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Homosexuality. Lesbians. Gay rights. Homophobia.

These terms have come up quite a bit in recent years in Africa to the shock, embarrassment and even anger of many people. This book is about that, and about the coming out (into public view) of individuals who in the past tended to keep a low profile. What does the history of homosexuality and the reactions against it tell us about African history in general? And how might this knowledge help us in struggles against HIV/AIDS, gender violence and other social inequalities in contemporary Africa?

Let us start by getting our definitions clear, as there are so many misconceptions, fears and prejudices around this topic. A big misconception is implicit in the very words 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality', for example. These words are typically taken to mean a single, basic type of person or behaviour when in fact they refer to a wide variety of people and sexual behaviours. The English language, like many others, has developed quite a rich and constantly expanding vocabulary to capture that variety. This obviously includes Women who have Sex with Women (WSW) who may or may not identify as lesbians, and Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) who may or may not identify as gay. But even within these terms there are many different expressions of sexuality – the active, penetrating partner ('husband', 'macho', 'top', 'butch-dyke'), the passive, penetrated partner ('wife', 'femme', 'bottom'), mutual partners, or women and men who just like to cuddle or to express intimate affection in non-genital ways. There are also people who are sexually attracted equally to men and women (bisexuals), and people who enjoy

'cross-dressing' – wearing the clothes or cosmetics associated with the opposite sex – but not necessarily engaging in homosexual relations (transvestites). People who think of themselves as living in the body of the opposite sex are termed transgendered persons (transwomen, transmen or simply trans) although in Zimbabwe, a transgendered man will generally identify as a queen and a transgendered woman as a dyke. Although also termed trans, transsexuals, more strictly speaking, are people who feel they are 'born in the wrong body' and they often seek hormonal therapy and sex-reassignment surgery (sex-change operations) to change their sex. There is as well a rare group of people who possess both male and female sex organs (intersexed, formerly called hermaphrodites). There are people who consider themselves heterosexual, or 'straight', yet will engage in sex with members of their own sex at different times of their lives or simply as they find convenient.

The possibilities are in fact so varied that many gay rights activists now avoid the words 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' altogether. These, they say, feed into simplistic stereotypes that have been used to justify discrimination. They therefore now prefer to use the plural form (homosexualities, or same-sex sexualities, or sexual minorities). LGBT.(short for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) is another term that is growing in popularity and lgbt is sometimes placed in lower case to avoid the appearance of overconfidence in the categories. Queer is also debated as an identity, but queer politics is fairly clear. It refers to any kind of political activism that publicly challenges stereotypes about homosexualities and that seeks to win public recognition of sexual rights as human rights.

Sexual rights does not mean freedom to copulate without restriction, as opponents sometimes loudly proclaim; rather, it means putting an end to both discrimination against LGBT persons because of their sexual orientation or identity, and the violation of any individual's sexual autonomy and human dignity; it therefore excludes pederasty (man-boy relationships), in most cases, and the heterosexual abuse of children (paedophilia).

Queer politics and the struggle for sexual rights are a very new devel-

opment in most of Africa, dating generally from the 1990s. Africans, however, have known for a very long time about people who somehow do not fit the heterosexual ideal. In the main African languages of Zimbabwe, for example, the concept of 'homosexuality' goes by the terms *hungochani* (Shona) and *ubunkotshani* (Ndebele). These words can be traced back at least a hundred years. Versions of them are also found in other African languages in the region. In Zulu, for instance, *nkoshana* refers to sexual intercourse between male persons, or sodomy, while in Tsonga (Shangaan) *tinconcana* or *bukhonxana* mean 'boy wives' or 'mine marriages'; the widespread urban slang word *skesana* probably comes from the same root. Other African words for same-sex sexuality found in the region include *maotoane* (Sesotho), *matanyera* (from Nyanja), *mashoga*, *mabashaa* and *misago* (Swahili) and *esenge* or *eshengi* (Ovambo) and 'yan daudu (Hausa). From Wolof comes *woubi*, *oubi* and *ibbi* used across francophone West Africa, while *kuchu* (origins unknown) is understood to mean homosexual across much of east Africa.

