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**A critical analysis of the effects of structural-heteropatriarchy, religion, and coloniality in espousing homophobia in the Southern Development Community (SADC): A case of Zimbabwe**

Kudzai Maurine Munyavi

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**A critical analysis of the origins of homophobia in the SADC region**

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Kudzai Maurine Munyavi

Thesis

December 2023

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**A critical analysis of the origins of homophobia in the SADC region**

The thesis committee for (Kudzai Maurine Munyavi)  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

A critical analysis of the effects of structural-heteropatriarchy, religion, and coloniality in  
espousing homophobia in the Southern Development Community (SADC): A case of Zimbabwe

Approved by the Committee:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Shalara Tova Dente)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Jill Drouillard)

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## **Abstract**

This thesis answers Stella Nyanzi's (2015) call for an urgent need for a purely African-curated queer rebuttal on the un-Africanness of homosexuality in the motherland in her paper "Knowledge is requisite power." As an African lesbian agender, in this thesis, I not only add to the historico-political fact that homophobia is a remnant of colonial rule. I also tease apart the forces that sustain this repression—structural-heteropatriarchy, Middle Eastern religions, and coloniality: to elucidate how un-African and historico-philosophically incorrect it is for African leaders to weaponize the myth that homosexuality is un-African in their anti-SOGIESC rights standpoints. I borrow mainly from Foucauldian philosophies to evince how homophobia—a distinctly Western phenomenon at the time of colonization was conjured onto the African continent and is bulwarked by the very powers that breathed life into it. I employ an African queer feminist-womanist qualitative and quantitative comparative analysis of literature from queer and decolonial scholars along with data from the United Nations, Open Democracy, Freedom House, and Statista.com in my argument that structural-heteropatriarchy, Middle Eastern religions, and coloniality co-constitute and co-bulwark homophobia in the Southern African Development Community.

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**Keywords:** Homophobia, SOGIESC, SADC, Coloniality, Structural-heteropatriarchy, Religion, Colonization, Zimbabwe, Africa, LGBTIQ+, Anglophone, Decolonization, Francophone, Feminist-womanist, Queer, Christianity, African Traditional Religion

## Introduction

This paper is a philosophical rebuttal of the myth that SOGIESC<sup>1</sup> advocacy is Western driven. It sets out to unearth the “multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which [homophobia] operate[s],” the very forces that co-constitute and co-bulwark antipathy toward black diverse sexual bodies on the African continent (Foucault, 1990, p. 92). I aim to correct homophobic Africans who believe LGBTIQ+<sup>2</sup> citizens of countries that criminalize same-sex practices are sexually starved; those who are convinced homosexuals<sup>3</sup> do not sexually indulge each other because of some constitutional book in some court of law or some “divine” rule somewhere, whether propagandist because those beliefs are erroneous on many levels. LGBTIQ+ activism, herein referred to as SOGIESC rights movement: the political response to antipathy toward non-cis heterosexuals and non-cis genders—is not a movement for “coital rights,” as most love to relegate it to. It is not a political battle to legalize “libidinous unnatural acts” for LGBTIQ+ bodies. It is not what patriarchs and conservative feminists-womanists<sup>4</sup> have conditioned us to think of as this “absurd” fight to promote so-called profane, sodomite, and vices against nature (Frossard de Saugy, 2022; Zimbabwe Criminal Law Act, 2006).

With or without SOGIESC rights, LGBTIQ+ people have had sex with each other behind closed doors since the beginning of time, and they continue to do so (Boswell, 1981; Fone, 2000). It is long overdue that African queer<sup>5</sup> scholarship bursts this hetero-patriarchal bubble that anti-SOGIESC rights

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<sup>1</sup> SOGIESC is “an acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics which groups these distinct but related terms together for ease of use, to describe the factors that make some people different than others...” (UN Women, 2022, p. X)

<sup>2</sup> LGBTIQ+ is “an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people. The plus sign represents people with diverse SOGIESC [see Footnote 3] who identify using other terms or none.” (UN Women, 2022, p. XI)

<sup>3</sup> “Homosexual is an unusual word in that it is a compound word, made from the Greek prefix *homo* and the Latin root *sexualis*. The Greek prefix *homo* is translated ‘same’ in English hence when translated into English *homosexualis* is same sex. Homosexual which is compounded macaronically of a Greek prefix and Latin root, its most obvious meaning is ‘of one sex’ (as homogeneous, ‘of one kind’). This definition is quite adequate in reference to a relationship or sexual act: sexual relation involving two parties ‘of one sex’ is indeed a homosexual one.” See Gunda (2010, p 23).

<sup>4</sup> A term I will use throughout this paper to reference women leaders who identify as either feminist, womanist, or both.

<sup>5</sup> Queer: “Traditionally a negative term, queer has been reclaimed by some people and is considered inclusive of a wide range of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions.” (UN Women, 2022, P. XII)



people reside in when they deny black LGBTIQ+ bodies the freedom to live a fulfilling life like them. As if denying SOGIESC rights halts non-cis heterosexual indulgences and precludes “sodomy,” the “crime against nature” that the patriarchy is immanently obsessed with policing. Even more alarming is how most of these anti-SOGIESC defenders see nothing wrong with anal sex, which would seem logical since it is the same concept, just different participants. Yet, though undeniable, denying SOGIESC rights much less obviates homosexual indulgences than it affects one’s growth; it appears like there exists a seemingly timeless representation of that “sodomy,” which is the pith of most homophobic arguments, cannot exist outside hetero-patriarchal power— inside private bedrooms, whether propagandist. This fallacy that history did not teach humanity enough to know that annihilating non-cis-heterosexual indulgences is doubtless unattainable!

No matter what laws the patriarchy legislates, sexual indulgences between two LGBTIQ+ adults exist outside of hetero-patriarchal power. The participants are undoubtedly outside judicial power then; how else did you think inherently marginalized LGBTIQ+ people survive in the motherland because we know they are not all asexual? This is why “HIV infections are ten times higher in countries [where] homosexual acts are a criminal offense” (COC Netherlands, n.d., para 10). Though discriminatory codes assuredly preclude access to health and sexual rights, that should never even remotely connote that queer persons are not receiving and giving pleasure! Thus, it is absurd to contend that coital acts between LGBTIQ+ people cannot exist outside the hetero-patriarchal power bubble.

I call it a bubble first because Michel Foucault (1990), in his book *The History of Sexuality Vol 1*, taught us that humans are never outside a “multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate, and which constitute their own organization”: we are never “outside of power” and this is why many homosexuals “heterosexualize” their relationships, whether inadvertently (p. 92). Feminist epistemologies also enlightened us that our sexual desires can be influenced by patriarchal proclivities (Srinivasan, 2022). Last, because the adverse effects of anti-SOGIESC rights are more potent

within systemic and systematic oppression: outside lines. They are lesser in the very spaces they purport to police, defeating the essence of these anti-LGBTIQ+ laws that have, at their fulcrum, a mandate to throttle “sodomy.” Yet bigots act oblivious to these brutal facts; they pretend that homophobia is not a weapon of the patriarchy to control resources, power, and women (Pharr, 1988).

Owing to these patriarchal motifs, most African homophobic penal codes are either silent or implicit on lesbian activities, which only appear as an afterthought in most codes that are vociferous on “sodomy”—homosexual acts between men as evinced in Zimbabwe’s Criminal Law Codification Act, Section 73. As if women’s homosexuality is less “immoral” or undeserving of policing, it appears, for patriarchy, it is not sex if a phallus is not present (Freud, 1927). Albeit it is noteworthy that though men may be the main targets of sodomy laws, such laws do criminalize any “unnatural” sexual acts, including all lesbian activities. I cannot help but wonder when this pretense will stop because it is doubtless that homophobia is driven by avariciousness, bigotry, illogicalness, and perhaps “devilry,” a diction most homophobes comprehend better.

More so, what appears further heartrending is that conservative feminists-womanists, who make up most feminists-womanists in Africa, remain rigid to adopt SOGIESC rights into the feminist-womanist movement on the continent. It appears that there is a rampant refusal to dispel homophobia in Africa in most feminist-womanist circles. I am not positing that the SOGIESC rights discursive is alien to African feminist-womanists’ menus; far from it, conversations around SOGIESC rights are somewhat happening at feminist-womanists’ round tables. However, most African feminist-womanists unshockingly remain unwilling to walk the talk; a considerable chunk shies away from publicly defending SOGIESC rights for fear of being judged but more so, fear of being stripped of their Christian titles, which many can’t even fathom losing, since Christianity is the yardstick for “the civilized” in post-colonial Africa. It is historically evident why identifying as a Christian is the benchmark for respect; however, it is more like who deserves humane treatment since black people were evidently colonized into believing

that the only way to navigate life “is through white people's ways” and that such ways must be Christian by all means; how sad. *Ipsa facto*, SOGIESC rights remain a contentious topic within most African feminist-womanist circles.

Yet sexuality is “an arena both of oppressive inequalities and constructive struggles toward women’s liberation (Freedman & Thorne, 1984, p. 102); still, even when a wealth of feminist scholarship posits that “the full scope of LGBTIQ+ rights issues should be treated as integrally linked to all efforts to achieve gender equality and to feminist [womanists] pursuits...” (UN Women, 2022, p. 3): it goes without mentioning that their rigidity is disheartening and self-defeating. It is as mind-boggling to me, and to many radical feminist-womanists, that most African feminists-womanists prefer treading on that lane that refuses to recognize how homophobia is a weapon of sexism (Pharr, 1988), as it remains unfathomable how, like many rightists in the West—the architects of homophobic ideologies: most African feminist-womanists unashamedly lean toward science and rightist religions in their anti-SOGIESC viewpoints while ignoring power-knowledge dynamics that influenced their schools of thought (Foucault, 1990).

It is also disconcerting that from a metaphysical lens, most African feminists-womanists, unfortunately, cling to heteropatriarchal inclinations as if oblivious of or unwilling to usurp, whether inadvertently. They’re embodiments of what the late Bader Ginsburg (2016) called “throwing away the umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting rained,” and that is very cancerous (p. 292). It cuts like a knife to watch most of them cling rigidly to patriarchal proclivities, like infant baboons clinging to their mothers for mobility, as if feminism-womanism cannot stand alone as a phenomenon outside patriarchal approval. This conceited behavior, which makes it difficult for them to comprehend how sexual repression in Africa is inherently anti-decolonial and anti-feminist, is also pregnant with meaning on the much work incumbent upon us all, feminists-womanists, to dismantle heteropatriarchy in Africa. Its signposts a call for a new African feminists-womanist wave that pays close attention to the alluded

shortcomings, perhaps a 5th wave, a genuinely intersectional one. If others are doing it, why can't we do it?

Moreover, contemporary Ugandan decolonial feminist theorist Sylvia Tamale (2020) advanced for us another significant challenge in the condition of African and African-diasporic queers, which is that some influential Black leaders believe and advise it is time Africans wander off from victimhood, *i.e.*, blaming colonialism for everything. But is this sincere advice? The answer is a cavernous no because such sentiments counter our decolonization struggles; aside from reproducing ignorance: these sentiments from former U.S. president Obama and former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, make African decolonial processes arduous. One would expect African descendants to comprehend better how such a neo-liberal discourse is injurious to decolonial efforts because it renders the current state of Africa, which is, in our case, the repression of sexual minorities, as ahistorical: a timeless African phenomenon, not a Western import, which it is<sup>11/30/23 4:36:00 PM</sup>.

Unfortunately, to our perturbation, these black way pavers spoke as if colonialism did not span centuries; as if it did not leave no African stone unturned and did not engender a Euro-centric Westphalian political approach on the continent; as if it is our fault that we—Africans, are victims of coloniality<sup>6</sup>; as if there are alternate redress methods that evade the victim card; as if we are lying when we blame colonialism for homophobia in Africa and as if the antidote for this homophobia, lies not, in undoing colonial legacies and within decolonial processes (Nyanzi, 2015; Tamale, 2020). They are not alone in their views. Let there be no misunderstanding; I am not arguing that Africa is not quasi-responsible for its eco-socio-political problems, far from it; but dismissing colonialism as an equal

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<sup>6</sup> "Coloniality is a concept of colonialism that goes beyond another country's mere acquisition and political control. As an ideological system, it explains the long-standing patterns of power that resulted from European colonialism, including knowledge production and the establishment of social orders. The 'invisible' power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism." See Tamale (2020, p xiii).

apparatus is too early, dangerous, and immediately requires cessation if we want to advance SOGIESC rights in the motherland.

Respectfully, suggesting wandering off from victimhood is strikingly parallel to advising feminists-womanists to cease blaming the patriarchy for women's eco-socio-political issues because feminism has existed for a while now. Indeed, the movement has been there for four waves, almost two centuries now. However, not only did it take women over 3500 years, 35 centuries, to become conscious of their oppression under the patriarchy (Lerner, 1986); meaning, we still have a long way to go in unlearning 3500 years of passed-down patriarchal indoctrination! To compound that argument, men are still axiomatically obsessed with controlling women, as evinced in the recent overturn of *Roe v Wade*<sup>7</sup>. This obsession is why a 2022 SCOTUS bench took the world aback to once upon a time of narrow-mindedness: a post-Dobbs<sup>8</sup> era. This is analogous to what I am arguing here: ignorance, witting or unwitting, anchored by the forces that constitute it, is why Africa is laden with antipathy toward non-cis-heterosexuals and non-gender-conforming bodies.

It is timely and crucial that we have these conversations because, as queer black bodies, all that life gives us is a lot of anger, distress, and despair. But more so, we are angry because anger is the technology at our disposal for our liberation, and there is nothing wrong in giving our anger a seat at the table to speak fully and unapologetically. We are angry that we must grapple with everyday life: mere basic needs; we are ballistic that asking to live authentically like our cis heterosexual counterparts sounds like asking for an arm and a leg to our communities like our sexualities, asking for the recognition of our fundamental human rights "infringes" their human rights. We are sickened that cis genders pretend this one life we all have is some form of simulation that we can afford to toss around in

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<sup>7</sup> *Roe v Wade* was a landmark case that legalized at least some abortion in the U.S. in 1973 until it was overturned in 2022. See Mangan and Breuninger. (2022, June 24). "Supreme court overturn *Roe v Wade*, ending 50 years of federal abortion rights." CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/24/roe-v-wade-overturned-by-supreme-court-ending-federal-abortion-rights.html>

<sup>8</sup> *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) is the American landmark abortion case that overruled *Roe v Wade*. See *Dobbs, et al. v. Jackson Women's Health Organization et al* Volume No. 19-1392 (2022). [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392\\_6j37.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf)

our VR headsets; well, maybe it is time we take them off. Life does not exist in a console; this is not Fortnite<sup>9</sup>!

Meanwhile, our Western counterparts lead somewhat navigable lives; they mostly have SOGIESC rights and, for the luckier ones, the right to marry and protection against discrimination. And though they have not yet gained a utopian queer world, their lives are nothing like what global south queer citizens or LGBTQI+ citizens of countries without SOGIESC rights experience. Contrary to our global south situation, they live in somewhat better conditions: attaining a significant percentage of Abraham Maslow's<sup>10</sup> hierarchy of needs as a global-north<sup>11</sup> queer body is nowhere near outlandish. Abraham's theory posits that when basic life needs are unmet, individuals die literally and figuratively, as with African LGBTQI+ citizens—our lives have been condemned to stagnation. For instance, the latest recorded World Bank Zimbabwe's GDP is 28.37 U.S. billion dollars, implying the general populace barely sees three meals a day (World Food Program); one can imagine what life is like for Zimbabwean sexual minorities who mostly drop out of school due to bullying and can neither open doors to either blue- or white-collar jobs because of their sexual identities (Reid, 2020).

This is the point at which I would like to ask the following existential questions: how did the motherland transition from inclusive communities to bigoted people? Was it because our rapacious leaders flagrantly led us into the rabbit hole we are in today, from which we speak with so much confidence that we are independent people, a self-governing continent; yet, in the metaphysics of things, we are still under the shackles of colonial rule and, more so, have somewhat become China's colony? Did we arrive here because of our leader's hatred for capitalism as subjects of colonialism, or

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<sup>9</sup> Fortnite is an online popular 3<sup>rd</sup> persons shooter game and last man standing competition of up to 100 players by Epic Games.

