



R.G. Mugabe and Zimbabwe's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer conundrum: Contextualising Romans 1:26–27

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Zimbabwe's late President, R.G. Mugabe, became (in)famous for his bawdy and scurrilous attacks on people of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) sexual orientation. In Romans 1:26–27, Paul seems to berate and condemn homosexual relations in R.G. Mugabe's tone of abhorrence, describing LGBTQ activities as 'unnatural' and 'unseemly'. This article sought to investigate whether the perceived Pauline anti-homosexuality diatribe in Romans 1:26–27 endorses or negates R.G. Mugabe and Zimbabwe's constitutionalised anti-homosexuality policy. This study addressed a highly controversial, politicised and socially sensitive sexual practice in Zimbabwe. The investigation, inter alia, revealed that both in Paul's Greco-Roman and Zimbabwean contexts, women are not expressly or legally included in the anti-homosexual dictates. It also emerged that homosexual relations are older than both the Roman 1:26–27 and R.G. Mugabe cultural milieus. The article exposed a plethora of misunderstandings around the subject of LGBTQ+ relations and recommended down-to-earth, unbiased discourses on the subject. The investigation applied a Reader Response hermeneutical paradigm coupled with ethnographic analysis to interpret Zimbabwe's LGBTQ+ stance as read with Romans 1:26–27.

Contribution: The article demonstrated the relevance of Romans 1:26–27 to the intricacies of the LGBTQ+ sexual orientations in Zimbabwe and implications for policy making on the subject of homosexuality.

Keywords: Romans 1:26–27; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer; Robert Gabriel Mugabe; Reader Response criticism; Zimbabwe Constitution.

Introduction

Zimbabwe's founding and late former Head of State, R.G. Mugabe, famous for his diatribal renditions against same-sex unions and relationships, went to his final resting place with a hard-line stance against homosexuality. Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly meeting on 28 September 2015, R.G. Mugabe intimated that gay rights are 'new rights' which the Western countries seek to impose on Zimbabweans contrary to the country's norms, values, traditions and beliefs (Justice 2015). It has been argued that a strong homophobic atmosphere has persistently hung over Zimbabwe since the regime of President Mugabe who went to the extent of describing non-heterosexual people as worse than dogs and pigs (Muparamoto 2020). In Romans 1:26–27, Paul alludes to a prevalence of unnatural sexual relations. The general consensus among scholars is that in essence Paul, by 'unnatural relations', refers to homosexuality or same-sex relations (Belluomo 2013). Ostensibly, Paul relegates homoerotic acts by men and women to the level of depravity and outlandish behaviours. It has been argued by a number of scholars, including Greenough (2020) that Romans 1:26–27 belongs to a category of 'clobber texts' or 'texts of terror' that conservative Christians have often deployed to bolster their arguments against same-sex marriage, transgender identities, adoption and parenting by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) people. This article seeks to interrogate the ambivalence and revulsion of the late President of Zimbabwe, R.G. Mugabe towards lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, queer sexual people, discuss whether R.G. Mugabe's sentiments against LGBTQ+ people have any *locus standi* in Romans 1:26–27 as well as reflect on reasons for the persistence of LGBTQ+ activities in Zimbabwe despite the protracted bashing of homoerotic practices in the country.

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Methodology

Through a Reader Response critical analysis, the article investigates Zimbabweans' attitudes towards perceived anti-LGBTQ+ texts such as Romans 1:26–27. According to Christensen (2024), Reader Response explores the influence of personal experiences and emotions on textual interpretations. The major thrust of Reader Response Criticism is to interrogate how readers receive biblical texts in terms of their diverse and unique life experiences and situations. This research strategically used Reader Response Criticism because, although it focuses mainly on the reader and what she or he brings to the text, it allows interpretation to factor in other lenses through which the text can be viewed. The approach allows to examine how individual words and phrases influence the reader's creation of meaning. Two types of Reader Response methodology are relevant for this study, namely Transactional Reader Response and Social Reader Response respectively. Transactional Reader Response refers to the process in which a reader brings her or his knowledge and beliefs to the interpretation table and juxtaposes such presuppositions with the author's ideas and words to produce meaning. Social Reader Response believes in interpretive communities that share same beliefs and values. The interpretive communities are therefore the ones that determine what an acceptable interpretation of a text is. In the case of this study, the Mugabe regime and statecraft are deemed as an interpretive community. The post-Mugabe young generation is also deemed an interpretive community. The beliefs and values of these two distinct interpretive communities constitute key motifs in the transaction of interpreting Romans 1:26–27 in terms of LGBTQ+ activities in Zimbabwe.