The origins of these words are impossible to know for sure. We do know, however, that they mostly suggest a strong stigma or social disapproval. Despite this, some gay rights activists in recent years have adopted them to describe themselves with a touch of pride. They say the mere fact that such words exist in African languages is proof that people like themselves have always been known in traditional culture. It gives a strong support for their case that LGBT people in Africa are fully deserving of the same rights and respect that are theoretically enjoyed by all other citizens.

The majority population may need more convincing on this. Zimbabwean gays and lesbians who choose to publicly admit their *hungochani* are in fact often perceived as a threat to the morals of black African society, aping a western perversion or prostituting themselves for tourist dollars and European-style beer (as another term of contempt in Zimbabwean popular culture hints: 'clear drinkers'). President Robert Mugabe has encouraged this anti-homosexual or homophobic attitude. Among other names, he has called homosexuals 'worse than dogs and pigs', 'gangsters' and 'an abomination, a rottenness of culture'.

He even suggested that Britain's supposedly 'gay government' was attempting to impose homosexuality upon Africans as part of a wider programme of western imperialism. The king of Swaziland, the presidents of Namibia, Kenya, Zambia and Uganda as well as top church leaders around the continent have all echoed similar views, sometimes in quite violent language. The Archbishop of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican), to give one example, in 2003 termed homosexuality both a 'Satanic attack' on his church and a form of slavery. The Minister of Home Affairs in Namibia, in an even more chilling speech, urged new police recruits to 'arrest on sight gays and lesbians and eliminate them from the face of Namibia'.

Such threats have in many cases hardened people's negative attitudes towards homosexuality. They have contributed to a climate where individual gays and lesbians have experienced blackmail, job discrimination, police harassment, shunning by their families and even mob violence. Lesbians in this climate are especially at risk from family members who arrange forcibly to get them pregnant, or from gangs of young men who seek to 'cure' them by rape. The stigmatisation also leads to self-hatred or 'internalised homophobia' amongst gays and lesbians. This in turn exposes them to relatively high rates of emotional depression, alcoholism, or even suicide.

For many Africans, therefore, any association with *hungochani* can spark violent reaction and shameful or angry denials. A case in point was the Zimbabwean police officer Jefta Dube shooting and killing a fellow officer in 1996 after the deceased had called him '*ngochani mukadzi*'. Dube did not deny that he had been sexually assaulted by the former president of Zimbabwe, Canaan Banana. But his defence was that the experience of being homosexually assaulted had made him emotionally unstable. For his part, Banana angrily denied the charges against him and hinted at a foreign or white conspiracy for making them in the first place. He later fled the country in disgrace.

These painful events and accusations in Zimbabwe have taken place at a time of rapid development of human rights and democratic governance elsewhere in Africa. In fact, as early as 1991, Lesotho and

Ethiopia became the first two African nations to uphold the idea of gay rights as part of promoting democracy for all citizens. Then, soon after democratic elections in 1994, South Africa included in its constitution the principle of freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation, one of the first countries in the world to do so. The first black president, Nelson Mandela, met with gay activists and publicly endorsed their causes, as did fellow Nobel Prize-winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Was this because South Africa is not 'really African' or was succumbing to western pressure, as some opponents suggested? On the contrary, South Africa has actually been well ahead of many western countries in overturning its discriminatory laws. The government has shown a mature and independent appreciation of the ways that homophobia relates closely to other discriminatory attitudes in society, including racism and hatred or contempt of women (sexism, misogyny). It holds to the view that all of these attitudes feed upon each other to frustrate the advancement of civil rights generally, to improve health for all and to achieve economic development with a fair distribution of wealth.