<sup>10</sup> Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological five-tier model of human needs that must be satisfied in every human's life for outright human growth and development. These needs are physiological, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. See Mcleod (2023), "Maslow's hierarchy of needs."

<https://simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

<sup>11</sup> Global north countries are countries that are fully developed and those that are still developing are considered the global south.

was it by other means that will take us some time to disentangle and perhaps present us with hard truths we sadly cannot erase? How did we—LGBTIQ+ black bodies become the enigma, those who do not belong?

In trying to answer the above, we must remain cognizant that the West has not made much tangible contributions to redressing these colonial injustices, if any. And by the West, I mean Britain, the chief colonizer, which has shown little, if any, progressive interest in dismantling the fortress of homophobia it conjured up in Africa. Apart from what a queer theorist Puar (2007) termed “homonationalism<sup>12</sup>”; what the global north prefers calling sanctions, ‘scapegoat propaganda.’ Phrased differently, it sounds more like “If we overtly appear to be more progressive on LGBTIQ+ rights, though we won’t put devoted work into it, we—Brits, can sway the world away from our real shenanigans like how we are significantly contributing to the planetary crisis.” The evidence of this homonationalism is in the number of decades it has taken the West to help the global south advance SOGIESC rights, which assuredly did not take the global north that long. It is judicious that we tease apart this homonationalism, for it is telling of how sanctions appear as its apparatus; it also provides answers to why, for instance, in France, LGBTIQ+ citizens or dual citizens of Muslim countries that criminalize sodomy cannot legally marry as reported by “France’s marriage equality law is less equal for some” by Trouillard (2013).

I am convinced the movement for SOGIESC rights appears two-fold from my empirical observations during my United Nations internship. One is for white bodies; then there is one for black bodies, but only if there are extra resources and time. Yet, the struggle for SOGIESC rights in the global south is intrinsically linked to that of global north bodies (Kaoma, 2012). So, I wonder if maintaining the homophobic problem in Africa helps retain the rhetoric that paints black bodies everywhere as savages,

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<sup>12</sup> Homonationalism analyzes how “liberal rights discourse,” laws and bills that look good on paper, are always at the expense of the people it purports to serve and protect. See Puar, (2013, p. 25). “Homonationalism as Assemblage: Viral Travels, Affective Sexualities in the Jindal Global Law Review.

“those that can’t even fathom sexual rights,” albeit that is a plot twist. This rhetoric assuredly paves the way for shutting all the doors for black bodies everywhere because oppression never stands alone; it seems homophobia in Africa and racism speak back to each other, and it is long overdue that we open our eyes to this. Assuredly, African politicians are not the monolithic beneficiaries of the homophobic condition in the motherland, though they doubtless benefit from it; it stands to reason that there is more to the story than what meets the naked eye, and that is the only answer that makes sense.

It is thus unsurprising to me that, in reaction to the Ugandan anti-homosexual bill introduced in March 2023, George Santos, the state of New York representative, enacted a foreign aid ban to countries criminalizing homosexuality (Lavers, 2023). Yet, deep within us, in our hearts, we know sanctions exacerbate the homophobic situation for diverse African sexualities. We know they much less “save” them because sanctions scream imposition: economic imperialism, whether inadvertently. Imposition breeds the rhetoric within which the minorities’ sanctions purport to save are further marginalized and ostracized as anomalies: impositions to African soil (Nyanzi, 2015). Indeed, we know all this because African politicians always overtly construe sanctions as reifying and buttressing the old myth that SOGIESC advocacy is neo-imperialism. This is, in fact, a *locus classicus* in pseudo-elite African political circles when biblical hermeneutics fail short or run counter or suspect, like most times. My point here is instead of sanctions, which have not worked in any shape or form to date, unquestionably so, Britain could, for instance, sponsor the development of queer African pedagogies while ensuring its only input is monetary or perhaps employ recommended bottom-up approaches.

There is every reason for academics, politicians, influential leaders, and progressive minds to consent that a top-down approach to dispel homophobia in the global south is not the trajectory. My experiences, as someone who knows how sanctions affect—a black queer’s life, passport, and rights more than they affect a country or targeted degenerates, inform this suggestion. I am confident that sanctions are not the solution; they have never been! The undeniable evidence of this inference is the



current state of African LGBTIQ+ eco-socio-political affairs, which sanctions self-evidently cannot improve since they showed face. Increasing anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric on the continent, despite a multiplicity of sanctions imposed on that very continent under the rubric of “SOGIESC activism,” further buttresses this standpoint.

As Tamale (2020) advised, a pragmatic transformative answer lies within de-colonial processes. And as African queers, we are mandated to curate purely queer African scholarship because a lack of it engenders politicized homophobia as a dominant and potent tool, which it has become in African post-colonial politics (Frossard de Saugy, 2022; Nyanzi, 2015). However, it is judicious not to lose sight that comprehending this historicity constitutes probing not only the role of the British monarchy but also that of the late Marxist-Leninist, Maoist, Catholic first prime minister, and second Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Nyarota, 2018). Mugabe was what one would call an absolute ruler: he had power over everything Zimbabwean, and he ruled Zimbabwe with an iron fist for four decades (Mushawatu, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Nyarota, 2018). Because “it is only with an unabridged comprehension of the historicity of homophobia that there can be a successful extrication from the bondage of colonization and domination [for us black LGBTIQ+ bodies]” (Tamale, 2020, p. 1).

At its heart, this thesis sets out to disentangle homophobia in Africa string by string, to lay bare its underlying roots, hoping that divulging such erudition will incite a reflection and introspection of homophobic laws and attitudes. I am hopeful that, the argument I am weaving here will aid in emancipating black queer bodies from the shackles of homophobia, but more so that it will also help curb racist tropes that feed into racist systems. Without intentionally and consciously undergoing this holistic de-colonial process, we cannot envision liberty, SOGIESC rights, and restorative justice will remain light years away for global south LGBTIQ+ persons. The following literature review intends to divulge the “co-formations and co-productions of [intersecting oppressive systems]” while evincing how these force relations co-endanger black queer bodies (Bacchetta & Power, 2002, p. 581). My enthusiasm

is driven by an unquenchable desire to annihilate homophobia: the irrational fear and prejudice toward non-cis heterosexual and non-gender-conforming identities (Boswell, 1981).

### **Key Terminology and Disclaimers**

It is imperative to clarify the meaning of terms used in this thesis before we delve deeper into the argument for clarity. Homosexuals (see Footnote 2), queer (see Footnote 4), LGBTIQ+ (see Footnote 1), and SOGIESC (see Footnote 3) are exotic to Africa (Gunda, 2010; Msibi, 2011; Pickett, 2021). Concededly so, the moniker homosexual is a European term that was coined by an Austria-Hungarian Psychologist, Karoly M Benkert, around the late 19th century to define those with a sickness that caused them to deviate from heterosexual practices: those who belonged to brothels and mental institutions (Foucault, 1990; Gunda, 2010; Pickett, 2021). These terms' etymologies undeniably drive us back to the global north, meaning employing them can conjure what some might construe as “anti-decolonial” undertones: the reproduction of U.S. and Western-centric notions of African queerness. However, these terms are ubiquitous in queer theory: a valuable academic tool to liberate African LGBTI persons. Assuredly, queer theory misinterprets and shortchanges non-western queers and queers of color because of its West-phallic and U.S.-centric approach (Tamale, 2020). However, by paying attention to these shortcomings and looking at its outside lines, we can queer the theory by situating the framework in a purely African context that employs a pure African lens, which I am doing with this thesis. It goes without mentioning that these terms' use has increased globally within and out of queer spaces in the last decade; they have somewhat become conventional or mainstream terms for same-sex loving identities, though they are not universally employed.

Additionally, I am aware that some Africans who engage in same-sex activities and do not conform to patriarchal gender binaries or expectations sometimes choose not to identify with these terms for varying reasons (Epprecht 2013; Nyanzi 2015). I also concur that some African-conservative politicians often invoke these terms as a ruse to undermine Zimbabwean human rights under the

pretext of “protecting cultural identity and sovereignty” (Gunda, 2010, p. 24). Thus, I know that using the queer framework and its terms in a decolonial argument without explaining why might be counterproductive and may derail one’s apprehension of my thesis in the manner sanctions inadvertently feed into homophobic myths. However, the theory’s usefulness in African decolonial politics is axiomatic, and as such, I will critically employ it throughout this thesis (Nyanzi, 2015).

Moreover, while my use of “Africa” could be interpreted to mean a single entity, the intention is not to conflate Zimbabwe with Africa or insinuate that Africa is a single entity, for Africa is a continent of 54 sovereign states (African Union<sup>13</sup>). It should thus never be viewed from one vantage point. Sylvia Tamale, (2020) also enlightened us that colonialism meant different things to different people within different power dynamics. This means colonialism in Africa occurred sparingly in disparate contexts, for example, what happened in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) under British rule is not analogous to what happened in the French Colony of Middle Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo). As emblazoned in the contemporary Francophone and Anglophone countries, attitudes, and laws toward sexual minorities on the continent *de facto* all African Francophones have successfully decriminalized homosexuality (Reid, 2022). Because France decriminalized “sodomy” in 1791 during the French revolution: it was more progressive regarding SOGIESC rights than its fellow colonizer, Britain (Dresden, 2016; Rao, 2014). However, it is judicious to note that the effects of colonialism overlap, and not exclusively so (Epprecht, 2013; Murray & Roscoe, 2001; Outright Action International, 2016); thus, instances of shared struggles in Africa will be implored in this thesis to paint the bigger picture and not to reproduce the systems we are embattled with.

Finally, I specifically chose the term structural heteropatriarchy and not heteronormativity or heterogender because ‘Heteropatriarchy’ allows us [feminist-womanist queer theorists] to explicitly

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.africanunion-un.org/africangroup>

name and interrogate the role of heterosexuality in the production of inequalities.” (Everett et al., 2022, p. 91). This term brings depth to my hypothesis that structural heteropatriarchy, religion, and coloniality speak back to each other to reinforce homophobia in the motherland, which imperialists assuredly engendered in Africa.

### **Literature Review**

In analyzing the historicity of homophobia within the context of Africa, we must remain cognizant that there is minimal available knowledge on pre-colonial African diverse sexualities. Owing to this dearth of scholarship, most of us can barely get our hands on due to global historical inequities (Epprecht, 2013; Gunda, 2010; Swidler, 1993); it is incumbent upon us feminist-womanist researchers that we guard fiercely not only feminist caveats on the importance of paying attention to “feminist objectivity” when dealing with gender and sexuality. What Haraway (1988) called “situated knowledges” which is that knowledge always comes from some viewpoint, that it is always situated in some context, and that there is no context-free standpoint (p. 581). We ought to also remember that available African history primarily pivoted on heterosexual dynamics and that most of what we know today of African LGBTIQ+ persons is either a curation of African heterosexual or non-African homosexual narratives: it’s primarily second-hand data (Nyanzi, 2015; Swidler, 1993; Tamale, 2020). Finally, we mustn't lose sight that speech and communication of facts do not happen in a vacuum; as potent as what is said is who decides what is said (Foucault, 1990); and a glance into the chronicles of African LGBTIQ+ persons, tells of the above in enraging ways.

Another probe into the historicity of race also exposes why renowned early Western ethnographers believed that African man was incapable of sophisticated thoughts and emotions (Murray & Roscoe, 2001). It elucidates for us why early Europeans presumed Africans could not possess complex and diverse sexual feelings because of their “inferiority” and “primitivity” (Epprecht, 1991). And because it stands to reason that these early Western ethnographers were handmaidens of a colonial

system yoked with a condescending mandate of “correcting,” disrupting, and, as most argued, “civilizing” black bodies for its profit motives (Murray & Roscoe, 2001). Emblazoned in their subjectivity, in the manifold alarming ways in which they blithely misrepresented African sexualities and black bodies, among which was the frequent dismissal of homoeroticism as a causative for homosexual indulgencies. To gain an undistorted apprehension of that which we seek to find, which is the origins of homophobia in the motherland via a purely African lens, it is to our gargantuan advantage that we undertake this intellectual odyssey with the above caveats at heart from the jump.

### **Homophobia a history: Precolonial Zimbabwe**

Arlene Swidler (1993), a feminist and religion researcher, in her compelling text, *Homosexuality and World Religions* problematized the influences of sexual beliefs and attitudes of early Western missionaries and ethnographers on the social constructions of sexuality in post-colonial Africa. She argued that because these ethnographers held internalized Victorian ideals to which most were staunch adherents, their Victorian inclinations doubtless convoluted the tracing of undistorted African perceptions of diverse sexualities pre-colonization (Swidler, 1993). This view is buttressed by Marc Epprecht, Evans-Pritchard, and many other Western ethnographers’ historical accounts which alarmingly misinterpreted African queer bodies, from scapegoating their so-called rare occurrences for the shortage of women, as alluded before, or sometimes for spirit mediums.

Though Marc Epprecht (2013), unlike Evans-Pritchard and Michael Gelfand, never doubted the existence of homosexuals in pre-colonial Zimbabwe at any point in his writings. Epprecht (2013) *de facto* asserted that the ancient hunter-gatherer bushmen<sup>14</sup> occupied the region of present-day Zimbabwe and that their gender relations were predominantly egalitarian and classless. He also unearthed that same-

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<sup>14</sup> The bushmen were the indigenous people of Africa and the largest group of humans some twenty-two thousand years ago in what is now called sub-Saharan Africa. See ([Haraway, 1988](#))

sex relations were unrepressed among bushmen, that they were non-threatening to African societies before colonization, and that the bushmen were as sexually diverse and tolerant as one can become. Be that as it may, the bushmen lacked English writing systems like other African nations. As such, they recorded their way of life through cave paintings and thus heavily relied on oral history to preserve their culture— which was undoubtedly not written in stone (Epprecht, 2013; Murray & Roscoe, 2001).

This absence of English writing systems made the ground fertile for the effacing of most African precolonial records, particularly everything that heavily transgressed Victorian ideals, setting the stage for what Ngugi wa Thiongo, the Kenyan scholar, later termed “epistemicide<sup>15</sup>.” This epistemicide paved the way for the engendering and bulwarking of Victorian ideals on the continent, amongst which was the idea of gender binaries, nuclear families, and the many idiosyncrasies that marred the Victorian era. Put bluntly, British legacies, like in all commonwealth countries (including former commonwealth countries like Zimbabwe), undeniably played, and continue to play a fulcrum role in the tapestry of so-called African traditions and history, which pass as truths (Murray and Roscoe, 2001).

Epprecht (2013) further enlightened us that between 600 and 1200 BC, the Khoi San undoubtedly operated under less strident patriarchal structures and no existing gender binaries: bushmen possessed, on top of sexual autonomy, the freedom of sexual diversity as depicted in their cave paintings (see Appendix A). So much so that early European travelers and anthropologists struggled to map their peculiarly Victorian gendered worldviews onto African societies, as posited in “The deviant African genders that colonialism condemned.” And upon realizing the implausibility of their nomadic way of life, the Khoi San subsequently abandoned nomadism and settled near the Limpopo River (Editorial Team, 2018); establishing Mapungubwe as the first pre-colonial sub-Saharan state during this Stone Age period, as indicated in “The first kingdom in Southern Africa.” Chronologically, around 600AD,

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<sup>15</sup> Epistemicide is the killing, silencing, annihilation, or devaluing of a knowledge system. Epistemicide happens when epistemic injustices are persistent, systematic, and collectively work as a structured oppression of ways of knowing. See, (Patin et al., 2021).

the Khoi Gumanye and Gokomere: Shona tribes settled in present-day Masvingo after the downfall of Mapungubwe, establishing the Karanga Kingdom (Epprecht, 2013); they inaugurated a monarchy there and installed a stone palace: Great Zimbabwe, known by its colloquial term *dzimba dzemabwe*, ‘house of stone.’