Reader Response Criticism enables us to catch a glimpse of Paul's Greco-Roman context, the world of the text and the world of the Zimbabwean reader of Romans 1:26–27. How an emerging querulous young generation in Zimbabwe has responded to colonial theologies that have supported homophobia is discussed in the article. As King (2022:36) contends, could it be that a new generation has emerged in Zimbabwe that thinks that homosexuality should be decolonised as part of biblical post-colonial hermeneutics? Ethnographic analysis, being a qualitative research study that looks at the social interaction of users in a given environment through a cultural lens (Ryan 2017), enables the article to tap from oral interviews, newspapers and social media accounts on LGBTQ+ debates during and after Mugabe's era.

Discussion

The discussion of the topic begins with the focus on contentions around Romans 1:26–27 as a homophobic text. The term 'homophobia' generally refers to ambivalence towards homosexual people and homosexuality, and the negative attitudes are expressed in the form of discrimination, rancour, hostilities and ostracisation. Homophobia metamorphoses into lesbophobia (hate directed at lesbians), biphobia (hate against bisexuals) and transphobia (hate against transsexuals) (Ventriglio et al. 2021). Prima facie,

Romans 1:26–27 presents Paul's most incendiary rhetoric against homosexuals. However, a close study of the author's horizon, the horizon of the text and the numerous scholarly responses to the text shows that there are diverse interpretations that emerge from the pericope.

The text in English and Greek: Romans 1:26–27

Romans 1:26–27:

[26]For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; [27]And likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working that which is unseemly and receiving in themselves that penalty of their error which was meet'.

²⁶ Διὰ τοῦτο παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας· αἱ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετέλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν, ²⁷ ὁμοίως τε καὶ οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἣν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν ἐν [α]ἵματι ἀπολαμβάνοντες.

The question of women's involvement in homosexuality

Ward (1997) puts to question the inclusion of women in the unnatural sexual acts. Ward, basing his argument on Scroggs' (1983) view that only men were prohibited in the Old Testament from homosexual conduct, argues that Paul's insinuation that 'even women did change the natural use into that which is against nature' should be scrutinised critically in terms of Greco-Roman sexual history. Scholars have argued that an ahistorical approach to the study of Romans 1:26–27 tends to distort the proper meaning of Paul's reference to female homoeroticism (Swancutt 2007). It has been argued that sexuality in Paul's Greco-Roman era was sharply different from modern day notions of homosexuality. Swancutt (2007) argues that modern day concepts of lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer sex categories were not prevalent in the context of Romans 1:26–27. Ancient Romans did not have the male and female sex dichotomy but only believed in one male sex model. The model of sexuality that existed in the Greco-Roman society of Paul's time regarded masculinity as the stronger level of maleness while femaleness referred to weaker maleness. Swancutt (2007) explains that in the context of Romans 1:26–27, there were no lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender and queer sexual distinctions as we have them in modern Western society. What existed in the Greco-Roman worldview was gender inversion whereby a person with innate biological drive to same-sex intercourse would engage in sexual behaviour parallel to the heteronormative pattern. Adult men would sleep with young men under a practice called paederasty. That system of paederasty was not viewed in the same light as homosexuals are seen in modern Western society. Powerful men in Ancient Rome could practise paederasty. Paul's use of the term *παρὰ φύσιν* [unnatural] in reference to sexual activities has been interpreted to refer to the practice of paederasty. Verse 27 uses the term *ἄρσενες* which broadly means male and was