Interestingly, even the more homophobic regimes such as Zimbabwe and Namibia have hinted that they, too, understand those interconnections and that they support research about homosexuality and gay rights. The Declaration on Gender and Development signed by all eleven heads of state of the Southern Africa Development Community in September 1998 called for, amongst other things:

- Promoting the eradication of elements in traditional norms and religious beliefs, practices and stereotypes which legitimise and exacerbate the persistence and tolerance of violence against women and children
- Introducing and promoting gender sensitisation and training of all service providers engaged in the administration of justice
- Undertaking and sharing research, gathering of statistics and other information on the causes, prevalence and consequences of violence on women and children.

Since lesbians are women, and since gays usually begin to understand their homosexual feelings when they are still children, this declaration is clearly gay-friendly. And indeed, despite the homophobia of some

African leaders, gay movements have flourished in recent years in many countries. Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) now openly provides counselling, legal and other support services to its members. The Equality Project in South Africa, The Rainbow Project and Sister Namibia, LeGaBiBo of Botswana, and Ligueey (Senegal) and Alliance Rights Nigeria, amongst many others, all seek to challenge hurtful stereotypes of homosexuals and to end discriminatory laws and practices.

These contradictory developments and controversies have drawn the attention of scholars and human rights activists from around the world. They raise provocative questions about culture, democracy, race and the nature of imperialism in the modern day. Talk of sexuality also brings us to reflect on HIV/AIDS. Although this was once widely assumed to be a 'gay plague' or a 'white man's disease' it is now devastating the black majority population throughout Africa. Can anything further be done to help protect the next generation of young people in Africa from this scourge? Could the frank discussion of the diversity of human sexuality help to provide Africans with the kinds of knowledge that might begin to slow the terrible progress of the HIV/AIDS pandemic?

This book will try to answer some of these questions by taking a close look at the history of same-sex sexuality. It will focus primarily on three African countries – Zimbabwe, South Africa and Lesotho - but will also refer to cases studies from elsewhere around the continent. This is very unbalanced, we know. But we also know from many of the studies discussed in the final chapter, and from our close discussions with researchers and activists around the continent, that there are strong similarities between southern Africa and elsewhere in Africa. We are therefore not suggesting that our research is the answer to all questions; rather, we hope that our research will suggest questions or ways to look for evidence in the wide variety of specific situations around Africa that still need to be investigated. The aim is to gain a better understanding of who these homosexuals are, where they came from in historical terms, and what they really want through their present-day activism. As well, it will try to shed light on how such strong attitudes both for and against gay rights have come to be and how those atti-

tudes towards same-sex relationships have affected so-called normal society. Finally, we would like to suggest ways in which societies in the region might move to heal the hurtful impacts of homophobia and other prejudices.

All of this is not to present gays and lesbians as blameless heroes in the struggle for democracy. On the contrary, we hope that gay rights activists and sympathisers can learn from this history as well so that they can better recognise political mistakes or errors in judgement that were made in the past. Such knowledge of the past may strengthen the effectiveness of their activism and their ability to offer counselling in the future.



Before reviewing this history, we want first to address a number of basic questions that are commonly raised in popular discussions around the issue. What causes homosexuality? Is it not ‘unnatural’? Can it be spread to the heterosexual population? Is it a lifestyle choice? Are there cures for it? How commonplace or rare is it? Are some cultures relatively immune to same-sex sexuality compared to others? Given all the taboos and the secretive nature of same-sex affairs in most cultures, is it even possible to uncover their history? If so, why is it important for us to know about it?

The answer to the first of these questions – what causes homosexuality – is much argued. All that we can say with a fair degree of certainty is that ... well, we just do not know. While many theories try, none can definitively account for the great variety of same-sex sexual behaviours that appear around the world in different cultures, across time and in many animal species. The last fact alone – that homosexuality appears frequently in nature – clearly destroys the argument that homosexuality is ‘unnatural’. In fact, nature is unquestionably one of the many factors to play a role in determining a person’s sexuality. It is almost certain, for example, that some people have a genetic predisposition to homosexual orientation or preference – they are born that way. The attraction to people of their own sex is in these cases

'hard-wired' into their brains and cells. For others, family socialisation or a traumatic sexual experience (such as rape) at a young age may be the most important influence affecting long-term sexual preference. Physical closeness, gender imbalance in society, alcohol consumption, age, one's stage in the life cycle and innumerable other idiosyncratic factors can also affect short-term decisions about sexual partners and conduct (so-called situational homosexuality).