Bantu Migrations<sup>16</sup> superseded the Iron Age, introducing new power structures and preposterous wealth accumulation strategies within bushmen communities (Epprecht, 2013). At its core, this new Age mandated the institutionalization of rigid patriarchal structures and the subsequent decline of egalitarianism for its perpetuity (Epprecht, 2013; Lerner, 1986). There had to be a “superior-inferior” power dynamic to successfully transition from egalitarianism to capitalism, as argued by the feminist luminary and the brain behind the book *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner (1986). The Iron Age imposed new economic systems which supported different notions of gender, class, and sexuality. It is not only remarkable at this juncture to note that, despite this unfortunate evolution significantly on the part of women and girls; Bantu people’s sexualities remained diverse, as well as their cultures (Murray and Roscoe, 2001). But also, that, unlike their contemporaries, 17th-century Victorians, whose era was burdened by studying what Steven Marcus called “the Other Victorians;” the bushmen assuredly never embarked on an “institutional incitement” or a “discursive explosion” of policing sex and or sexuality, until the colonizers brainwashed them (Foucault, 1990, pp. 17–18).

Among these Bantu migrations was *Mfecane*<sup>17</sup> ‘the time of trouble’, spanning from 1810 to 1840, leading to Mzilikazi’s settlement in Matabeleland, north of present-day Zimbabwe. Driven by

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<sup>16</sup> Bantu Migrations was a wave of expansion that began some 3000 years ago; Bantu-speaking populations today, millions of people, gradually left their original homeland of West-Central Africa and traveled to the eastern and southern regions of the continent for the South, supplanting older populations of hunter-gatherers setting the stage for which the amalgamation and blending of diverse African cultures. See Murray and Roscoe (2001).

<sup>17</sup> “Mfecane was initiated by the Zulu under their aggressive military leader, Shaka. In 1818 he embarked on a great expansion of his realm in what is now the South African province of KwaZulu Natal, and during the next 10 years his depredations evicted several other peoples from their lands, setting off large-scale migrations and ultimately resulting in the formation of several new kingdoms. The Basotho nation was thus created by King Moshesh, who gathered his refugee followers in a defensible area of present-day Lesotho. The Ndebele marched north under Mzilikazi (c. 1790–1868) to carve out a kingdom on land previously occupied by the Shona in modern Zimbabwe. The Ngoni, led by Zwangendaba (c. 1785–c. 1848), also marched through the

exhaustion from perennial subservience to Tshaka as the chief impetus, Mzilikazi and the Ndebele people also fled the Boer colonization on the Cape (Epprecht, 2013; Walter, 1966). Perhaps as a survival strategy or politics as usual, they invaded the Shona for wives and wealth during this transition period (Epprecht, 2013). It is argued that the Ndebele further impacted Shona mores around sex and gender, just like the preceding Bantu migrations, though that sounds like another misinterpretation (Murray and Roscoe, 2001). This Zulu tribe was mainly known for practicing homosexual war rituals, a page Mzilikazi undoubtedly borrowed from Tshaka the Zulu's war book: the supposed latent homosexual Zulu King, his former Master (Epprecht, 2013; Murray & Roscoe, 2001; Walter, 1966).

Last to follow in these critical historical transitions for the bushmen was Zimbabwe's colonization by the British pioneer column, which succeeded *Mfecane* around 1890. It was induced by an avaricious scramble and partition of Africa by Europeans. This colonization, as evinced in the contemporary eco-socio-political state of most African queer bodies, not only destabilized gender relations but also denigrated indigenous cultures (Dlamini, 2006; Epprecht, 2013; Murray & Roscoe, 2001). It conjured up new minorities, what Antonio Gramsci (1930) called the subalterns: the lower caste. Colonialism assuredly set in motion, unbeknownst to Africans, eco-socio-political changes that espoused homophobia and engendered stigma against their diversity.

Zimbabwe declared independence from the United Kingdom in 1965 but was only recognized as an independent and self-governing nation in April 1980, according to "Zimbabwe profile-timeline." From (1980-1987), after successfully leading Zimbabwe to true freedom via the Lancaster House Agreement: the Ndebele homosexual Methodist theologian and politician Canaan Banana assumed the country's presidency (Reed, 1996; Thomas, 2005). Robert Gabriel Mugabe, his then prime minister, and Shona co-political party member: the sultan, who turned Zimbabwe into a laughingstock, cunningly hectorred

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Shona country, where they destroyed Changamire in 1834 before they resumed their 20-year 1600-km (1000-mi) trek into present-day Tanzania. Soshangane (c. 1795–1859) took his Ndwandwe followers into present-day Mozambique, where he founded the powerful Gaza Empire". See Funk and Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia. (2018).



President Banana into early retirement on sodomy charges soon after the Lancaster watershed moment for Zimbabweans (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Thomas, 2005).

Here, I wonder if it is disingenuous to assume that one of the first books Mugabe read was *Mein Kampf*, because his political tactics mirror those of Hitler in many ways, and he was an overt fervent of the Nazi tyrant (Anonymous, 2003). Among their many shared affections from the toothbrush mustache, political ideologies, etc., they both appear like make-believe homophobes. The kind who held on to worldviews because they either don't know anything else or it's self-serving in some rapacious way. I believe this because, though it appears they spent a significant chunk of their draconian incumbencies masquerading like they were one of the worst nightmares for homosexuals ever to walk this planet, which they were by all means! They both closely worked with homosexuals in their rise to power, as depicted in the Netflix documentary "Eldorado: Everything the Nazis hate," which leaves much to be desired (Cantu, 2023; Thomas, 2005).

Others might want to argue that working with someone does not necessarily warrant acceptance, and that is very true; however, it is not the only truth that lies before us. Another truth I believe is radicalism has no room for, "Oh, you are a good politician; perhaps we can work together; I will compromise my beliefs in the meantime" or any of those eyebrow-raising excuses. One is only ever willing to make do in such situations if they are unsure about their worldview or when driven by avaricious missions. From my vantage point as a queer researcher, any digressing behavior poses quintessential questions that should never be overlooked, as in the cases of Hitler and Mugabe. Put bluntly, it is incongruous to purport to be fervently homophobic to the depth that Hitler and Mugabe claimed to have been and then be found in that quagmire of a solid close political relationship with a known homosexual by whatever circumstance. Albeit this somewhat follows since Hanna Arendt (1963), in her riveting book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*, argued that evil can be both banal and radical. I am convinced that, like Adolf Eichmann, Robert Mugabe was another

terrifyingly normal human being who somewhat possessed an alarming disengagement from the reality of his evil actions.

This is why, despite all the atrocities Hitler's regime inflicted on queer bodies, including burning the indispensable Magnus Hirschfeld's library, Hitler closely worked with a gay army chief commander, Ernst Höm, whom he later treated as expendable because he was gay. Höm was one of the chief architects behind the Nazi takeover in 1933, and Hitler was unbothered by Höm's sexuality for the longest time until that arrangement stopped serving him (Cantu, 2023). We see the same story unravel between Mugabe and Canaan Banana approximately three decades later; this banality of evil deserves scrutiny! We must be willing to cross paths with hard truths if we are to find that which we seek: the emancipation of black queer bodies and queer bodies everywhere.

In the case of Mugabe, historical records show that Mugabe's captured courts convicted Banana on eleven counts of sodomy as if Mugabe was unaware of Banana's homosexuality before the bloody fight for freedom; Banana was indicted for "unnatural acts" in 1997 (Reed, 1996; Thomas, 2005). Albeit ironically, we spend our lives teaching homophobia, the seemingly unnatural phenomenon, and not homosexuality, the phenomenon science and rightist religions claim to be "unnatural." What lies crystal clear is that when hate and greediness are the chief impetus, common sense departs our faculties at the speed of Usain Bolt. It was after these unfortunate moments that Mugabe brainwashed Zimbabweans into adopting the narrow-minded Victorian, Christian, compulsory hetero-patriarchal life structures through Mugabeism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). These systems became his pillars of power and a ruse to retain that power through populist politics that linked LGBTIQ+ rights to Western Imperialism in the early 2000s: populist politics came in handy for a struggling Mugabe regime, it appears (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

### **Precolonial Africa**

It seems either by mistake or negligence on the part of some curious Victorians who perhaps also possessed some thirst to learn more about African sexualities, or both, or perhaps for Machiavellian agendas, some African records escaped defacement. As such, we are exceedingly lucky to have chronicles with evidence that, contrary to popular belief, the Igbo and Yoruba tribes of present-day Nigeria did not assign gender to babies until later in life (Buckle, n.d.). Yet, even in such times, it was never according to sexual anatomy but rather the energies they exuded; it is doubtless that gender and sexual orientation were thus never a black-and-white issue to Africans, as they were to so-called sophisticated Europeans before colonization (Buckle, n.d.). Some might argue that this sounds confusing and flaky because it means Africans had genders regardless, but we do not know that for sure; what we do know for sure, instead, is that when it later showed face in an African child's life, whatever colloquial term it was referred to, pre-colonization, it was never premised on some androcentric Victorian prescription (Buckle, n.d.). Other records have again educated us that 17th century Angola, a 1-day drive from present-day Zimbabwe, approximately covering the distance between Boston and Houston or Bulgaria and Germany, was home to a butch Queen who owned a bunch of drag queens for wives. Nzinga Mbande is displayed in these historical accounts as an androgynous black warrior whose distinguished war tactics rained hellfire on Portuguese Christian invaders for three solid decades. Nzinga was the queer version of what the Japanese call a Ninja; she was the epitome of autonomy! Nzinga, without a doubt, defied all patriarchal odds on the battlefield and inside private bedrooms (Snethen, 2009).

More so, "King Mwanga II of Buganda, the 19th century Ugandan king who was gay," also reported that around the time King Edward VIII was lynching gay men in 19th-Century England, King Mwanga II of Buganda slaughtered approximately 45 Ugandan newly converted Christians for rejecting homosexual advances for one Christian reason or another (Rao, 2014). The point here is not to insinuate that this was "ethical," though that term in and of itself is laden with problematic Christian undertones;

no one has a right to sex! (Srinivasan, 2022). The point is instead to reiterate that at the time, 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe suffered under the thumb of the English Renaissance, plagued by the rise of Victorian ideals (Foucault, 1990); the bush men remained unbothered by what went on inside consenting adults' private spaces. Here, I am underscoring that during the period, “twilight fell upon the bright day” of 17th-century “other Victorians:” the century that incited the European bourgeoisie to preoccupy themselves with repressing sex, legitimizing “a single locus of sexuality” and pathologizing everything that transgressed (Foucault, 1990, p. 3); black bodies continued in their diverse cultures and sexualities. They were assuredly not cut from that same cloth as those who pressed themselves by such personal politics—the Victorians.

At this juncture, riveting epiphanies reveal themselves; one among them is that, respectfully, it is naivety of the first order to expect anthropologists whose idea of sexuality was Victorian-ideal-driven to document the history of diverse African sexualities objectively. It is, thus, a no-brainer that predominant scholarship on black LGBTIQ+ bodies is heavily linked to alien political systems and Christian missionaries (Swidler, 1993). Such revelations illuminate the power dynamics that set the ambiance for a homophobic Africa, which was assuredly historically neither homophobic nor antipathetic toward same-sex desire (Msibi, 2011). “While this is not to suggest that same-sex relations were publicly approved, overwhelming evidence does shatter the prevailing discourse of a ‘sodomite-free’ Africa.” (Msibi, 2011, p. 64). Still, many cling to that “sodomite-free” Africa standpoint as if it has not been increasingly dispelled.

### **African Tradition Religions V Christian attitudes toward diverse sexualities: An analysis**

To “reconstruct the relationship between religion and sexuality [is as convoluted], in much the same way [as it is to map] the history of sexuality in world history” (Machingura & Chitando, 2022, p. 1). It is even more arduous in the case of Zimbabwe due to the lack of English writing systems before colonization, which precipitated the effacing of most of our African history, as alluded to before. We are

lucky that significant historical records hold it axiomatic for humankind that religion and sexuality have historically paralleled each other in that they have acted as “soulmates and antagonists” in disparate periods, geographies, and contexts. Concededly, “religion...continues to have a say on sexuality” even in contemporary societies (Machingura & Chitando, 2022, p. 1); but does it mean the discourse surrounding sexuality in ATR is analogous to that of Middle Eastern religions, in this case, Christianity? To answer this question, we must critically analyze pre-colonial ATR attitudes toward sexuality via the lens of the Shona, the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe, *vis-à-vis* attitudes and perceptions of medieval Christians. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the Shona come from four broad sub-groups: Karanga, Korekore, Manyika, and Zezuru (Chitando and Machingura, 2022); this thesis will invoke the term Shona to reference all subgroups.

In *Religion and Sexuality in Zimbabwe* by Chitando and Machingura (2022), Sipeyiye, a contributor, enlightened us that the Shona’s attitudes and perceptions towards sexuality are mainly informed by their “religious worldview,” which is three-tiered and adaptive (p.13). The structure of this African Traditional Religion includes the spirit world (*Varikumhepo*), ‘the land of the living and the land of the departed.’ In their spiritual “world *Mwari* [‘God’] is at the apex of that hierarchy and the ancestral spirits,” as such, ancestors are the equivalent of Jesus in that they are the mediator between the living and *Mwari* (Machingura & Chitando, 2022, p. 13). It is noteworthy to mention that the difference between ancestral spirits and those in the underworld is that ancestral spirits “have [undergone atavistic initiation] rituals [which are] conducted by the living” (Chitando and Machingura, 2022, p. 13). Implying that death alone is not tantamount to an ancestor; a ritual ceremony is a prerequisite to initiating one from the underworld into the ancestral world.

Even though we have been presented with what sounds to me like a vague, distorted, and somewhat nonsensical argument: the Shona claim parental status as historically the chief prerequisite for an ancestral title (Epprecht, 2013; Machingura & Chitando, 2022). However, it is doubtless that

childlessness was not necessarily a magnet for shame, alienation, or ostracization among most bushmen ATR believers (Epprecht, 2013). Disputants might argue that infertile African women have, assuredly been regarded as suspects among the Shona at some point in history. Unfortunately, some remain suspects depending on how progressive the family one marries into is, which is not usually the case; progressive thinking remains a utopia for many Zimbabweans. Be that as it may, concededly, infertility has historically been predominantly blamed on the woman, but that phenomenon has not been a distinctly African women's catastrophe. A myriad of historical records stands to argue in our favor that since ancient Greece, infertile women have been chiefly castigated as witches, among many other heinous names. Alvarez (2010), *de facto* reported that "in 1484... the idea of a witch became gender-related to women, and the stereotype of witch that of an elderly and dangerous woman... [and this] led to [the] deaths of thousands of women during the late Middle Ages" (para 1). Albeit we do not have many records dating back to the pre-Christian era in Africa, it appears plausible that perhaps this inhumane phenomenon is another colonial remnant, just like homophobia.

Furthermore, because the Iron Age conjured up patriarchal structures in African societies that possibly spilled into ATR traditions, concomitantly inciting the installation of systematic and systemic oppression; it was within this era that numbers became the equivalent of power: the more children one had, the more powerful one would become, and the more wealth one would amass (Epprecht, 2013). If a Shona man, for instance, had more "female" children, he would be affluent since "girls lobola"<sup>18</sup>-received could also be quickly recycled as lobola-given to secure proper wives for sons to expand a

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<sup>18</sup> Lobola is a monetary bride price usually paid by a man to a woman's family (mostly the patriarchs) as a prerequisite for marriage. This marriage process, initially introduced into Zimbabwean communities as a token of appreciation. Has long assumed the function of a money-making machine in most struggling Zimbabwean households owing to the horrendously corrupt, self-imposed, forever-ruling government, ZANU-PF. Most Zimbabwean daughters find themselves from a very early age, hectorated into treating marriage as every woman's greatest trophy. This coerced patriarchal internalization to settle with a man before a certain age, has been profoundly exacerbated by the country's perpetuating economic dissonance. Such that Zimbabwean daughters have since become the equivalent of what appears to me like a "railroad out of poverty-ville." Albeit even that fallacy doesn't seem to stick around that long enough for most families, it's like that 10c Chinese balloon from back home that pops out as you are trying to inflate it. Because \$5,000 USD (whether it is the first time that someone is seeing that amount of money all at once in their life or in decades which is usually the case), hypothetically assuming is the most common lobola price, assuredly does not have the capacity to correct decades of poverty, particularly the kind that exist in Zimbabwe.

polygynous household with new wives” (Machingura & Chitando, 2022, p. 20). From a feminist-womanist lens, this appears like one of those ah-ha moments, where you come across a patriarchal explanation that makes your head nod up and down effortlessly on some “that tracks.”