generally used to encompass both men and boys. Michaelson (2011) argues that Paul's use of the term ἄρσενες and not ἀνερ which refers to a male adult gives the reader a clue that he was referring to the practice of paederasty whereby influential men would engage in sexual relations with boys. The practice of paederasty was not a case of sexual orientation in the context of homosexuality in the modern context. In essence, scholars who subscribe to the view that the unnatural sex referred to in Romans 1:26–27 refers to male sexual inversion of paederasty, dismiss the view that lesbianism is implied in the pericope. According to Boswell (1980:92), Romans 1:26–27 is not about gay persons, but homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons.

Michels (2015) contends that to understand Romans 1:26–27 in its proper historical setting, one has to engage in tribadic hermeneutics that properly foregrounds the experiences of the queer community. By tribadic hermeneutics, Michels refers to a process of interpreting biblical texts that purportedly condemn women who engage in unnatural sex activities by focusing on those women's peculiar circumstances. The term 'tribadic' originates from the Greek word 'tribas' which, in the Greco-Roman community of Paul's time meant 'a woman who practices unnatural vice'. Michels (2015) states that in the Greco-Roman society, women who had unrestrainable sexual urge were nicknamed 'the tribas'. The idea was not that those women lusted after fellow women but that in heterosexual conducts, they would engage in queer behaviours in search of gratification. Michels (2015) argues that the Ancient Roman community of Romans 1:26–27 did not have sexual orientations and that sex acts were gender constitutive. From that premise, it is imperative that a phenomenological approach which factors in the background and real experiences of women in Paul's time of writing the pericope should be invoked in the interpretation of Romans 1:26–27.

It has been argued that the interpretation of Romans 1:26–27 should not be divorced from Paul's remonstrance of the idolatry and religious cultism of Ancient Rome (Botha & Van Rensburg 2004; Ekpendu 2016). From Reader Response perspective, the Roman community would understandably raise concern over the genderqueer sexual orgies that were associated with the priests of goddess cults. Romans 1:26–27 resonates with Roman goddess cults that worshipped Venus the goddess of love, beauty, sex, fertility and victory just as the Greek mythologists worshipped Aphrodite the equivalent of Venus. Both Roman and Greek tribadic orgies involved men and women in androgynous sex roles as depicted in Romans 1:26–27. There was a hedonistic tendency in the genderqueer sex practices of treating weak men and women as objects of sexual pleasure. Weak men could be treated as women by other men. Such weak men would participate in same-sex activities not because they were homosexual in orientation but because the gender structures of the day relegated weak men and women to the status of sex objects. Brooten (1996) states that men and boys who were subjected to the practice of paederasty were demoted from the status of real men as they assumed the passive and receptive female role. Brooten's contention is that people who participated in

homosexual acts in Romans 1:26–27 were in fact heterosexuals who out of sheer hierarchical supremacy degraded other males to the level of women.

R.G. Mugabe's worldview vs Romans 1:26–27

The former and late President of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, averred that people of homosexual orientation were 'worse than pigs and dogs' (Muparamoto 2020). Mugabe would add that nonhuman species like dogs do not engage in same-sex relations because nature teaches them that the God-ordained way is the heterosexual route. Carter (2013) reports that during his presidential speech in 2013 Mugabe described homosexuality as 'a filthy, filthy disease which destroys nations'. Mugabe used his anti-gay rhetoric as an electioneering campaign tool to the extent that he warned that the ancestors of Zimbabwe would be angry with and punish the country with natural disasters if homosexuality is allowed (Maurice 2019). R.G. Mugabe's φύσιν [natural] way is when a man engages in a sexual act with a woman. When a man or a woman engages in a sexual act with a member of the same sex, both Paul and Mugabe call it παρὰ φύσιν [unnatural] sex. Mugabe also charged that homosexuality belongs to Western or European cultures (Justice 2015). Fisher (2015) reported that Mugabe made overt homophobia an official policy in Zimbabwe. Fisher (2015) maintained that Mugabe's revulsion of homosexuality was often couched in his antagonism against Western countries which he vilified for wanting to impose on Zimbabwe homosexuality and acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights. Mugabe pointed out that there is no procreation that takes place if 'John and John or Maria and Maria' perform a sexual act. Fisher (2015) opines that homophobia is not just confined to Mugabe's Zimbabwe but is spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa. It has been found out that the Pew World Study and the World Values Survey both established that most African countries have homophobic attitudes (Fisher 2015).