This suggests that the question of what causes homosexuality is ultimately misguided. One might equally ask, what causes heterosexuality, or even why humans are sexual at all? The answer is simply, they are.

Our approach then is to follow what scientists, doctors, leading Christian theologians and other social science scholars generally agree about the nature of homosexuality. This is a consensus that has emerged from decades of research and reflection primarily from the west but also increasingly from queer communities in underdeveloped and former colonial countries such as Mexico, India and Algeria. It regards human sexuality as a continuum from one theoretical extreme to another, with the majority of the population somewhere in the middle. The small percentage of the population found at either extreme in terms of their innate sense of sexual preference (that is, 'pure' homosexual or 'pure' heterosexual) is probably constant across the world and throughout history. The percentage of people who act in accordance with more ambiguous or bisexual feelings in their choice of sexual partners, however, varies enormously over time, across cultures and in relation to economic, political and other social considerations. Sexuality, in other words, is thus not merely a natural or instinctive phenomenon; rather, it is to a large extent learned or 'constructed'.

We can see this quite clearly when we look at the changing ways that homosexuality has been treated by society in the west. In ancient Greece, the homosexual relationship between a man and a youth was highly regarded, even idealised. This kind of homosexuality was thought to allow deeper spiritual and intellectual exchange than procreation-oriented sex with women (which was regarded as animalistic or soulless). That notion fell out of fashion in the Christian period of the later Roman

Empire. But male–male sexual relations came back into respect, even to the extent of being sanctified by church marriages, in the Middle Ages. The Protestant Reformation, and the infamous Catholic Inquisitions in the 16th and 17th centuries, once again brought renewed hostility against ‘sodomites’. But this too gave way to a period when same-sex affairs were widely tolerated. The Code of Napoleon in 1803 actually forbade the persecution of people on the basis of their sexual preference.

The pendulum swung against homosexuals in the west once again in the late 19th century. At that time new theories arose about the supposed ‘cause’ of homosexuality, shifting the blame away from moral sin and constructing it as a medical problem. This implied that homosexuality somehow should and could be cured, typically through combinations of rigorous physical exercise, psychiatric therapy and shaming. Worse was to come in the aftermath of World War II. During the Cold War both sides portrayed homosexuals as a weak link in the struggle between capitalism and communism (that is, adding treason to the list of their supposed medical and moral failings). Probably the most intense fear and hatred of homosexuality in western history occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, when suspected gays and lesbians were entrapped by the police and hounded out of their jobs. Only since the 1970s has a culture of limited tolerance re-emerged in the west, although even this limited tolerance is under constant threat of backlash and renewed repression by the political right and Christian fundamentalists.

All of the above makes it clear that there is indeed a history of homosexuality and of ever-changing social attitudes towards it. But why should the majority population bother about such a presumably small minority, especially in a place like Africa where questions of poverty, land reform and ill-health are so urgent? The answer is twofold. In the first instance, the small minority in question is not so small as is commonly thought. Exclusively homosexual people may number only 1% to 5% of the population, but men who sometimes have sex with men, and women who sometimes have sex with women, number many more, possibly even a majority in certain settings. Second, in looking at European history we can see a clear pattern that should be of great

concern to the majority population. Increasing intolerance or hatred of homosexuals fairly clearly coincides with periods of intolerance and hatred of foreigners (xenophobia). The Protestants of England and the Netherlands, for example, blamed homosexuality on the Catholics and the Spanish, with whom they were at war. The British later accused the Portuguese and Arabs, their rivals for control of trade in the Indian Ocean. In each case the accusation of homosexuality served to fuel greater contempt for and hatred of the foreign enemy.