There might be some facticity and factuality in the hypothesis that the Shona adopted this patriarchal phenomenon more structurally and viscerally after colonization since, according to Foucault (1990), one of the “greatest innovations” of the colonizers—the Victorians, “was the emergence of ‘population’ as wealth, population as manpower or labor capacity... and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility...” (p. 25). And though it is clear that we are only left with what looks like abstract answers owing to the defacement of our African history, I am still filled with the kind of joviality the embryos John and Jesus felt when their mothers met, to say with so much pride, so much confidence, that it appears doubtless that the phenomenon of repressing sexuality remains alien to African Traditional Religion believers (Machingura & Chitando, 2022).

It is also historically evident that homosexuality (though not referred to by those terms in pre-colonial Zimbabwe) is “closely guarded and highly ritualized” among Shona ATR believers (Machingura & Chitando, 2022, p. 15). The essential point is to stress that homosexuality within ATR immanently dwells at the intersections of spiritual leaders and traditional healers: those born with a divine gift, sometimes referred to as spirit mediums, though that is not to insinuate that every ATR leader is a “homosexual.” And because Africa is the oldest inhabited continent, it is also assuredly doubtless that the phenomenon of valorizing sexual diversity and espousing reverence for those born with a divine duty perhaps originated out of the motherland (Machingura and Chitando, 2022; Epprecht, 2013; Fone, 2000). However, we can only speculate since that history, to our disheartenment, was condemned as contraband.

Moreso, historical records depict that “physiological hermaphroditism,” what progressive minds now call inter-sex identities, is highly respected in ATR traditions (Epprecht, 2013, p. 26). It has been

proven beyond doubt that intersex bodies never attracted opprobrium pre-colonization, even when most contemporary Shona's appear successfully browbeaten into buying into the belief that ancestors immanently revere reproduction, thanks to the patriarchy! It remains historically factual that ATR is accepting of diverse sexualities; yet most African pseudo-elite politicians seem oblivious to this need lying before their eyes so blindingly: a need to decolonize their minds from Western myths introduced by colonizers seeking to shut the door on our natural African sexual and gender diversity— our blackness.

More so, Swidler (1993) also corroborated our standpoint that homosexuality is not exotic to black bodies in her unputdownable book, *Homosexuality, and World Religions*; in this text, she proclaimed the existence of diverse sexualities within pre-colonial African Traditional religion. Swidler (1993) conceded that Bantu transgenders were beacons of religious authority pre-colonization. However, it is remarkable that we do not withstand that, among bushmen, some spiritually powerful identities who engaged in what could be construed as homosexual acts were not always interpreted as “deviant sexualities” (Epprecht, 2013; Swidler, 1993). Perhaps because, as underscored earlier, pre-colonized Africans were not ones to be burdened by the nuances of gender and sexuality. After all, prevailing history exceedingly argues in our favor that they were relatively less occupied in the categories of sexual acts or emotions during the eve of colonization (Dlamini, 2006; Epprecht, 2013; Murray & Roscoe, 2001; Swidler, 1993).

In other words, among this ethnic group, if a person was two-spirited<sup>19</sup>, they could engage in coital acts with members of the same sex without inciting antipathy and stigma like today, and the same goes for women (Epprecht, 2013). Albeit noteworthy to point out that, these dynamics are not always exclusive in that they are not universal for all sexually diverse African bodies. Assuredly, not all ATR leaders are homosexual, and not all homosexuals are spiritually gifted, for homosexuals are not homogenous. Sexual diversity among the Shona is not monolithic, just like everywhere else, because

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<sup>19</sup>An ATR follower who is a vessel of both “masculine” and “feminine” ancestors.



sexuality is fluid and sometimes plural, depending on who is looking, who is getting looked at, and the forces at play. In that light, ATR queer spiritual leaders are rarely confined to gender expectations because they mostly draw their power from masculine and feminine powers, like their creator, *Mwari* (Machingura and Chitando, 2022).

Here, I am arguing that “spirit medium- homosexuals,” though they constitute the most studied homosexuals among the Shona, are just a relative percentage of the entire Zimbabwean LGBTIQ+ community. This is eyebrow-raising; it reminds us of Foucault's (1990) caveat that in tracing oppression, we must not lose sight that, as critical as who dispenses information, is the one on the asking end of that table, the one who decides what can be talked about and what can be known. It doubtless appears pregnant with meaning that “spirit-medium-homosexuals” account for the most documented LGBTIQ+ identities within prevailing African queer scholarship to date. Because it blindingly paints for us—black queer bodies, and decolonial thinkers, a translucent image of why many colonizers preferred running their mouths on that “spirit medium homosexuals” narrative; for it came in handy for the demonization of African cultures, which paved the way for the advancement of colonization masked as Western “civilization.”

The pith here is to punctuate that the misrepresentation of African LGBTIQ+ identities in the prevailing scholarship is suspect in that any pundit in the social sciences arena of sexuality studies should be able to comprehend the intricacies of sexuality, fundamentally its complex fluidity and plurality. Anyone with their feet inside such an arena should never question how human beings never stop learning about themselves and how sexuality is not written in stone like any other human characteristic or attribute. Respectfully, any divergent thought patterns are alarming and indicate that maybe such people shouldn't be in the social sciences, for history has proven in apocalyptic ways that this field is axiomatically not a playground for subjective minds. It is historically accurate that subjectivity has cost humanity decades of unlearning, particularly women, marginalized identities, but more so black

bodies. Contrary to that imperialist narrative, many Shona queers exist outside this “spirit-medium dynamic,” *de facto*, a significant populace of African LGBTIQ+ ostensibly identifies with that community because of homoerotic impulses and not out of ancestral assignments.

Moreover, it is prudent to highlight in our argument how such anthropological biases, seemingly driven by surreptitious agendas on African queerness, mislead, brainwash, and excessively shortchange many Zimbabwean same-sex identities outside of that spirit-medium bracket. On top of feeding into imperialist tropes that believe(d) African men are too “primitive” to possess homoerotic impulses, they also blithely shrink all African homosexual identities to fit into this miniature box of those “floating between the spirit world of ancestors and present-day society:” (Nyanzi, 2015, p. 126). Concomitantly cementing the rhetoric that constructs homosexuality as satanic, which further exacerbates the demonization of African queerness. It is evident from the African condition that these Western biases permeate Africa today both for the benefit of African conservative politicians and racist global north powers; and these myths and colonial narratives requires our–Africans, immediate treatment of it as contraband, which it is.

We remain confident that contrary to post-colonial pernicious narratives by self-serving African politicians like Robert Mugabe or Yoweri Museveni,<sup>20</sup> that homosexuality is a function of capitalism or a consequence of globalization, the literature reviewed so far unequivocally corroborated for us that black queerness should never be debated! It should never even remotely find itself on such a table, for not only have such debates become old; but that myth in and of itself has also undeniably become increasingly superfluous in that it remains unsubstantiated! It is what Americans love calling, “he say,

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<sup>20</sup> Yoweri Museveni is the current Ugandan president, “dubbed as ‘Mugabe homophobic-copycats’” by Ana Simo in “The Bermuda triangle of African homophobia” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 113).” It appears these two founded their relationship from a mutually obsessive desire for tyranny, evident in their self-imposed long presidential incumbencies among their unending lists of crimes against humanity. And though Zimbabwe managed to come out of that quandary via a coup, Uganda unfortunately remains a nation under the shackles of Yoweri Museveni who recently stole a 6<sup>th</sup> election from the Ugandans and Bobi Wine in the 2021 presidential election.

she say” (Murray and Roscoe, 2001; Dlamini, 2006); and those are certainly not the kinds of debates one brings to the life and death discursive table, unless one is an ignorant bigot.

Only an ignorant African mind (witting or unwitting) can view African homosexuality via the lens of a “white man’s disease.” For crying out loud, the mere fact that the etymology of the word *Ngochani*, the Shona term used to denote those who engage in same-sex activities, dates as far back as two decades before the eve of colonization corroborates that the practice of homosexuality doubtless antedated the arrival of white capitalists on the continent (Murray and Roscoe, 2013).

Furthermore, it is evident that the literature reviewed thus far signposts an urgent need for a holistic decolonial process of African minds, what the late decolonial feminist (Lugones, 1987) called traveling into each other’s worlds to conceptualize and understand our differences, oppression, subjectivity, objectivity, and shared struggles. Most importantly, it flags for us—Africans an obligation to emancipate black bodies from colonial legacies, fundamentally from the colonial penal codes ubiquitous in our so-called African laws. What lies before us is an apparent requirement to puke all the racist toxic lessons we incessantly sipped on throughout our lives because they masqueraded as margaritas of “civilization.” How could we—historically underprivileged bodies, have escaped falling victim to so-called on-the-house cocktails, especially the kind you find in Las Vegas casinos? Those that deep-pocketed mixologists cunningly concoct with the sole mandate of robbing all your money from all the gambling addiction these “free cocktails” induce. Albeit my knowledge of this has been entirely derived from the cinemas, what goes down in Vegas is analogous to how it all played out in the motherland; it was not free “civilization” but imperialism. In the same way, it is not “foreign aid” in contemporary Africa but rather neo-imperialism; after all, nothing seems on-the-house on this planet: there is always a resident on the benefiting side of every equation, regardless of what propagandists may posit.

It also doesn’t follow that most Christians see no “special religious role for people who engage in homosexual relations” or gender non-conforming identities (Swidler, 1993, p. 34), especially considering

that some schools of thought have profoundly argued that Adam, the first man in the bible, was intersex (Robert Wesley Thoughts, 2020). But since John Boswell (1981), a queer researcher, in his riveting book *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, postulated that, from the advent of Christianity, attitudes toward minorities dwell on a relatively transitioning continuum. It appears characteristic that part of that history was perhaps deliberately defaced by Christians for reasons that best served the perpetuation of the patriarchy. This defacement vociferously tells of the antipathy that those with the power of knowledge production then held against diverse sexualities—medieval Christians. However, it does not even begin to tell the unabridged story of the hollows at which Christians went to achieve their avaricious agendas, hollows deeper than hell, to render the repression of sexuality as ahistorical and therefore justifiable.

More so to our defense is Bryne Fone's (2000) thought-provoking book *Homophobia a history*, which posited that during the Common Era—the period from the birth of Jesus, as far back as 6BC and 4BC, when Christians were still a minority; Christian theorists “blamed social chaos” on homosexuality amongst pagans (p. 75). Boswell (1981) also argued in our favor that it “was not until 533 [that] any part of the [Roman] empire [saw] legislation flatly outlawing homosexual behavior, even though Christianity had been the state religion for more than two centuries” (Boswell, 1981, p. 171). Swidler (1993), conceding with both these schools of thought, propounded that as early as the late 6th century, the Visigoth<sup>21</sup> Roman Catholics of Spain espoused virulent attitudes towards homosexuality and were quite vitriolic towards those who practiced homosexuality. Her feminist ontologies further enlightened us that Thomas Aquinas, an Italian Christian philosopher of the early 12th century, doubtless espoused “rigorist views” against homosexuals and that his homophobic standpoints “were representative and influential” (p.142). Even more corroboratory to our argument that homophobia is colonial debris is that Saint

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<sup>21</sup> The Visigothic Kingdom, Visigothic Spain or Kingdom of the Goths (Latin: Regnum Gothorum), was a kingdom that occupied southwestern France and the Iberian Peninsula from the 5th to the 8th centuries. See Britannica Encyclopedia

Aquinas wasn't the only homophobic medieval Christian writer: Vatican's like Alcuin and Aelred of Rievaulx espoused akin homophobic views for the Roman Catholic Church and were just as influential (Swidler, 1993).

Albeit Thomas Aquinas was a distinctive homophobic voice in that he successfully brainwashed many medieval Christians with his "unnatural law." Marcin (1998) reported that Aquinas likened homosexuality to "[a] special kind of deformity whereby the venereal act is rendered unbecoming ...[and it] may occur in two ways: first, through being contrary to right reason, common to all lustful vices; secondly, because, in addition, [homosexuality] is contrary to the natural order of the venereal act..." (p.69). Aquinas's worldview on sexuality ostensibly became the premise of Sodomy penal codes, the basis of the subsequent 1533 Buggery Act: the heinous act that transferred homosexual crimes from clerical to judicial courts. This penal code is mirrored in most contemporary African penal codes that criminalize homosexuality today; another given here is that the etymology of the word Sodomy and the notion thereof is undeniably un-African.

Disputants might argue that, but why is John Boswell (1981) and Michel Foucault (1990) convinced that it was not until the Renaissance—beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> until the 17<sup>th</sup> century that social intolerance, narrow-mindedness, and oppression became the depressing reality of homosexuals? But that question is doubtless undeserving of our precious time, and its answers are somewhat redundant. Whether homophobia sprung out of the early common era, the late 6th century, or even toward the end of the 17th century is not paramount! What lies critical, however, is that Christians doubtless troubled their faculties with sex and sexuality decades before Africans adopted an imperial phenomenon engineered for their disenfranchisement and subsequent colonization. More so, "let there be no misunderstanding: I do not claim that sex has not been prohibited or barred or masked or misapprehended since the classical age; nor do I even assert that it has suffered these things any less from the period before [the Victorian era or precolonization]" (Foucault, 1990, p. 12). As such, there is

nothing to argue here, especially since such arguments appear superfluous to our decolonial processes as black bodies but more so black queer bodies.

It is also unanimous among early queer scholars that the threats of Protestantism assuredly induced insecurities and paranoia among Christians (Boswell, 1981; Fone, 2000), rendering the phenomenon of denigrating minorities “such as Jews and gay people” survival-rich for the Roman empire (Boswell, 1981, p. 170). This perceived threat of the return of paganism as a majority religion made the then-Christian ambiance incubatory for homophobic attitudes and perceptions, it seems. What remains unquestionable for us here is that imperialists engineered an unbeknownst fear among Africans—homophobia, as a ruse to implement the rapacious scramble and partition of Africa for white capitalist gains. Thus, as an African, to parrot that homosexuality and not homophobia is a Western import is ridiculously anachronistic, injurious, and pernicious; it reifies a lack of an undistorted conceptualization of the historicity of homophobia on the part of the one purporting. This misconception has proven costly for us—Africans to overlook thus far.

Furthermore, a fellow Zimbabwean, Masiwa Ragies Gunda (2010), a Christian researcher whose book *The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe*, also came to our defense, hypothesized that from the advent of Christianity, the bible—a holy scripture of the Christian religion, rebuked homosexuality and continues to do so. Sadly, this is the case in contemporary Africa, though the bible is an exotic religious scripture. Gunda (2010) also enlightened us that according to Louis Crompton, narrow-minded fourth-century Christians rendered homosexuality as “*peccatum non nominandum inter Christianos*”, meaning the mere mentioning of homosexuality among Christians was taboo, like it was in Zimbabwe about five or more years back (p. 29). It is judicious that we underline here that, as alluded before, homosexuality was only an ecclesiastical sin until 1533, when King Henry VIII, popularly known as the “Defender of the Roman Catholic Church,” moved it to state law under the Buggery Act. Consensual homosexuality remained outlawed in Britain until 1967. Implying that, for almost four centuries, a good 328 years,

many European homosexuals lived under the threat of death row, never knowing when they would be charged with marching to the gallows. What remains factual in our argument is that consensual same-sex activities were repressed among the so-called sophisticated Victorian bourgeoisie for almost four and half centuries, a period spanning hundreds upon hundreds of years.