It is of paramount importance that we reflect on how Zimbabweans responded to the late President Robert Gabriel Mugabe's homophobic crusade. According to Maurice (2019), Robert Mugabe may be dead but his anti-gay legacy lives on. The country has anti-gay legislation. The Zimbabwe Constitution's Section 73 of the *Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act of Zimbabwe* states:

- Any male person who, with the consent of another male person, knowingly performs with that other person anal sexual intercourse that would be regarded by a reasonable person to be an indecent act, shall be guilty of sodomy and liable to a fine up to or exceeding level fourteen or imprisonment for a period not exceeding 1 year or both.
- Subject to subsection (3), both parties to the performance of an act referred to in subsection (1) may be charged and convicted of sodomy.
- For the avoidance of doubt, it is declared that the competent charge against a male person who performs anal sexual intercourse with or commits an indecent act

upon a young male person (a) below the age of 12 years, shall be aggravated indecent assault or indecent assault as the case may be or, (b) who is above 12 years but below 16 years and without consent of such young male person, shall be aggravated indecent assault or indecent assault, as the case may be, (c) who is of or above the age of 12 years but below the age of sixteen and with the consent of such young male person, shall be performing an indecent act with a young person.

It should be noted that in 2006, Section 73 of the *Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act of Zimbabwe* was revised to expand the penalty for sodomy to include acts 'that would be regarded by a reasonable person as an indecent act to include two men holding hands, hugging or kissing and could carry an extended prison term' (Voice of America News 2017). Human rights groups and civic society organisations have pointed out that homosexuals do not have any legal protection as law enforcement agents who include the police, the courts and the legislative assembly are all poised to frustrate and crush LGBTQ+ activities in the country (Maurice 2019).

Zimbabwe's Second Republic stance on lesbian, gays, bisexual, transgender and queer+

Following the death of Mugabe and the electoral victory of Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa as President in 2018, Zimbabwe's LGBTQ+ group through its umbrella body, Gays and Lesbian Association of Zimbabwe (GALZ), expressed optimism that his win portended an end to anti-gay sentiment. Igual (2018) cites the Director of GALZ, Chester Shumba, appreciating that with the onset of Mnangagwa's Second Republic, there has been a marked reduction in homophobic hate speech as well as reduction in the politicisation and vilification of LGBTQ+ individuals as campaign tools.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2022) observed that unlike President Mugabe who displayed unveiled hostility towards LGBTI persons, President Mnangagwa has not shown open revulsion or hostility towards homosexuality 'although he has failed to visibly support LGBTI persons'. When asked what his stance on gays and homosexuality is by Richard Quest of CNN, President Mnangagwa replied that his stance was guided by the Zimbabwe Constitution which outlawed homosexuality and that he was not placed to campaign or speak out for gay people who are free to canvass for their rights so that they get majority support to amend the constitution in their favour. The UNDP (2022) reports that while gay sex is illegal in Zimbabwe, a rising number of underage boys are selling themselves on the streets. It has been observed that although the country's legislation incriminates homosexual activities, overtly, homosexual activities are taking place in the country. There has not been any recorded case of same sex marriage in the country, and this is probably because Section 78(3) of the

Zimbabwe Constitution forbids same sex marriages. Sensual and intimate same sex relations are indeed taking place in the country's major cities and holiday resorts (Ntsabo 2018). Ntsabo (2018) reported that 50% of gay men were assaulted and 64% disowned by their family members due to the stigma associated with homosexuality in the country. Despite cases of assault, threats, outing, discrimination, police harassment, unlawful detention, disownment, blackmail, displacement, unfair labour practices, hate speech and invasion of privacy perpetrated against LGBTQ+ people in Zimbabwe, same sex relations have continued behind closed doors.