This history also reveals an obvious connection between stigmatising homosexuals and the oppression of women who step out of traditional feminine roles. The most intense persecution of 'sodomites' in the 16th and early 17th centuries coincided with the burning of tens of thousands of female witches in western Europe. The homophobia of the Cold War period in North America coincided with enormous tensions around moving women out of the workforce, which they had entered during World War II, and back into suburban, domestic roles.

Both xenophobia and sexism against women present huge obstacles to the economic development and political rights of the majority. It thus follows that exposing the sources of prejudice against the homosexual minority might improve our ability to attack prejudice against other groups that experience discrimination and systemic disadvantage.

Finally, there is strong consensus amongst scholars that the history of homophobia can help us to understand, and then to move away from, some very old but very dangerous habits or conventions in our language. Perhaps above all is the tendency we seem to have of wanting to divide societies neatly into two categories. Such dichotomies are almost always simplistic and misleading. The dichotomy of homosexuality versus heterosexuality is clearly such a false dichotomy, but so is that between masculine and feminine. Even 'man' and 'woman' are not necessarily as self-evidently distinct as we commonly assume. In fact, appearances can be deceiving. A person with a male body may have a highly masculine or macho personality and still be homosexual. Equally, a male may have an effeminate personality but be lustily heterosexual. A woman may wear trousers for comfort or to make a political

statement about her civil rights but not as a sign of lesbian orientation. A woman may acquire the status and titles of a man (and in many parts of Africa may even formally marry another woman) without for a moment desiring the masculine role in a sexual relationship.

All of this suggests that we need to be more careful in our use of words that imply or impose false dichotomies on complex social relations. We also need to be careful not to base our judgements of people on the incorrect assumption that there is a direct and predictable relationship between the physical body (sex), social behaviour (gender) and sexual feeling (sexuality). The relationships between sex, gender and sexuality are in fact constantly negotiated. The study of these negotiations is particularly hazardous since so much takes place non-verbally – a fleeting touch, a look, a smile – and leaves very few solid traces that can be followed back through time. Matters are complicated further by the fact that many of the words we use carry unintended and unhelpful cultural ‘baggage’. The words gay, queer and lesbian, for example, all derive from the modern west – the word homosexual did not even exist until its invention in 1869. These words are closely associated in people’s minds with a very specific type of behaviour or identity that is alien and in some cases even offensive to non-western gays and lesbians. Using those terms may suggest misleading parallels with the western experience and thus blind us to important differences or shades of meaning in local cultures.

For all these reasons, researchers now stress the need for great caution in approaching the language around sexuality. We will try to heed those cautions here and be careful with the words we choose, even if it sometimes results in clumsy-sounding phrases. So, for instance, rather than ‘homosexuality’ and ‘bisexuality,’ from now on we will use the expressions ‘homosexualities’ (plural) or ‘same-sex sexuality’. These terms are more accurate in that they do not imply a permanent condition or a single, unchanging cultural identity that is either diametrically opposed to heterosexuality or perfectly stuck between the two extremes. Likewise, rather than ‘gay’ we will say ‘males who have sex with males’ (unless we know for certain that the men we are talking about really

did in fact regard themselves as gay in the modern western sense). The same applies to 'lesbian', which we will avoid in favour of 'female-female sexuality' or 'lesbian-like'. Rather than 'queer' we will use 'gay rights activist or sympathiser' and so on. Of course, wherever there are indigenous terms we will use them rather than importing foreign ones and will use the local words and spelling of the time (such as *inkotshane* in 1907), even when the modern Shona spelling is *ngochani*.

One of the central arguments we hope to make is that the oppression of gays and lesbians today, like the oppression of women, is, to a large extent, structured into or rooted in our language, often so deeply that we can't even see it. Challenging the language can therefore help us to see the blindspots and prejudices that are otherwise taken for granted. New words, even if they sometimes sound clumsy, can make invisible oppressions in a culture visible for people to see and fight against.