More thought-provoking, especially for us African non-Christian decolonial thinkers, is that King Henry VIII's so-called title, "Defender of the Roman Empire," did not last as long: he divorced his first wife, an act castigated by over 25 biblical verses and a taboo in the then-Christian religion (Evans, n.d.). His inconsonant Christian behavior echoes Christians' two-faced treatment of the bible as a holy text to castigate homosexuality, which to me seems immanent among this tribe. It follows that today, like in the medieval era, Zimbabwean Christians weaponize the Bible as a sacred text to advance personal agendas and then unashamedly turn against it for individualistic gains; it speaks more to Arendt's (1994) theory of the banality of evil. And because acting so duplicitously "bibley" is nothing new among Christian believers, what lies crystal clear before me as one who once was under the shackles of this oppressive religion is that what bedevils black African LGBTIQ+ bodies today, is the nature of Christians, writ Zimbabwean, writ African!

Nonetheless, that is not the central argument here. What's paramount at this juncture is what appears like a traceable trajectory among these Jesus followers—the masculinist treatment of the bible as "a religious unquestionable scripture." This masculinist Christian approach is why white Christian colonizers, who purported to be agents of "civilization," unashamedly weaponized this same "holy scripture" to enslave and colonize black bodies; one would think holy wouldn't vilify. But to our cognitive dissonance, as if slavery and colonialism weren't unChristian enough, white Christian missionaries and colonizers went to the devious extents of convincing black bodies to buy into the racist capitalist rhetoric that God situated them in that eternal servitude status. That "he—white God" created black bodies for white bodies to objectify. That they—white bodies are the inherent incumbents of that

superior position because their race hit a triple during the creation of humankind, and that black bodies are expendable in that they are “not of the first order.”

This we have seen on display in shows like HBO’s documentary, *Harriet* by Lemmons (2019) and Netflix’s documentary, *13<sup>th</sup>* by DuVernay (2016). How white bodies conjured into literature myths that passed as truth for over 400 years for the generation of white generational wealth, which could only be attained, it seems, through indenturing black bodies. Today, in the so-called free world, descendants of the same colonizers and slave owners fight tooth and nail the Critical Race Theory, which paints how racism is systemic and systematic. As if their ancestors did not spend centuries creating these apparent oppressive institutions that bestow upon white bodies, what McIntosh (1989) called “an invisible knapsack of white privilege:” the unspoken prerogative that most white people possess unknowingly and knowingly, depending on how erudite one is.

In contemporary academic rooms, black folks and some white progressive minds are grappling with the contentious historic-politico debate on whether it is safe to posit that slavery ended since it appears doubtless that racism was somewhat redefined into mass incarceration in the United States (DuVernay, 2016; Srinivasan, 2022). In that, a larger population of black bodies remain under the shackles of slavery through carceralism, which ostensibly weaponizes what looks like a deliberate 13<sup>th</sup> amendment loophole, schematically inserted for the sole objectification of black bodies as unearthed in Netflix’s documentary, *13<sup>th</sup>* by Ava DuVernay (2016). In the context of where I come from—Africa, coloniality is the new colonialism: colonial legacies remain laden across African traditions and politics, which spill into all African phenomena in how we think of ourselves and want the world to perceive us. Though we—Africans speak with so much zest that we are no longer a colony, that Africa will never be a colony again, many have never, not even an inch, left that which they ardently distance themselves from.



Today, homophobic Christian leaders in Zimbabwe, as depicted by “The gold mafia: The laundry service” (Aljazeera Investigative Unit, 2023), walk that same path of duplicity; they are homophobes who also spearhead Kleptocratic regimes against Jesus' teachings. Yet, Jesus, the founder of Christianity, has no single verse castigating homosexuality. Paradoxically, Jesus has numerous verses castigating avariciousness to the point that he flogged people in the Church for such things (Pharr, 1988). What's more mind-boggling to me is that the current Zimbabwean president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, the Zanu-PF homophobic Christian leader like his predecessor Robert Mugabe, also blindly inherited this weaponization of homophobia as if he is a “saint.” On top of being a sultan, the man is not just an accused pedophile on numerous counts (Anonymous, 2019, 2022), making it mind-boggling that such a person can move like he is chaste.

It circles us back to the double-dealing nature of Christians alluded to earlier, we can see that like Henry VIII, the “defender of Christianity,” Mugabe, Mnangagwa, Museveni, Engel, and similar homophobic politicians espouse the most strident terms on homosexual acts. Yet, against the Bible, they also made it into the world's Guinness Book of the most avaricious and corrupt to ever be in positions of power (Benson, 2022). Still, no draconian laws against their greediness have been enacted even when decades of economic dissonance in most African countries have tumultuously suggested otherwise. Apologists and blind followers might want to dismiss this argument as “deranged” because anyone who disagrees with anything Jesus, apparently, has a “derangement syndrome.” Arguments I would like to crash by positing that it is not “deranged” to disagree with a religion whose entire history has been to otherize, marginalize, demonize; dichotomize, sulbaternize, and engender ism(s) (Boswell, 1981; Fone, 2000; Lerner, 1986). What is deranged is being presented with all this information and still choosing to continue with the hypocrisy: the rigidity to reflect and introspect on a religion that has historically evidently served a specific class of bodies, predominantly white, even when the optics flag that it is a necessity.

This selective hypocrisy is also evident in how some African Christians act like Jesus left a will putting them in charge, only when it concerns SOGIESC issues because they do not have the privilege or the *cojones* to be publicly LGBTIQ+, for varying reasons. However, I must mention that homophobia is not limited to non-homosexuals only; the latter is the case for many Zimbabweans, such as some ex-Mugabe officials who were alleged homosexuals<sup>22</sup> (Fone, 2000). These ex “ZANUans” were homophobic just like their master, not because that was an autonomous decision on their part but perhaps because it was all their menus served. What we are to make of all this is that our significant stumbling block in our liberation struggle is not these highlighted Christian inconsistencies but, instead, the failure on our part—Africans, to realize the coloniality in the weaponization of Middle Eastern religions and Western schools of thought to argue for homophobic standpoints. But how did we become accomplices to our oppression? How do we contribute to our inhibited Africanness? How did we become haters of our blackness, our plurality?

### **How we became Victorians**

It is to our—African LGBTIQ+ bodies gargantuan advantage, to open this section of the literature review by fore-fronting that Britain—a former colonizer of most African nations: decriminalized consensual same-sex activities around 1967, almost two centuries after France decriminalized its anti-sodomy laws during the French revolution in 1791 (Sharma, n.d.). Today, in 2023, the current eco-socio-political state of diverse sexualities in Anglophone and Francophone nations, which remains more horrendous in Anglophones, testifies in our favor that Africans have never been outside of colonial power: for power “is permanent, repetitious, inert and self-reproducing” (Foucault, 1990, p. 93). This is not to posit that former French colonies do not have sodomy laws or to insinuate that LGBTIQ+ bodies of these nations do not suffer from homophobia, far from it. Having advanced that, the post-

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<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.thezimbabwean.co/2014/09/jonathan-moyo-is-gay-mliswa/>

structuralist Michel Foucault (1990) warned us—queer researchers, never to lose sight of what he termed the “repressive hypothesis” in our search for the technicalities of systems of oppression because losing sight of it is tricking our minds into thinking that sexuality has always been repressed; that diverse sexualities have always been the enigma (p.15). Hannah Arendt (1951), in her riveting book, *The origins of totalitarianism* also warned us—minorities, never to treat any repression as ahistorical because to treat it as that is to hand the oppressor an excuse to repress on a silver platter. This Victorian repressive hypothesis the late Michel Foucault (1990) warned us about seems to have swept through Africa during colonization through the workings of imperial handmaidens; then, it remained inscribed in the minds of many, written with a pen of iron.

Today, most Africans cling to this repressive hypothesis as if it is absolute truth, even though there is no such thing as absolute truth, for the search for such has long proven futile given that humankind is ever evolving. As philosophers and philosophers in the making, we are presented with new truths every other day, though sometimes, we might trick ourselves into thinking that we have unearthed the “truest” truths. Regrettably for most, but insightfully for us—open minds, we always find ourselves shaken by newer truths as we dig deeper. And only those paying ingenuine attention can live in that utopia where some absolute truth exists somewhere. In this real world, it is obligatory upon every progressive mind to always leave room for newer truths; anything other than this approach lies at the risk of playing ourselves. It is to allow history to repeat itself; it risks a failure to prevent the Hitlers and Mugabes of this world from taking us on those tomfoolery walks, the likes of Emmerson Mnangagwa and Yoweri Museveni. And those tomfoolery walks are the exact catastrophes black bodies cannot afford in this historical period.

This is the point at which I want to ask the following existential questions that can perhaps answer how we—Africans became a people so hateful and hypocritical. If overwhelming history holds it axiomatic that same-sex relations historically existed in Africa, why do we, to this day, perpetuate the

myth that homosexuality is un-African? If a wealth of history evinces that before colonization, like before 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, “sexual practices [in Africa] had little need for secrecy... things were done without too much concealment [and black bodies] had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit” it appears (Foucault, 1990, p. 3), which part is cumulonimbus about how, like the patriarchy, systems of oppression are not ahistorical? What exactly is convoluted about how sexual repression is inherently un-African?

But most importantly, by what spiral did so-called educated world leaders like Robert Mugabe, Yoweri Museveni, and like-minded folks elicit standing ovations among us, uttering incongruous, witless colonists' sentiments? For example, Mugabe's all-time favorite homophobic standpoint as the chief perpetrator of homophobia was that he found same-sex relationships “repugnant” to “his conscience” because such phenomena appeared “immoral and against the law of nature” (Human Rights Watch, 2003, para 75). Albeit, he had to spend his entire incumbency installing systems that teach Zimbabweans homophobia and influencing other African heads of state to follow suit on the rubric that homosexuality was infectious or somewhat contagious; one would expect homophobia to occur naturally if homosexuality is indeed “unnatural” (Human Rights Watch, 2003, para 75); far from it, as Hannah Arendt (1951) posited, to be an oppressor, one must lose touch with common sense. Only those out of touch with their common sense would not see the ridiculousness of their worldviews and evils.

Albeit I am even more troubled by what it is about black minds that enabled Mugabe to get away with insinuating that, like addiction, homosexuality is this “seemingly chosen phenomenon” that disrupts a society's social, legal-political, ethical, and moral order, even when that has been long disproved by progressive research? (Fone, 2000). How is it possible that today, in 2023, the world witnessed Mugabe's long-time friend and Ugandan tyrant, Yoweri Museveni, further worsen the eco-socio-political state of LGBTIQ+ Ugandans under the rubric that “What then does the law fight? It fights [homosexuals] from recruiting other people who are not psychologically disoriented like [them]” as posited in the “State of the nation address 2023 by H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, president of the

Republic of Uganda.” Respectfully, if homosexuality, according to Museveni’s “objective scientific research,” is undoubtedly “mental,” how can people be ‘recruited’ into this so-called derangement? Without mincing words, invoking diction like “recruitment” in a psycho-scientific argument is akin to trying to eat soup with a fork, which is ludicrous. It also speaks verbosely about the subjectiveness of these “psycho-scientific” findings that Yoweri and anti-SOGIESC defenders weaponize for their standpoints; it corroborates Harding’s (1988) feminist standpoint that “knowledge claims are always socially situated” (pg. 54). To compound that, this disconnect also indicates for us the power dynamics that influence African homophobic leaders, which are doubtless Western and colonial. Hence, it is outstandingly naïve to expect objectivity from African scientists, particularly Christian scientists, especially on the question of sexuality.

The following quintessential follow-up questions also unravel at this juncture; were Mugabe and his “democratic” Zanu-PF politicians ever exposed to queer bodies of knowledge? If not, why? If yes, were they perhaps selective readers who also suffered from an identity crisis emblematic in their weaponization of the bible and science–non-African inventions to anchor their homophobic standpoints? Does all this signpost an alarming flagrant reading and understanding of history and colonial effects on the part of contemporary African leaders? To answer these questions, to attain an unabridged historicity of the condition of African LGBTI identities—it is critical to analyze and trace this historicity step by step via the lens of the principal proponent of homophobia in post-colonial African politics. The longest-serving president of the sub-Saharan nation–Zimbabwe: the late Robert Gabriel Mugabe, I hope he is not resting in peace, if there is at all, any resting that happens after death, it seems we have been lied to a lot particularly by Christians and it’s also because it appears unsubstantiated since nobody came back to testify!

### **A Victorian creature: Robert Mugabe the Jesuit “Intellectual”**

Born in 1924 at Kutama Mission, a Jesuit<sup>23</sup> school in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) during the peak of colonization, as the son of a laborer father and a member of the Shona ethnic majority, though as a Zezuru: one of the minor branches of the Shona tribe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Because he was a product of a deadbeat father, Mugabe’s primary socializing agents were the colonists: he was practically raised in the Catholic church (AFP, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Pollitt, n.d.). As Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the Kenyan decolonial academic, enlightened us, missionary schools like Kutama “were used effectively by colonialism to commit ‘psychological violence’ known as epistemicide.” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015b, p. 6). Mugabe was but another victim of this violence, emblazoned in the kind of leader he became: a homophobic Christian whose “postcolonial practice of governance [was] not very different from that of colonialists at many levels” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 1). It appears Mugabe escaped out of this trauma as an African nationalist and anti-colonialist, which is doubtless far from a decolonialist; Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) further enlightened us that:

Anti-colonialism gestured towards taking over power by black elites from white colonialism. Anti-colonialism enabled black elites to inherit the colonial state. Once the black elites inherited the state, they never bothered to radically transform it.

Deracialization became conflated with decolonization of colonial state institutions.

Africanization degenerated into nativism, xenophobia and retribalization, chauvinism and racism. (p. 1)

Mugabe's politics were verbatim to this hypothesis. More so, Mugabe, a Catholic, like most Christians, “consider[red] the bible to be [the] sacred scripture” (Swidler, 1993, p. 135). Here, it is judicious to highlight that Catholics, whose tolerance toward sexual minorities has significantly

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<sup>23</sup> Jesuit- is a religious order of clerics regular pontifical for men in the Catholic Church headquartered in Rome. This largest male religious order in the Catholic church is centered on the nurturance of men and women through education ministries. See <https://www.jesuits.global/>

progressed in this decade, at least on the part of their supreme leader and most global north Christians and some global south Christians, as reported in “Pope Francis opens possibility for blessing same-sex unions” by Alfonseca and Natanson, (2023) of ABC News: held virulent homophobic attitudes during colonization (Brown, 2016; Dryden, 2018; Foucault, 1990). Today, many unbending Christians still believe homosexuality is this “heinous” phenomenon, even though the founding father of Christianity, Jesus himself, “said nothing related to homosexuality” in all his earth teachings, not even a single verse! (Boswell, 1981, p. 115).

*De facto* sexuality was “largely a matter of indifference to Jesus” (Pharr, 1988, p. 3). Albeit it is historically evident why Mugabe was greatly troubled by matters of sexuality, it also lies crystal clear that, like most typical Christians, Mugabe weaponized the bible to amass personal wealth and cling to eternal oppressive rule. It tells why he created a country where wealth remains concentrated among ZANU elites and self-proclaimed prophets (Aljazeera Investigative Unit, 2023; Mungoshi, 2017; Taru & Settler, 2015); the same elites and prophets work overtime to ensure African soil remains fertile for weaponizing homophobia in Africa. But,

If religious strictures are used to justify oppression by people who regularly disregard precepts of equal gravity from the same moral code, or if prohibitions which restrain a disliked minority are upheld in their most literal sense as absolutely inviolable while comparable precepts affecting the majority are relaxed or reinterpreted, one must suspect something other than religious beliefs as the motivating cause of oppression. (Boswell, 1982, p. 7)

However, some African Christians might argue that many scriptures in the bible from both Jesus’s disciples and the Old Testament criticized homosexual acts. Even though none stops to have what I, like Suzanne Pharr (1988), a feminist and queer theorist, believe is a critical dialogue in that Genesis 19 text: the traumatic dehumanization of Lot's daughters when he offered them to be gang

raped. It follows that, albeit raised a Jesuit, Mugabe was far from an ideal Christian; still, many Zimbabweans, particularly Catholics, highly regard(ed) him as the epitome of Catholicism mainly due to his elite card and less his behavior if we are to be honest, it remains sad that, in the eyes of many, despite all his atrocities on Zimbabwean bodies, Mugabe was, ridiculously, a symbol of religious authority.

