The location of homophobia

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Paper to be presented at SGIR 2010. 'Draft' would be too glorified a term to describe this set of thoughts and observations. Please accept my apologies that this is not yet a paper. The fieldwork on which it was to have been based had to be postponed and is ongoing (I am writing this in the midst of conducting interviews in Uganda). Comments very welcome, but please do not quote or cite without permission.

Provocations: the politics of essences

Until July 2, 2009, s. 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalized 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature'.[1] Central to the constitutional challenge launched against this provision by a broad array of human rights organisations, was a discursive battle over what I would call 'the location of homosexuality/homophobia'. Those who supported the continued criminalisation of homosexual intercourse insisted that homosexuality was culturally inauthentic, a decadent Western import that had no place in the postcolonial Indian nation-state.[2] Those who opposed the criminalisation of homosexuality, pointed to a rich-tradition of same-sex love in India and insisted that it was the criminalisation of homosexuality that was the import from Victorian Britain. Whilst adopting diametrically opposed positions on the ethical and moral acceptability of consensual homosexual conduct, both positions reproduced a politics of nativism and indigeneity in which that which was foreign, or of foreign origin, had no place in the postcolonial community.

Sometimes, queer activists departed from this script to do something quite different. In September 2006, a glittering array of Indian celebrities led by the novelist Vikram Seth (with Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen writing independently in support) demanded the decriminalisation of homosexual sex between consenting adults in an open letter addressed to the Government of India, members of the judiciary and all citizens.[3] This unprecedented elite civil society mobilisation was timed to build public pressure for decriminalisation in the run-up to a hearing by the Delhi High Court of the petition challenging the constitutional validity of s. 377. The open letter and its list of signatories

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[1] Indian Penal Code, 1860, s. 377
[2] See for example, Affidavit filed by the Government of India in Special Leave Petition (Civil) No. 7217-7218 of 2005, in the matter of *Naz Foundation* v. *Government of Delhi*.
[3] Open Letters Against Sec 377, http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/international/open_letter.pdf (hereafter Open Letters).

was accompanied by a meticulously researched press kit containing information about the situation of sexual minorities in India as well as global trends on the issue of sexual offences. In some places, the press kit reiterates the position that homosexuality is indigenous and homophobia imported, repeatedly characterising s. 377 as 'a British-era law' and a 'colonial era monstrosity'.[4]

Curiously, other parts of the press kit performed a reverse gesture, locating homosexuality in the 'West',[5] but *towards the very same end of promoting decriminalisation*. After outlining the global position on the extent of criminalisation of homosexual sex, readers are presented with a map in which countries that continue to criminalise sodomy are coloured orange, while those that do not remain white.[6] (This means, effectively, that Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and a few states in the Caribbean are orange.) The map is captioned as follows: 'Only the Countries coloured in orange continue to criminalise sodomy. To which world must India belong?' The question is entirely rhetorical, relying for its persuasiveness on what it knows to be the predispositions of an Indian elite desperate to break away from the old Third World so as to take their rightful place at the table of great powers (it is not clear whether the map is trading on an elite aspiration to be part of the 'powerful' or 'civilised' world, but seeing as there is a substantial overlap between these two categories, perhaps the question does not matter very much). In this map and its accompanying caption, elite Indian activists (by no means representative of the movement as a whole) seem to be tapping into a deeply held conviction in at least some segments of upper middle-class Indian society that progress means becoming like the West. A number of scholars, most notably Partha Chatterjee, have argued that the Indian middle-class's encounter with Western modernity has always involved elements of both mimicry and rejection, with the former being the dominant approach in 'material' spheres of the lifeworld (economy, statecraft, technology) and the latter in what were seen as the 'spiritual' spheres (art, culture, family).[7] The mapping of homosexuality on to the West seems to reflect a hunch on the part of some queer activists about what might be gained through the 'materialisation' of

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[4] Open Letters, 1-3.
[5] The composition of the 'West' is an exceedingly complex issue, to which I cannot do justice here. Suffice it to say that in discussions of homosexuality in South Asia and East Africa—the two regions that this paper is chiefly concerned with—the term signifies the cultures of the United States, Europe (particularly Western Europe), and the predominantly white settler colonies (Canada, Australia, New Zealand). South Africa tends to have an ambiguous position in these discussions, reflecting its history and demography. Recognising the deeply contested and shifting understanding of this term, I use it nonetheless because it is a frequent cultural referent in discourses surrounding homosexuality in the regions of interest to this paper. In every subsequent usage of the term in this paper, I have dropped the scare quotes, but try to clarify what the term is meant to signify by attempting to provide sufficient context to make this intelligible or self-evident to the reader.
[6] Ibid., 11.
[7] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6, 119-20.

queer sexualities: neoliberal Indian elites in particular may be susceptible to the argument that queer freedoms, signalling open and tolerant societies, might profitably be used to market India as an increasingly attractive destination for foreign investment.