Before addressing the history of same-sex sexuality in Africa, it helps to know what people have already said and written about the topic. There are some real surprises in this respect. For example, the first people to claim that same-sex sexual relations are 'unAfrican' were not African themselves, nor even in some cases had they ever been to Africa. They were European men. Sir Edward Gibbon was the first, writing in 1781 about the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. He knew nothing about Africa from direct experience or learning, but he wanted to 'believe and hope' (his words) that Africans were 'exempt from this moral pestilence' (i.e. sodomy).

In the following century, another Englishman was even more assertive. In an appendix to his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Sir Richard Burton divided the world by whether homosexual behaviour was supposedly native to the region or not. Although he made little mention of Africa in the essay, nor had he travelled much outside of Dahomey, this English aristocrat placed the 'Negro' parts of the continent together with northern Europe in the non-homosexual zone.

Why would Burton have made such a huge claim without proper

research (and in fact contrary to numerous earlier first-hand accounts of male–male sexuality from West Africa and of Africans enslaved to the Americas)? He did not explain his reasons but we may make an educated guess from his other assumptions. Firstly, working on the assumption that homosexuality was a ‘by-product of modernity’, he excluded Africans because he regarded them as primitive. Secondly, this emphasis on African primitiveness justified the imperial conquest of Africa by supposedly virile northern Europeans. Burton’s eccentric interpretation, in other words, breathed new life into the arguments for British and German imperialism. By seizing new territories in Africa, they would protect hapless Africans from the sodomistic Portuguese and Arabs.

In the case of Zimbabwe, the topic was hardly mentioned before a remarkable two-page ‘study’ published in 1979. Like Burton before him, the author used the topic to make sweeping moral claims to a European audience rather than to find out what was really happening in Zimbabwe. Indeed, anthropologist Michael Gelfand used the apparent infrequency of male homosexuality in Shona culture to make negative judgements about homosexuality and modern society in general. ‘The traditional Shona seems to have none of the problems associated with homosexuality,’ he pronounced. ‘Obviously they must have a valuable method of bringing up children, especially with regard to normal sex relations, thus avoiding this anomaly so frequent in western society.’ These conclusions were based on a small number of stories from non-homosexual persons, no research amongst traditional healers or diviners, and no reference to scholarship on sexuality from elsewhere in Africa or the world.

European claims about the rarity or non-existence of same-sex sexuality in African traditions prepared the ground for blaming homosexual behaviour amongst Africans in modern times upon external influences. In the colonial era, as noted, the British regarded Arabs and Portuguese as the key culprits. Some in South Africa blamed imported Chinese labourers. The French-trained psychologist Frantz Fanon later argued that colonialism itself was to blame (regardless of whether it was Portuguese or French or British). By its very nature, he maintained,

colonial rule empowered white settlers to sexually humiliate (or emasculate) African men. This led some to insanity, some to violence, and some to homosexuality.

This theme of emasculation occurs in a number of novels from around Africa and was also developed by the historian Charles van Onselen in his study of male migrant workers in colonial Zimbabwe. Van Onselen argued that the mining companies turned a blind eye or even 'forced' African men into homosexuality. Why would they do such a thing? Because the mine-owners were worried that their workers, separated for long periods from their wives and children and labouring under stressful and dangerous conditions, might rebel unless distracted by cheap sex. Since the government did not want female prostitutes in the mine compounds or nearby towns, this left only each other or animals to afford men the necessary release. Van Onselen wrote about a similar phenomenon in the Johannesburg area, and about sexual relations amongst African men in the criminal gangs there. He tells of a Zulu gang leader in the mid-1890s, Nongoloza Mathebula, who was said to have ordered his men to have sex with each other or with boy servants. To this day, more than a century later, the gang now known as the 28s remains loyal to the 'Ninevite system'.

Van Onselen's studies reveal much about the horrendous conditions faced by African men at mine compounds and other such institutions in southern Africa. But they also leave many questions unanswered. How can a man be forced to have sex with another man? If a man's sexual urge is really that strong, how do we explain the existence of males who take a passive role in the sexual act? Can mass change in sexual behaviour come about because of a single individual (and be kept up for over a century after he ceased giving orders)? And what about the women left behind in the rural areas: Did they know or care about their men's behaviour at the mines? Were they themselves driven by loneliness into lesbian-like affairs? How did all this supposedly shameful, un-traditional behaviour affect people's understanding of their own culture?