He “graced” archbishop’s ordinations, including Pius Ncube, the first black Roman Catholic Archbishop of the dioceses of Bulawayo, who later became Mugabe’s chief critic. In response to Pius’s criticism, Mugabe, conscious of the high religious seat from which many looked at him, successfully weaponized the “let’s pray for Pius” rubric since Pius Ncube, against his religious commandments, had been involved in a sexual affair, as reported by “Zimbabwe’s Mugabe says he’ll pray for bishop” (Farrel, 2007). Albeit, Mugabe was 40 years older than his wife, Grace Mugabe, popularly known as Gucci Grace, owing to her Marie Antoinette persona, which doubtless gave pedophile vibes; I do not care what anyone thinks because only pedophiles can marry someone 40 years younger than them, regardless of the context. Translating to that, while it is doubtless that it is, in fact, Mugabe who needed a cleansing of the soul if that sort of thing exists. Unfortunately, in the eyes of many blinded by Mugabe’s elite card and bourgeoisie lifestyle, this realization was uneasy to cross paths with. Yet one would think Christians would invoke the “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Crossway Bibles: Matt 7.5) when such things happen, but far from it; for years on end Mugabe got away, unscathed, and his successors and caricatures are seemingly getting away with it unscathed too.

It appears doubtless that, for a cunning mind like Mugabe, the ruse to plot twist Pius Ncube’s criticism was helpful, for it appeared critical to deter Zimbabweans from Mugabe’s incompetencies and corrupt politics. Since Pius’s criticism came during the period in Zanu PF history when strong opposition parties began organizing heavily and publicly against Mugabeism, however, we should note that the



critical point here is not to go on that discursive of the duplicitous nature of Christians or some biblical hermeneutics on morality, seeing that work has already been accomplished. What is noteworthy is that this leading proponent of homophobia in Africa, Robert Mugabe—the Jesuit “intellectual” angered by capitalists and their reluctance to relinquish power, assembled Mugabeism from Marxist, Maoist, Leninist, and Nkrumahist philosophies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Nyarota, 2018). Schools of thought that were unapologetically antipathic toward homosexuality to alarming degrees at the time, particularly during Mugabe’s young adulthood. Like most of his colleagues, 1<sup>st</sup> generation African nationalists, Mugabe initially thought he could swipe his elite card into decision-making rooms after independence (Gatsheni, 2015). But colonists were not ready to be in bed with inclusion; they were unprepared to enfranchise “primitive men:” thus, they dished out seats at the table without belonging. You were invited into decision-making rooms, but with your mouth tied, and by your mouth tied, I do not mean you were not allowed to speak, but more like nobody listened.

“It was only when colonialism seemed too inflexible to accommodate the black elite that [Mugabe and other African leaders] engaged in politics of anti-colonialism” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). And “having experienced colonialism as emasculation, [Mugabe embraced toxic] male virility through violence;” he resorted to the politics of African nationalism around the 1960s as a strategy for consolidating power like fellow African nationalists (Rao, 2014). Against a fellow African nationalist's advice, the late former Mozambican president Samora Machel “[To not] play make-believe Marxist games when [he returned] home [from exile because he had] no Marxist party yet, [and so couldn't] impose Marxism.” (Nyarota, 2018, p. 1); Mugabe went on to impose Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-Nkrumahist ideologies onto Zimbabwean soil under the guise of “transforming Zimbabweans toward civilization, toward anti-colonialism, toward anti-capitalism.” Mugabe’s politics turned a nation once the breadbasket of Africa into a country where an average citizen lives hand to mouth, so much so that only

a handful have the cognitive bandwidth to ponder SOGIESC rights when their livelihoods are at stake. Mugabe was successfully ousted in a coup in 2017, as reported by Mackintosh (2017).

However, what deserves more scrutiny here is that Mugabe was a Jesuit “intellectual” with many acquired and honorary degrees, though most were later revoked. Hence, it appears naïve to think Mugabe wasn’t aware that homophobia was a creature of colonialism. For assuredly, he wasn’t what one would call a selective reader; Mugabe was an avid reader! Thus, it is judicious that we admit that Mugabe was perhaps a flagrant selective reader: an accomplice to the destruction of blackness. As Waller Newell, a professor of political science, enlightened us in Netflix’s documentary *How to become a Tyrant*, by Myrick (2021): tyrants have a kind of megalomaniacal confidence in their abilities. This megalomaniacal confidence makes it easy for them to pull out the most ridiculous deceits under our noses without anyone smelling it. It is evident Mugabe was another megalomaniac who masqueraded as “this liberator of Zimbabweans,” the “anointed one:” even though nothing about his leadership spoke of any anointing nor anything divine. It stands to reason that this megalomaniacal confidence enabled him to get away with what would usually be questioned by most. We are in no doubt that Mugabe weaponized homophobia for personal agendas and never for what he made the masses believe and subscribe to.

### **Methodology: Methods**

Borrowing from the philosophies of Sandra Harding (1988), a feminist way-paver: “[there is no] distinctive feminist method of research” (p. 1). This feminist theorist enlightened us that instead of occupying our faculties with gatekeeping feminist-womanist research methods, which seems axiomatically retrogressive and self-defeating. What is rather efficacious is the ability to fathom the co-constitutive institutions operating at multiple levels against women, *i.e.*, gender and sexuality. A lack of such an understanding “renders heterosexuality as an invisible feature of patriarchal society...thereby closing off critical engagement around how these two systems are bound together and are mutually constitutive,” it precludes radical feminist-womanist inquiries (Butler, 1990; Everett et al., 2022, p. 91).

Thus, this paper employed a feminist-womanist quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis of literature, penal codes, and data to add to the argument that homophobia is a colonial relic that seems to serve not only African megalomaniacal tyrants but also global north powers.

I will now analyze data from the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII)<sup>24</sup>, Open Democracy<sup>25</sup>, Freedom House<sup>26</sup>, Statista.com<sup>27</sup>, and 10 SADC<sup>28</sup> states' penal codes to evince how structural-heteropatriarchy, religion and coloniality co-constitute and co-reinforce homophobia in the SADC. Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles, D.R.C., and South Africa were deliberately omitted from this study for the brevity of time. Because most of these are islands and all former French colonies save for South Africa. The Democratic Republic of Congo never criminalized homosexuality, and South Africa is, on paper, the leading LGBTIQ+ rights-supporting member state in SADC. I contend with disputants who regard these sources as Western curations that may be biased in their approach and understanding of the African condition. However, we mustn't lose sight that these indexes are doubtless valuable for liberating African LGBTIQ+ bodies in that they aid in corroborating our standpoint that homophobia is sustained by colonial oppressive institutions that speak back to each other. We also do not have alternative purely African indexes that we can harness in our inquiry; thus, it appears imperative and progressive to make do with what is available in times like these.

I also concede that LGBTIQ+ identities of the countries I omitted endure almost as much homophobia; still, their lives are nothing like most LGBTIQ+ identities of the hand-picked countries, especially those that don't have SOGIESC rights yet. After all, there is nothing called shared oppression

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<sup>24</sup> "GII is a composite metric of gender inequality [that employs] three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market. A low GII indicates low inequality and vice versa." (United Nations, n.d.)

<sup>25</sup> Open democracy is a media platform which tracks global funding from US Christian rights groups.

<sup>26</sup> Freedom House is a civil society that serves as a watchdog for democracy.

<sup>27</sup> Is a leading provider of consumer data that tracks a traffic of about 24 million visitors each month on around 80,000 topics; it has 4 million registered users.

<sup>28</sup> Southern Africa Development Community is a coalition of 16 member states whose main objective is to "enhance the standard and quality of life of the peoples of Southern Africa, and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration, built on democratic principles and equitable and sustainable development." (SADC, n.d.)

or coherent repression, and this is why homophobia manifests in different faces, in disparate contexts, dependent on many variables that are not always limited to a lack of SOGIESC policies (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, a lack of SOGIESC rights always entails compounded homophobia in that queer bodies of countries with no SOGIESC rights lack state protection. No SOGIESC laws translate to LGBTIQ+ bodies must either lead double lives for survival or be willing to be outcasted, and by outcasted, I do not only mean finding yourself homeless, which is doubtless traumatic, but I mean being outcasted from all the places that make humans human. How so? Living as an LGBTIQ+ person in a country with no SOGIESC rights is akin to what Robin Sharma (2018) called a person who dies at 30 but is instead buried at 80, in that their life ends way before going six feet under, in how such an individual stops living authentically in ways that primarily serve them, which *ipso facto* defeats the purpose of life.

Except in our case—African LGBTIQ+ bodies, we are dead way before we turn 30; we are dead as soon as we enter adulthood; we must die the very moment we initially acquaint ourselves with all the things that flag our queerness. Our authentic lives end at this juncture, never out of choice, peer pressure, or some algorithmic influence since most humans have become what Sharma (2018) called cyber zombies in this digital age. But we are fated for that trajectory regardless of whether we choose to lead double lives or take the highway; this is because either path never warrants bulletproofing of some sort from homophobia. Because sexuality is a significant, if not a paramount component of one's identity, it can only be concealed so much; in that, sexuality can manifest itself in ways that sometimes shock even the carriers but, more so, the onlookers, particularly those with preconceived, ill-informed notions of sexuality and or gender since sex is in and of itself already gender (Butler, 1990). Though I am convinced leading double lives appears like a worse evil, like something I would never be at peace with, not that anybody should be at peace with it. My aim in introducing these data sources is not only to construct a rebuttal against the un-Africanness of SOGIESC rights; it is not just to prove that

homophobia is a relic of colonial rule, for that has already been achieved. It is to incite a revolution, to awaken Africans from their long slumber.

From our findings thus far, it appears doubtless that “fury over sexuality in Africa has been orchestrated by [Western] figures and groups who continue to systematically impose their theological views and public policy prescriptions on the continent.” (Kaoma, 2012, p. iii). For them, deep-pocketed anti-SOGIESC advocates “[successfully] denying the very existence of African and African-diasporic sexual minorities [translates to easily denying] all LGBT people [SOGIESC rights everywhere]” (p.iii). This is a ruse more devious than it appears but more so in ways that many are unready to disentangle; it is a ploy that kills many birds with one stone. Unfortunately, many global north LGBTIQ+ rights defenders remain oblivious to this ruse and its operations against all their collected efforts to advance SOGIESC rights in the global north. My standpoint here is informed by their dilly-dally, diplomatic, propagandist, forever-taking techniques to upend the homophobic condition in Africa even when such a revolution demands immediate bottom-up decolonial processes. Evidently, from their lens—homophobia in Africa is not co-constitutive of the homophobia rampant in their global north territories despite them having adopted SOGIESC rights; sadly, it is! While it remains obscure how many are ready for this radical inquiry, it also remains essential to paint this interplay more vividly if we are to succeed in thought-provoking strategies that can holistically annihilate homophobia.

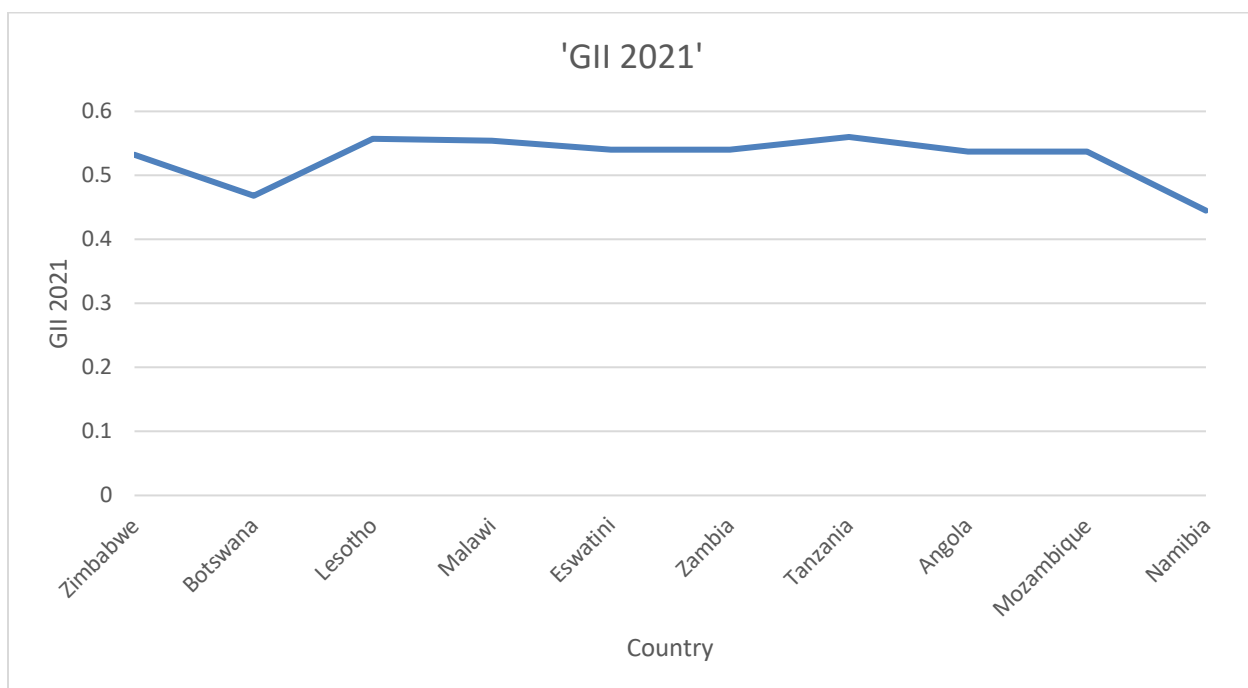
The United Nations Gender Inequality Index is a befitting metric for this paper in that it divulges how heterosexuality and normative gender “reinforce each other through social norms and co-constitutive structures and policies that create and sustain patriarchal social arrangements [while] influenc[ing] the types of social, cultural, and economic capital available to individuals.” This GII juxtaposes female reproductive health, empowerment, and labor indices against male empowerment and labor indices; it compares the female gender index *vis-à-vis* the male gender index to expose global inequalities. Put differently, it is a quantitative metric of how “structural sexism and structural LGB[TI]

stigma are inherently linked systems of oppression that co-constitute structural heteropatriarchy [because]...they both aim to privilege [cis]men [while] punish[ing] individuals...who do not embody heterosexual norms.” (Everett et al., 2022, p. 91). Through this index, we can map how the patriarchy speaks back to oppressive institutions that reinforce and perpetuate homophobia.

### **Findings**

As evident in the GII chart below, only two countries out of the surveyed 10 recorded a GII of 0.5 and below. Namibia and Botswana recorded below .5, perhaps because they have been making significant improvements in their approach to the LGBTIQ+ question, as reported by (Thoreson, 2023). And more so because Botswana and “all former Portuguese colonies have decriminalized same-sex conduct” in Africa (Reid, 2022, para 10). These countries, nevertheless, are still lagging in gender equality; we shouldn’t be surprised by this since systems of oppression would seemingly require as much time to dismantle as they manipulated to conjure up, and this is perhaps the case for these nations.