On X, formerly called Twitter, on 01 December 2023, a blogger who uses the pseudonym Snowball Tongogara, wrote:

'The continued rise of lesbians and gay cases in Zimbabwe is worrisome. Our laws must be clear whether LGBT is a criminal offense or not.' (@snowballOfficia)

A respondent to Snowball's tweet replied:

'You are the ones encouraging (LGBT) by posting about it.' (@NoRiver5)

Another blogger named Otis Mashayanyika, retorted:

'I have noticed in primary schools they are slowly teaching children about the meaning of LGBTQ+ acronym meaning and types of sexual expression.' (@OMashayanyika)

Saymore Chinzara, said:

'I think gayism has no room whatsoever in our country or culture so to speak. The only thing is there is no law which speaks about such which I think should be put in place no sooner than later.' (@ChinzaraSaymore).

Another respondent, Musena WariTsoka said:

'Homosexuality was imported into Zimbabwe by ZANU PF leadership especially big men recruiting boys and young men offering money and other inducements. Now they are paying two girls or young women to perform lesbian acts while they watch.' (@tapfumaneyi).

A lady by the name Tariro Tawana replied:

'For your information the law is clear. It simply criminalises gay or lesbian marriages. It is very silent about relationships outside a matrimonial set up.' (@tawana_tariro)

Jarzin Man replied:

'It's flourishing under the so-called Second Republic. We all know that the previous administration never tolerated this.' (@Regis71675163)

Another blogger running by the pseudonym Prince Chiwara Zuma said:

'It's a criminal offence in Zimbabwe and it's not welcome. Moreso, it's against our norms, values and culture. It's taboo.' (@ChiwaraZuma)

On 27 December 2023, following the publication of the story of two Masvingo city lesbian lovers who had been arrested

by the Zimbabwe Republic Police for releasing a video clip kissing and performing oral sex on each other, there was a heated debate on X (formerly Twitter). A blogger hiding behind a fake identity wrote:

'Zimbabwe just needs to learn to protect gay rights. It's not a crime to be lesbian. Policy shouldn't be invading the privacy of those two.' (@SnickiKatope)

There was an avalanche of protest responses from more than 500 Zimbabweans whose responses ranged from ambivalence, chagrin, disgust, insults, revulsion to vitriol. The majority of the respondents argued that homosexuality negates the country's Christian tenets as well as cultural norms and values. On 28 December 2023, at 18:23, @Snicki_Katope posted another tweet complaining that Zimbabwean Police selectively applied the law in dealing with homosexuality cases. They stated:

'These two (Y'all know who) leaked this and police never raised a finger. Now those Masvingo girls did the same and are languishing under arrest. Double standards defined. Lesbianism is not a crime.' (@Snicki_Katope)

In reply, one who calls himself Solicitor at Large, said:

'Lesbianism is not a crime in Zimbabwe. They haven't been charged with lesbianism.' (@Zvoutete)

In reply to @Zvoutete, one who calls himself 'exuberance', retorted:

'Same sex or as you said lesbianism is a criminal offence in terms of the reform and criminal act.' (@Vincent Shava)

@Zvoutete, who, apparently, is a lawyer by profession replied:

'How can you be so ignorant and yet so confident? It's called The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act or Criminal Law Code in Short. Same sex or whatever that means isn't lesbianism. Perhaps you wanted to say same sex marriages. Those are criminalized. A same sex marriage isn't necessarily lesbianism. Not all relationships between women metamorphose into marriages. Now cite the statutory provision that criminalizes lesbianism.' (@Zvoutete)

To the satisfaction of @WGanagana, @Zvoutete explained that in Zimbabwe, there is no law that prohibits a love relationship between two women as long as they do not get married to each other in contravention of Section 78(3) of the Constitution which outlaws same sex marriages.