Scholars of Zimbabwe have largely avoided these questions. By

contrast, a number of studies, memoirs and films have appeared from elsewhere around the continent that show, and in some cases praise, indigenous African homosexualities. South Africa has produced the majority of these, beginning with T. Dunbar Moodie's 1988 examination of 'mine marriages' on the Witwatersrand and Patrick Harries' study of Mozambican migrant labourers. Both these studies showed that male–male marriages amongst African mine-workers were commonplace at the beginning of the 20th century, so much so that they were not regarded as shameful, even by the female wives left behind. On the contrary, almost everyone seems to have approved, as long as it was kept quiet. The men liked it because they did not need to go to female prostitutes, with all the risks of disease and the high expense that that involved; their wives liked it because they did not need to fear their husbands would get a second family with town women; the youth or male 'wives' accepted it because they earned money and gifts and acquired a protector in the violent surroundings of the mine compounds; and, of course, the mine companies liked it because it saved them from the expenses and higher wages that would need to be paid if women and children were allowed into the urban areas. Only the Christian missionaries protested, but without much effect.

In more recent years, there have been further studies of gay rights activists in the anti-apartheid struggle and in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS. Gays and lesbians themselves have also started to come out with their own autobiographical accounts of growing up or dealing with sexuality issues in southern Africa (*Sahwira* in Zimbabwe, for example). Some of these are discussed in the final chapter on further reading and watching. For now, though, we want simply to mention the work of Zackie Achmat. As a historian, Achmat warned researchers against repeating negative stereotypes about gays and lesbians and against assuming that African men could not love men out of sensual desire (rather than economic or cultural need). Along with gay rights activists and scholars of women and gender such as Patricia McFadden and Evelyn Zinanga in Zimbabwe, he called for culturally sensitive research that questions the myth of the exclusively hetero-

sexual African. They make a strong case that such research might contribute to our understanding of how cultural change around intimate personal life occurs in relation to the global political economy. This knowledge can then be put to the service of the wider community. Indeed, Achmat's own career is a powerful role model in that respect. From self-described 'adult molester' to scholar and gay rights activist, Achmat went on to found the hugely successful Treatment Action Campaign. TAC was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for spearheading a broad, international social movement for equitable access to health care and to treatment of HIV/AIDS.



This book takes up these many challenges by interpreting the evidence for popular audiences in Africa. It follows the basic structure and draws upon data first presented in an academic book entitled *Hungochani: the history of a dissident sexuality in southern Africa* (Montreal: McGill, 2004) which followed the history from the ancient Bushmen, through 'medieval' Shona and other Bantu-speaking kingdoms, to the early colonial societies and the establishment of industrial economies. It then examined how settler culture trickled into the emerging African 'middle class' and from there into the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles. Finally, it examined the rise of the modern gay rights movement. We shall stick to the same basic path, with one new chapter to guide readers towards other works that discuss homosexualities in Africa.

We have also woven into the narrative a number of personalised or fictionalised vignettes ('little pictures') of the lives of people who engaged in same-sex relations in the past. The reason for this is simple: often, especially in an area of study like the history of sexuality, the evidence is scanty, if not entirely hidden between the lines. We may suspect emotions, but we cannot prove them when we rely on the dry descriptions left by colonial bureaucrats and police, or on the hazy memories of old people. We therefore allowed ourselves a little artistic licence to imagine what people may have felt in the past. For this purpose, we invited a range of activists and scholars to draw upon their

experience, research and imaginations to fill in the gaps and silences that they have come across in the historical sources. These vignettes are not true in the literal sense, but we believe that they capture important truths in a poetic or dramatic sense. Our hope is that they humanise the people we are talking about and help to bring the history to life.