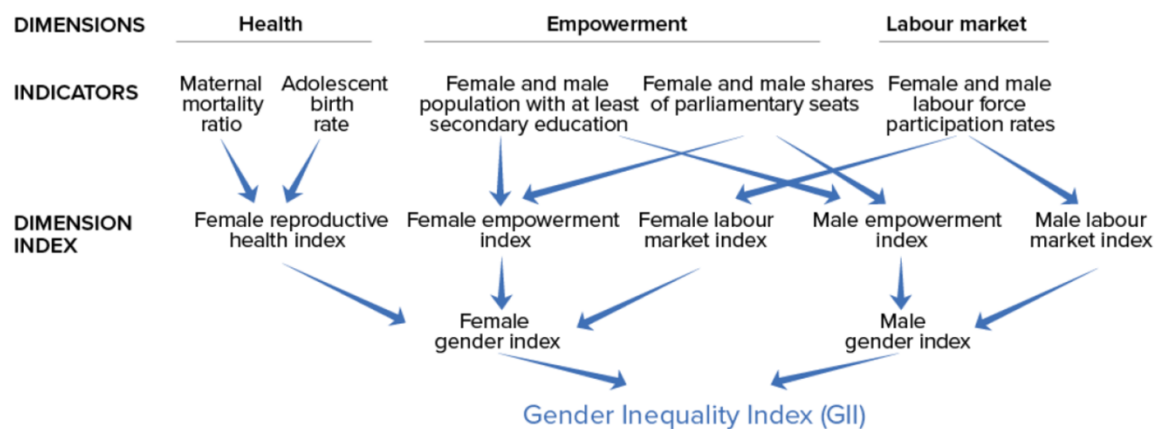
Table 1: UN GII



Note 1: This data was derived from the United Nations Development Program website <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index>

Figure 1: UN GII Dimensions and Indicators

## Dimensions and Indicators



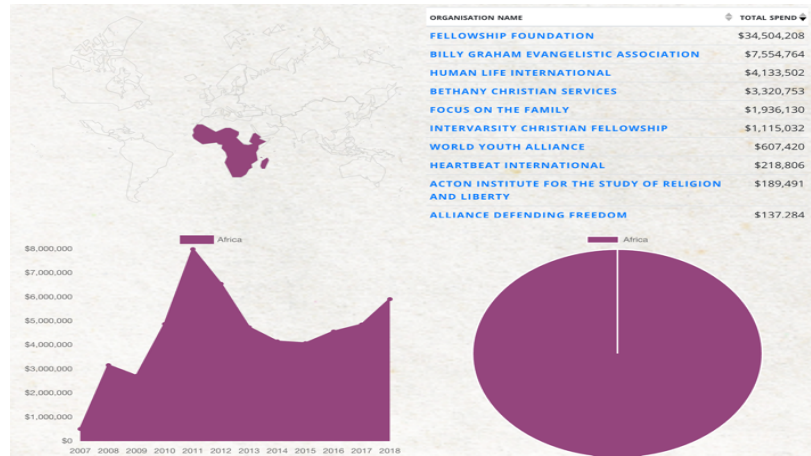
Furthermore, from the lessons gained in the last decade or so from not just the dire condition of South African LGBTIQ+ bodies, even with SOGIESC rights, which is highly alarming; South Africa is shockingly, but more so dishearteningly, the mirror through which the world views Africa, even more so “progressive Africa.” It also stands to reason that annulling anti-sodomy statutes is just 1 step in the thousand-mile journey toward advancing SOGIESC rights and sustainable development. Hence, it remains a given that it will mandate unending intentional unlearning and curation of decolonial literature to attain a SOGIESC utopia in Africa and globally.

### **Analysis and Results**

This is the point at which I would like to expose the interconnectedness of the above-highlighted structural-heteropatriarchy and its chief reinforcer—religion. This analysis is quintessential in that it unearths how these reinforcing institutions co-create and co-bulwark the homophobic condition in Africa. I aim to analyze the population data of the hand-picked 10 SADC states *vis-à-vis* their Christian and Muslim composite with the below charts alongside the amount of dark U.S. Christian money working 24/7 in these nations and its multiple functions to undermine democracy and the advancement of human rights in the motherland.

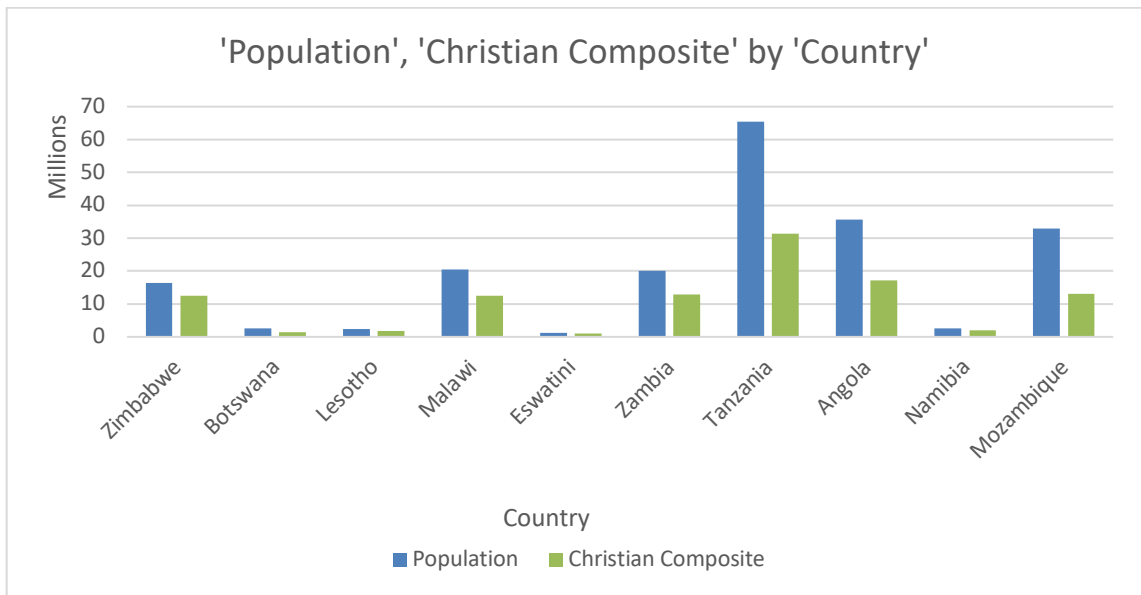


Figure 2: Latest Open Democracy data on dark Christian money circulating in Africa.



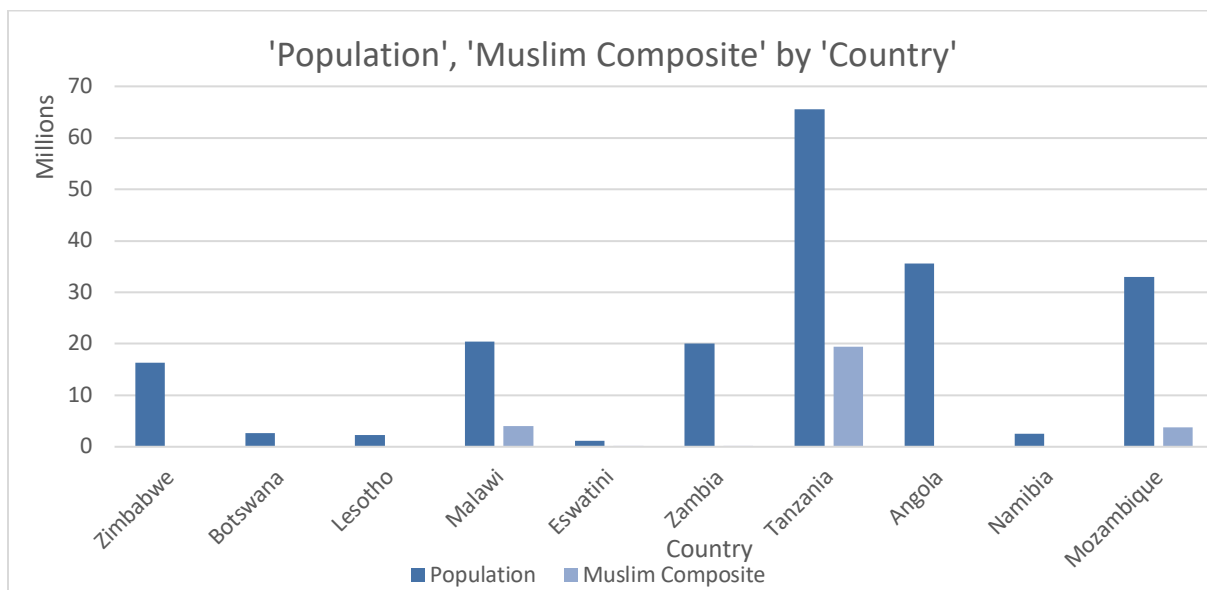
Note 2: This data was retrieved from Open Democracy here <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/trump-us-christian-spending-global-revealed/>

Table 2: SADC Christian Composite



Note 3: Data was acquired here <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1239389/share-of-christian-population-in-africa-by-country/>

Figure 3: SADC Muslim Composite



Note 4: Data was copied from here <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1239494/share-of-muslim-population-in-africa-by-country/>

Earlier in the literature review, I commented on how missionaries, handmaidens of colonialism, demonized and denigrated African cultures to conjure up binaries that would cement systemic oppression in the motherland. I explained how Middle Eastern religions—Christianity and Islam, did not wither away with the end of colonialism. It is evidently depicted in charts 3 and 4 above, that in times Christians fell short of sweeping their doctrine through at least half of a country's population, Muslims grabbed such opportunities with both hands. It is also unanimous at this juncture that these Middle Eastern religions held rigid patriarchal doctrines, particularly during colonization. However, this has significantly changed over the years, at least for some parts of the world. It is also doubtless that missionaries of these religions made the ambiance incubatory for Christianity's gospel of prosperity in Africa, which is, today, the nail hooking many Africans to a belief they lack an in-depth understanding of. A religion whose entire history has been that of being the cornerstone of many evils and otherizing bodies of color and all minorities (Arendt, 1951).

This gospel of prosperity swept through contemporary Africa, “[claiming] that simple faith in Jesus Christ will bring wealth and well-being,” and it successfully turned Africa into a “receptive home for Christian right movements that may be more marginal in the United States [and other developed nations]” owing to global historical inequities (Kaoma, 2012, p. vii). It remains doubtless unsurprising if many Africans today identify with such a religion; I mean, what else does one expect from a people whose generational wealth was stolen and never returned or at least compensated in just ways? What is it that you get from a person who lives hand to mouth *ad infinitum*, not out of choice but a reality beyond their fixing, apart from blind faith? One wouldn’t need any form of browbeating to attract followers to such a religion; in all fairness, their situation is coercive enough. And this nonsensical idea that the poor are cursed and the rich are blessed is nothing new. Considering that gathering data on the composite of ATR followers remains increasingly tedious. Most Africans practice ATR in clandestine spaces to maintain a Christian image: the accepted image; it stands factual that Africans are victims of an ingrained incessant “aspiration to imitate the culture and manners of White colonizers” because coloniality is no myth; it is an actual conundrum for black bodies (Kaoma, 2012, p. iii).

More so, as illustrated in Chart 2, it is evident that there is a lot of “dark money spent by US Christian Right groups [in Africa]” to advance U.S. conservative doctrines. (Archer & Provost, 2020, para 2). Dr Kaoma, (2012) hypothesized to our defense that,

[Africa’s homophobic] problem is continental in scale. Its underlying cause continues unabated: [because] the U.S. Christian Right, which engineered Uganda’s so-called “Kill the Gays” bill [and perhaps the recent Uganda’s anti-LGBT law<sup>29</sup>], continues to open new fronts across the African continent in its distinctly American culture war[s] against homosexuality and abortion. (p. ii)

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<sup>29</sup> The Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni recently signed a bill into law that punishes what he called “aggravated homosexuality” with lynching. See (Budoo-Scholtz, 2023)

Even though there is a pervasive myth on the African continent that the West funds LGBTIQ+ defenders to impose heinous Western phenomena and join the so-called satanism, the data above *de facto* depicts that the West dumps millions of their “dark money” into African conservative politicians, civil societies, and NGO pockets to perpetuate American Christian values onto our historically underprivileged and underserved continent. Most Africans are left with no choice but to work for these organizations, for it is mostly the available and most lucrative ticket out of poverty, and my mother and her co-workers were no exception to this victimization. Her co-workers blatantly accused me of selling my soul to the devil in my face in tones and undertones that somewhat alluded that I had stopped being human and turned into this nemesis of humanity. They forthright told my late mother that U.S. Satanists fund my lesbian lifestyle, workshops, and scholarships, opportunities I sweat daily for so I can contribute to the fight against inherently religiously motivated hate and stigma. And then they turned their backs and called the “dark money” in their pockets as employees of the Zimbabwean Association of Church-Related Hospitals (ZACH): foreign aid, the irony. It is not foreign aid but imperialism in sheep's skin because it bears stipulations primarily serving Western orthodoxy and conservative propaganda. Still, many aren't prepared for this unsettling conversation, at least not yet, perhaps for fear that such discourse might leave them jobless since there is always someone somewhere ready to take up their jobs; the job market in Zimbabwe remains on a perpetual Sahara dryness.

Let there be no misunderstanding: I am not asserting that U.S. and Western progressives do not fund African LGBTIQ+ defenders to fight colonial legacies and U.S. rightist “moral” prescriptions in the motherland; far from it. I am, however, stressing that conservative U.S. deep pockets heavily counter these progressive efforts, and again, this is a discourse many aren't brave enough for, in the spirit of “remembering where their bread is buttered,” since many Zimbabweans have no bread to butter. Still, that does not displace the fact that researchers have proven beyond reasonable doubt that U.S.

rightists, Mormons, and Christian conservatives “work both separately and independently to renew and expand colonial-era proscriptions on sexual rights [in Africa]” (Kaoma, 2012, p. ii).

Deserving of more of our attention here is the fact that even though the Global Philanthropy Project (2020) reported that between 2019 and 2020, Sub-Saharan Africa received global LGBTIQ+ funding of about 53 million United States, nearly 1 million dollars less than that of anti-LGBTIQ+ rights movements. The only work before these conservative rightists and their handmaidens is cementing established and deep-rooted colonial phenomena like homophobia. Yet, funding for such minutest work, one would think, is even more than that of those yoked with the colossal task of redressing colonial injustices that have been operational for centuries. What that tells us is that democracy is underfunded, that human rights are under attack not just in Africa but across the globe, but even more riveting is that the black race is under attack. Hence, when we enter potent rooms to devise decolonial solutions that can yield restorative justice for minority bodies, we must keep these lessons at heart. Until then, we are unworthy to speak of an equal world, sustainable development or even to consider ourselves as agents of such, if our conception of equality only applies to non-minority identities, for humankind is a conglomeration of non-minorities and minorities, and that is a metaphysical fact.

This is where I would like to expose the interplay between the above co-constituting oppressive institutions with their forefather—coloniality. As we have seen, colonial legacies remain ubiquitous not only in the dominant religions contemporarily operational in Africa, structural-heteropatriarchy, and anti-sodomy penal codes but also in most African regimes today. This coloniality paved the way for mimicking oppressive colonial regimes, which had no respect for the human rights of black bodies and their traditions. Another given here is that, on top of perpetuating colonial laws, for instance, coloniality in Zimbabwe is also emblazoned in Mugabeism—the political phenomenon, which, though unlike the colonial political phenomenon, where oppression was overt off the bat, Mugabe’s ZANU PF insidiously became overtly oppressive to its citizens (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). This reifies the hypothesis that

Mugabe was instead a tyrannical ruler, not the liberator he purported to be. His successor, Mnangagwa, his longtime friend Yoweri Museveni, and other homophobic African leaders regimes are even worse versions of Mugabeism in that they are what appear like Mugabeism-redefined, Mugabeism-pro, Mugabeism 2.0! Below is a pictorial presentation of this coloniality that I speak of.

Figure 4: A pictorial presentation of SADC Penal Codes

State	Colonizer	Penal Code Effective date	female same-sex mentioned ?	Penal code language	When colonizer adopted anti LGBTI laws	When colonizer repealed
ZIMBABWE	BR	1891	NO	SODOMY	1533	1967
BOTSWANA	BR	1965	implied	Sodomy	1533	1967
LESOTHO	BR	1981	implied	Sodomy + Unnatural Crimes	1533	1967
MALAWI	BR	1930	Yes	crimes against nature	1533	1967
ESWATINI	BR	1949	implied	unnatural Acts	1533	1967
ZAMBIA	BR	1975	Yes	crimes against nature	1533	1967
TANZANIA	DE BR	1945	Yes	unnatural acts	1871 1533	1994 1967
ANGOLA	PT	1886	YES	crimes against nature	1712 Slave Code	1983
NAMIBIA	DE	1924	implied	Sodomy + unnatural acts	1871	1994
MOSAMBICUS	PT	1886	YES	against nature	1712	1983

KEY: DE = GERMAN  
BR = BRITAIN  
PT = Portugal

Note 5: Data was derived from multiple sources cited in the reference list.