The foregoing chats vindicate the observation of SIDA, a Swedish international human rights watchdog which in November 2014 reported that 'in Zimbabwe, the society's attitudes towards lesbian, gay, biosexual, transgender and intersex persons are characterized by ignorance and homophobia'. According to @ZimLive on 15 February 2024, the Vice President of Zimbabwe, Constantino Dominic Nyikadzino Guvheya Chiwenga issued an angry statement in which he described LGBTQ+ activities as 'unchristian, anti-Zimbabwean and insidious'. In a long press statement

scripted on a government letterhead, Chiwenga criticised foreign interests for using scholarships and student grants as bait for recruiting Zimbabwe's less privileged and poor students into LGBTQ+ activities. Chiwenga pointed out that LGBTQ+ activities are 'deviances' and 'aberrations' against which the government of Zimbabwe passed legislation. He described it as criminal, unlawful and 'a grave and gross affront on Zimbabwe's national values and ethos as a Christian nation'. Despite such pro-Mugabe anti-LGBTQ+ diatribes, it is noticeable that there is an upsurge in LGBTQ+ activities in the country after R.G. Mugabe. The Mnangagwa administration has relented on the tough stance that the Mugabe administration adopted.

Possible reasons for the flexible attitude towards LGBTQ+ activities include, inter alia:

- Increased education and awareness on what the Zimbabwean law says about homosexuality. Specifically, as more people become aware that the law only forbids same sex marriages and anal sex or sodomy, many engage in other LGBTQ+ activities.
- The Second Republic of President Mnangagwa reportedly entertains meetings with the GALZ under the President's policy of being a listening President and the government's mantra of not leaving anyone behind in the agenda of national development. For that reason, some of the people who participated in discussions cited above on X believe that the Mnangagwa government warms to homosexuality although it does not come out openly supporting the practice of it.
- Creation of platforms for the discussion of the morality or otherwise of LGBTQ+ activities including controlled deliberations on the subject in schools and in youth forums has reduced rancour, revulsion and stigma associated with LGBTQ+ activities.
- Increase in research and publications on the subject of homosexuality is opening new vistas of understanding among the youths and the intelligentsia who now believe that people with LGBTQ+ inclinations should be legally protected from targeted discrimination, torture, ostracisation, disownment, insults, assault and unfair dismissals from employment.

Critical analysis of R.G. Mugabe's position of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer+

To critique Mugabe's stance on LGBTQ sexual people, the following contentions stick out from his stance:

- LGBTQ+ is identified as belonging to Western, Euro-American cultures.
- LGBTQ+ is eccentric, foreign and anathema to Zimbabwean and African cultural norms and values.
- LGBTQ+ is against the order of God.

Is homosexuality exclusively Western?

Scholarship on Romans 1:26–27 seems to corroborate Mugabe's notion that modern homosexuality with its LGBTQ+ traits has Western origins. Boswell (1980) noted that homosexuality was so rife in Ancient Greco-Roman and Victorian England societies that Plato arrogated a high rank to the practice describing those who despised it as barbarians. Plato is quoted by Boswell as having said:

[H]omosexuality is regarded as shameful by those who live under despotic governments just as philosophy is regarded as shameful by them, because it is apparently not in the interest of such rulers to have great ideas engendered in their subjects or powerful friendships or passionate love-all of which homosexuality is particularly apt to produce.

Veyne Paul (1985) noted that in Ancient Rome it was common practice for rich people to pursue young slaves for homosexual intimacy. It was fashionable and a mark of superiority for the noble class men to have a young beardless slave as a homosexual partner. The slave was supposed to be the passive partner in the relationship. The master was expected to dominate the relationship. Paul (1985) states that the slave boy was not expected to show that he was enjoying the anal penetration since passivity on the part of the slave was intended to give the master an upper hand in the act.

Scholarship on the history of homosexuality in Zimbabwe contends that the phenomenon existed in Southern Africa well before the colonial era (Mabvurira et al. 2012). It has been argued that the Khoi-San people who lived in Southern Africa for thousands of years practised same sex relations. A rock painting attributed to the San in Gुरुve depicts three men engaged in anal intercourse and the painting is estimated to date back to circa 8000 BC (Toomey 2016). Research on sodomy in Zimbabwe's prisons shows that anal intercourse between in-mates dates back to colonial times. Prisons like Khami, Whawha and Chikurubi have documented cases of inmates trading tobacco for sodomy (Shumba 2014). The prevalence of sodomy in Zimbabwe's prisons reflects a practice that is endemic in society. Sodomy and anti-gay laws in Zimbabwe have strong roots in British Judeo-Christian values (Gupta 2008), and do not reflect or represent the original reality of the sexual life of the indigenous people of Southern Africa. In this vein, Mugabe, the ZANU PF government or any social analyst's claim that gayism is foreign to Africa is factually incorrect. As Gupta (2008) argues, even Nelson Mandela pointed out that homosexuality should not be viewed as 'un-African' but as just another form of sexuality that has been suppressed for years.

Is homosexuality against the order of God?

An attempt to answer this question undergirds Paul's remark that 'even God has given up on them' (homosexuals) in Romans 1:28. The question that begs an answer is whether by 'God has given them over' Paul is saying that God has decided that those who practise homosexuality can practise it even though God himself did not intend it for them like that or rather, has God already sentenced gays to eternal damnation? Evans and Mawere (2021) raise an important point that the

discourse on homosexuality has cultural, political, traditional, religious and social constructions. What is tricky is that many a time, interpreters of God's mind impose their own cultural, traditional and social constructions on God. On the other hand, politicians have also cast aspersions on the subject of homosexuality depending on their political interests. For example, the ZANU PF government has engaged in political sabre-rattling around the issue of homosexuality especially during election campaigns. In this mishmash of cultural, traditional, religious and political innuendos on the ancient phenomenon of homosexuality, the real 'order of God' on sexual preferences tends to remain contentious and highly subjective. It is also inconceivable that God would give over to a reprobate and incorrigible state some people, turning them into eternal castaways.

Findings and conclusion

In this article, it has been established that:

- The majority of Zimbabweans follow a superficial understanding of the subject of homosexuality.
- LGBTQ+ philosophy in Zimbabwe is couched in societal, cultural and religious constructions that are highly subjective.
- Romans 1:26–27, which is hermeneutically situated in an ancient Greco-Roman context, has often been eisegetically and erroneously relocated to incongruous social and Christian settings where at times, homosexuality has been arrogated to females contrary to the Jewish midrash on sexuality.
- The view that homosexuality is unAfrican is not only unhistorical but also unscientific.
- From the era of colonialism, the politicisation of LGBTQ+ issue has negatively affected policy formulation on the subject of homosexuality.

Conclusion

The legal, cultural, psychological, religious, societal and traditional ambiances in Zimbabwe repress LGBTQ+ behaviours, albeit in a compromised and counterfeit setting. This article has established that homosexuality is as old as the first human settlers of Zimbabwe. On the surface, Zimbabwe is against homosexuality yet beneath the shallow veneer of anti-gayism rhetoric, LGBTQ+ activities are rampant as long as the 'perpetrators' have not come out in the open. While the Zimbabwe Constitution bans same sex marriages, it does not expressly ban LGBTQ+ behaviours. The current President of Zimbabwe, in an interview with Richard Quest of CNN, pointed out that if gay activists can successfully mobilise the citizenry for integration of gay rights in the country's constitution, his government would not oppose such a democratic outcome (Tutani 2018).

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