Before I delve deeper into the analysis of the above image, let me crush the question that critics dying to invalidate my detailed inquiries might pose. So, does this mean Africans had no laws that included those against “homosexuality” before colonization, whatever term it was called? I want to reply with what I think is an essential ask back: how are we supposed to know when “pre-Christian history [has] been merely regarded as a preparatory stage for the true history, which beg[ins] with the coming of Christ and end[s] with the Second coming?” (Lerner, 1986, p. 15). Pre-colonial African history, as alluded to before, was regarded as “barbaric,” owing primarily to the Darwinian theory of evolution; the records from which we must find such answers were sentenced to planet oblivion on the charge of “redundancy” and “primitivity” (Lerner, 1986, p. 15). As such, trying to lay our hands on that intel is like

trying to jump over our shadows; it poses risks that situate us in a rabbit hole that we cannot afford to find ourselves in, particularly during these critical times wherein millions of black LGBTI lives are at stake.

The pictorial above shows a pattern or synonymy in the language used in African penal codes that criminalize(d) homosexuality. As thought leaders have enlightened us, language is one of the pillars, if not breeding grounds, for the system of patriarchy, the father of heteropatriarchy (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1990; Lerner, 1986). Even more glaring in our illustration is the term “sodomy,” which appears omnipresent in most African penal codes that criminalize same-sex activities; yet that word in and of itself drives us back to the Hebrew Bible and the beginning of Middle Eastern religions— to un-African origins and contexts. To compound my viewpoint, the terms that appear sometimes conflated with “sodomy”— “vices against nature,” “unnatural crimes,” and “crimes against nature,” which appear neck to neck were canonized into literature during the Steven Marcus era— 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, these terms doubtless resonate with the decorum of the Victorian era. As such, they take us back to the period within which, according to Foucault (1990), “a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon [sex and sexuality]” (p. 26). Foucault (1990) enlightened us that this was the era when:

the conjugal family took custody of [sexuality] and [then] absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. [And the] legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. [This] couple imposed itself as [a] model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality [became] acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household... (p. 3)

Thus, it appears plausible that, perhaps, what we think of homosexuality today in judicial terms in Africa as black bodies speaks vociferously of the coloniality that plagues the continent and bedevils

African and African-diasporic LGBTI bodies. This coloniality is what I am arguing requires our immediate renunciation of it if we are to liberate our race holistically.

Moreover, it should not be surprising if many Africans today speak of homosexuality only in these terms and these colonial terms alone. The answer is that they have been viscerally colonized into this medieval European thinking of heteronormativity as the “normative” sexuality; very few, it seems, have been acquainted with terms outside these antipathic, stigma-inducing names. Thus, it stands to reason that if many African descendants affirm this repressive language today and the idea of unrepressed sexuality remains alien to them, it is because it is historically evident. More so, more noteworthy on our pictorial is that all the colonizers criminalized homosexuality way before their colonial states adopted anti-sodomy laws, but even more deserving of our attention is that Britain repealed “sodomy” polices before introducing those same laws onto its colonial territories of present-day Zambia and the Kingdom of Lesotho.

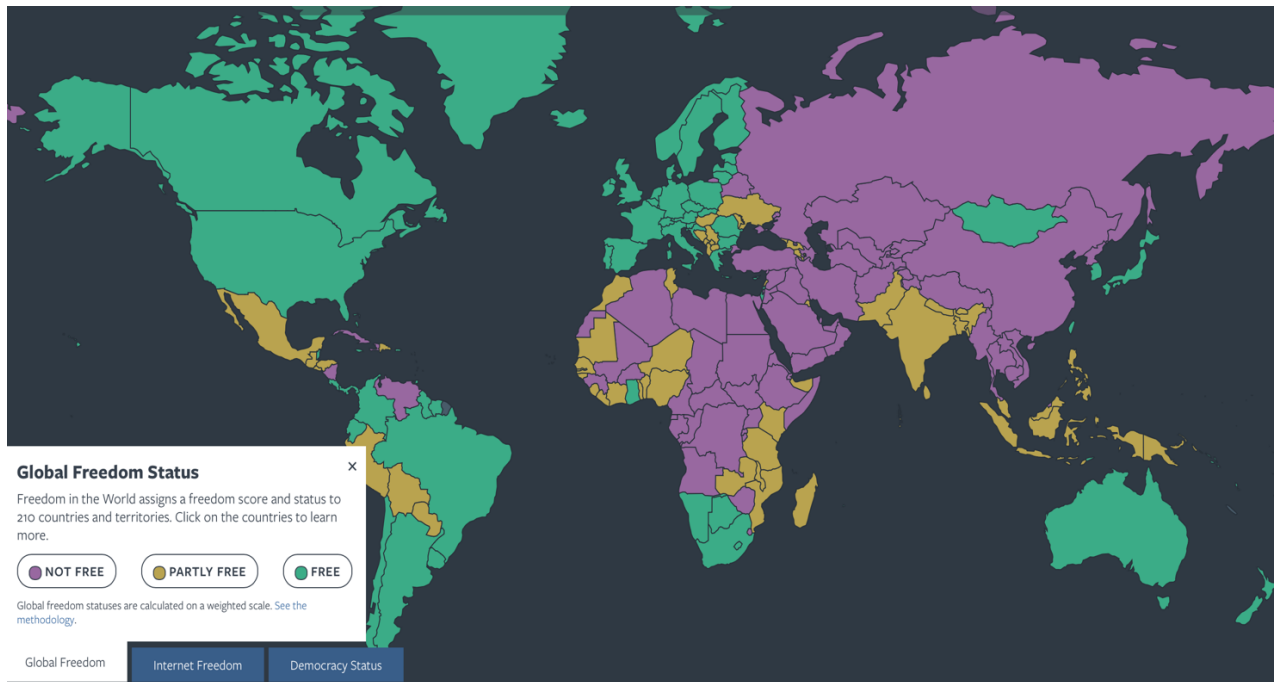
This solidifies our standpoint that sodomy laws are a relic of colonial rule in that they most certainly appear to have been an extension of imperialism since imperialism is generally a system that, by rule, mandates a loss of touch with common sense for its existence and because common sense is nonexistent among oppressors (Arendt, 1951). As such, introducing even that which they, themselves, had already condemned and overruled— homophobia and homophobic structures appeared a ruse *sine qua non* if Victorians were ever to subjugate black bodies successfully. Since, for power to be able to monopolize its highest prerogatives, for it to take whatever shape it desires, particularly repressive power: there must be a creation of subjects, a conjuring up of enemies of the very institution that is creating the subjects (Foucault, 1990). It appears this was an indispensable ploy for Brits since our African sexualities and genders posed significant threats to Victorian ideals, which were doubtless necessary for imperialists and imperialism.



Nothing can convince me that colonialism would not have spanned as long as it did if our diverse African sexualities and genders, which threatened binaries and inferior-superior power dynamics— colonialism, remained at unrestrained play. Albeit it remains obscure why Angola criminalized homosexuality before its colonizer, I guess that perhaps one of the first things the Portuguese had to do after all they went through trying to conquer the unconquerable Nzingah of Ndongo for six decades prompted them to install anti-homosexual laws as soon as they could to prevent a repetition of history. And it is also historically correct that Europe was never congruous on the question of LGBTIQ+ rights, evidenced by how relaxed Germany was on this issue before the rise of Nazis (Cantu, 2023); perhaps Portugal was also not exactly as pressed as Britain was on the question of sexuality, just like France, and that alone is sufficient to answer critics.

Hence, it also follows that African leaders, who took over incumbency from colonizers mirrored the practices of their former masters; here, I am reminded of an English adage that says, “An apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Perhaps this is why most of Africa is unfree today, according to Freedom House. Though in the image below, some nations have gradually become partly free and significantly democratic; most African nations, however remain shackled by colonial political phenomena.

Figure 5: Freedom House Global Democracy Status



Note 6: Data was derived here <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

We have seen throughout this paper that, in Africa, homophobia is doubtless a remnant of colonial rule, which remains bulwarked by the very powers that breathed life into it. It also appears philosophically correct at this juncture that, for Africa to build *de novo* from colonial rule, Africans must be ready and exceedingly willing to free themselves from the shackles of wanting to be white, to be bourgeoisie, to be Western by all costs, especially in ways that abandon and shun historically African phenomena. Not only has that cost us—black bodies, more than an arm and a leg, but it has cost us millions of black bodies, primarily to suicide for those who couldn't take it anymore and those whose bodies were lynched and mutilated by bigots for one un-African standpoint or the other.

It is only then that African feminism-womanism can transform to become genuinely intersectional, and perhaps also finally cross paths with the realization that sacrificing African and African-diasporic queer bodies for respectability is immanently anti-feminist and anti-womanist. Until

then, feminists-womanists, according to María Lugones's (1987) philosophies, cannot "world" "travel" into each other's worlds to learn about the multiplicity of ways in which the system of patriarchy subordinates minorities in "playful" ways that are nurturing and liberatory. And this "world" "traveling" is quintessential, particularly for us—black bodies, in that as a minority race, we live in a world in which we are not mainstream, and so we are "world-travelers" *ad infinitum*, by necessity since we are not the rule, we must forever travel into places that either stereotype us or affirm us (Lugones, 1987), "playfulness" is a non-negotiable!

The findings in this thesis have also corroborated for us that, as black bodies, it is witless to think we can just *viva voce* free ourselves from imperialism; it lies historically evident that merely parroting that "Africa will never be a colony again," is insufficient to dismantle the coloniality ubiquitous in our land. Hence, it lies incumbent upon us—Africans to design feminist-womanist pedagogical and decolonial frameworks aimed at uprooting colonial structures and religions that have never served black bodies, at least to the depths at which most want to believe they have, which is doubtless not even remotely close to how they have served white bodies if we are honest to ourselves.

More so, we must be willing to unlearn all our colonial proclivities to create room for learning about who we truly are as Africans outside of the very powers we are trying to usurp ourselves from (Lugones, 1987). Because,

Destruction is essential to construction. [As feminist-womanists], if we want to build the new, we must be willing to let the old burn. We must be committed to holding on to nothing but [what's truly feminist womanist]. We must decide that if the truth inside us can burn a belief, a family structure, a business, a religion, an industry- it should have become ashes yesterday." (Doyle, 2020, p. 73)

It stands to reason that until then, our African mouths remain unworthy to speak on *Ubuntu* 'I am because you are' for the spirit of *Ubuntu* is the antithesis of the lives that most lead in the

motherland, where most families are broken in that queer members of these families must constantly break themselves to fit in or flee away.

It is evident throughout this intellectual inquiry that the only trajectory, or at least the one that appears feasible— for black bodies to get to the point wherein feminist-womanist discursivity on the liberation of women, which includes discourses on gender and sexuality, is not just construed as a revolt against a repressive system but also as genuinely liberatory, can only come through a visceral un-Westernized understanding of this spirit of *Ubuntu*. Black bodies must immediately reject the imperialistic notion of *Ubuntu*; *Ubuntu* means we must not stupidly adhere to Western ideologies till death do us part, even if other African bodies must die in that process, for not only are we a minority race and so we do not afford losing numbers! But the phenomenon of homophobia in and of itself is doubtless un-African, so why cling to it? Perhaps if Michel Foucault's claim— that there is no outside of power is valid, which I believe it is: further research might tease apart whether a natural, un-homophobic African "state-of-mind" can be uncovered once coloniality is dismantled and if coloniality can, even be easily dismantled.

Furthermore, it is obligatory that we finally come to terms with the fact that history does not happen by accident; albeit history is not a place we should never find ourselves dwelling in, it is assuredly a place we must visit to inform the present. It has been historically proven, everywhere, in all parts of the world, that without history, humans are sheep without a shepherd; we are headless chickens; our paths are not illuminated, which is why Africa is in the condition it is today.

Furthermore, allow me to borrow from the philosophies of Thomas Jefferson (1816); he is not an ideal candidate to be referencing in a decolonial thesis owing to his race politics, but National Park Service, houses a Thomas Jefferson statue that says:

I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions. But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind as that becomes

more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change. With the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors. (n.d., para 5)

I am convinced that Africans cannot envision progress if we continue acting like folks who have knowledge, but no understanding of it. Understanding our history entails repealing all colonial penal codes in Africa today because they do not belong! Even more crystal clear is that parallel actions help reify the display that paints Africans as “savages,” and “imbeciles,” which, from my vantage point, we must avoid as a continent, for that rhetoric makes us accomplices to the imperialist plot twist. We cannot overlook that because African governments have seldom made efforts to upend colonial rule, we are somewhat perpetrators of our victimhood and are quasi-responsible for our eco-socio-political condition.

To return to the aim of this thesis, which had at its heart a desire to incite a repealing of anti-sodomy laws, to induce the rejection of Western phenomena, and to help Africans cultivate an undistorted understanding of Africanness— *Ubuntu*. Borrowing from Ruth Bader Ginsburg's (2016), compelling memoir, *My own words*, “Equality of rights under the law for all persons, male or female [or non-binary], is so basic to democracy and its commitment to the ultimate value of the individual that it must be reflected in the fundamental law of the land.” (p.133). Hence, nothing should ever appear complex about understanding that intruding into people’s bedrooms is profoundly undemocratic; that it infringes on black queer bodies' human rights. After all, African homophobes and homophobic governments are the losers in that you need us— black queer bodies to build and develop Africa from what colonists call the “3<sup>rd</sup> world.” But we—black queer bodies cannot contribute to Africa’s sustainable development and the possible earth extinction because we are so consumed out front fighting for the

right to exist that we do not have the cognitive bandwidth to worry about other things when our humanity is at stake!

Finally, suppose we are to attain liberation from the shackles of colonization in its entirety, without wasting more time, it is incumbent upon Zimbabweans to immediately refrain from incessantly trying to emulate Victorians and white “moral” standards daily to fit into this bourgeoisie category that colonizers imbued in our faculties as an “aspiration” of ours. One that is “Christian” and nothing divergent; this imposter syndrome, forever oscillating inside our cognitive as a “desire” of ours that can only attain fulfillment from our disownment of the melanin in us, if not through the machinations of colorism then at least in the ploys of mannerisms. So much so that “the most outspoken homophobes in [Zimbabwe] often use biblical, public health, or ‘family values’ arguments that appear to be borrowed wholesale from social conservatives in the West...” (Epprecht, 2013, p. 7). Those more unfortunate have fallen victim to the skin-whitening industry, which is nowhere near cheap financially and psychologically. It is pregnant with meaning that even though the industry has seemingly proliferated into an 8-billion-dollar industry projected to be worth 12 billion dollars by 2026, owing to desirability politics, it hasn’t even remotely successfully whitened black bodies that near enough, at least in the definitions of white privilege, evidently defeating the essence of these trauma-inducing seemingly “autonomous choices” (Senthilingham et al., 2022). Africans must reject imperialism, whatever face it manifests in!

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## Appendix A

### Bushmen thigh and anal sex cave paintings

A photo by Peter Garlake of the earliest cave paintings of the bushmen engaging in homosexual activities from over two thousand years ago before colonizers invaded the continent (Epprecht, 2013).



Vita

Vita

Kudzai Maurine Munyavi was born in 1994 on Human Rights Day in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. During her undergraduate studies at Midlands State University in the faculty of Commerce, Kudzai was awarded a U.S. Department of State Programs (Global UGRAD- World Learning) full-ride scholarship to undergo a cultural exchange in Idaho at Lewis-Clark State College. This exchange introduced Kudzai to feminist and liberal arts studies. Kudzai is an only child, and she has four known half-siblings.

1047 Panter Road Parktown

Waterfalls, Harare

Zimbabwe

Kmunyavi94@gmail.com

The author typed this thesis.