The mapping of homosexuality on to the West also mirrors the discourses of a number of US and European LGBT activists, an increasingly prominent sub-set of whom have shown a tendency to locate homosexuality at the heart of an enlightened Judaeo-Christian 'West', confronting a uniformly homophobic 'non-West', sunk in ignorance, superstition, barbarism, and moral darkness, as evidenced by its failure to recognise LGBT rights.[8] In effect, as LGBT communities have won political and legal battles in Western states and have begun to assimilate ever more deeply into Western societies, LGBT rights have become a new marker of modernity, a new signal for the age-old divide between the civilised and the barbaric. States that fail to respect such rights are increasingly characterised as backward, with the internationalisation of such rights taking on the character of something like a modern-day civilising mission.[9]

Although the different discourses alluded to above are underpinned by radically different sorts of politics, common to them all is something we might call a politics of essences, in which homosexuality is located or fixed in particular places, so that particular attitudes towards sexuality come to be marked as defining the essence of what it means to belong to those places. Location in turn is crucial, in these discourses, to the legitimacy—the moral and political acceptability—of practices and identities associated with homosexuality. Moreover, 'place', in these discourses is understood in absolute terms as designating particular pieces of territory that acquire agency through the instrumentality of the state.

The practice of locating homosexuality in places, understood in fixed and absolutist terms, is analytically disingenuous and normatively dangerous. It is analytically disingenuous because of the wealth of historical and anthropological evidence of the existence of homoerotic and homosexual practices across geography and history.[10] Yet the usefulness of this historical record is complicated by the distinction between behaviour and identity. It has now become a relatively orthodox claim of sexuality studies, that while homosexual *behaviour* has been observed across place and time, the emergence of homosexual *identities* (i.e. the idea, as akshay khanna puts it, 'that who I

[8] Rahul Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 181.
[9] Neville Hoad, 'Arrested Development or the Queerness of Savages: Resisting Evolutionary Narratives of Difference', *Postcolonial Studies* 3:2 (2000), 148.
[10] Murray & Roscoe; Epprecht; Brian Whitaker, *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2006); there is a wealth of historical and anthropological work that I am not yet fully conversant with, demonstrating the existence of same-sex desire across cultures and time.

fuck or am attracted to says something about the type of person I am'[11]) is a more recent and culturally specific development. Michel Foucault located this development in the late nineteenth century West and explained it with reference to the operation of discourses of medicine and law.[12] The dislocations produced by industrial capitalism and mass urbanisation were simultaneously disrupting traditional family structures and providing the conditions—for some—of individual material self-sufficiency and anonymity that enabled the configuration of new forms of community around non-heteronormative identities. Some scholars have suggested that the diffusion of these enabling conditions via the spread of capitalism, reinforced by the advent of AIDS which has provided a public health frame within which to discuss previously taboo subjects of non-heteronormative sexualities, has made possible the expression of homosexual identities in the contemporary Third World.[13] I have some reservations about this diffusion narrative, given the pre-capitalist existence of non-heteronormative identities such as *hijra* in India. But let me leave these reservations to one side for the moment.

The location of homosexuality in the West therefore acquires a whiff of credibility from the idea that homosexual *identities* originated in Western societies. Yet this unambiguous and unproblematised location ignores the universality of homosexual *behaviour*, the relatively recent emergence of homosexual identities even in the West, the very substantial history of Western homophobia, the continuing novelty and fragility of tolerance for sexual difference in many Western societies, the embattled nature of this tolerance and the constantly shifting balance between the forces of tolerance and repression in Western states and societies: in short, it pretends that the battle for queer liberation has been won in the West. On the other side of the argument, the suggestion by Third World queer activists that homosexuality existed in non-Western societies and that homophobia is the Western import, trades on the historical evidence of homosexual *behaviour* in non-Western societies, but in doing so sometimes evinces a tendency to romanticise pre-colonial societies as havens of tolerance for behaviours whose acceptance was, in fact, often bounded by the requirement that they not interfere with the serious business of heterosexual reproduction. To put it more bluntly, the politics of essences—as manifested in practices of locating homosexuality in particular places—ignores the mixedness of all places.

The location of homosexuality in fixed and bounded places, as if one's attitude towards sexuality was tied up with the essence of what it means to belong to that place, can also

[11] akshay khanna, 'Us "Sexuality Types": A Critical Engagement with the Postcoloniality of Sexuality', in *The Phobic and the Erotic*, eds. Brinda Bose & Subhabrata Bhattacharyya (Oxford: Seagull, 2007).
[12] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume I* (London: Penguin 1998 [1976]), 43.
[13] Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 86; Peter Drucker, '"In the Tropics There Is No Sin": Sexuality and Gay-Lesbian Movements in the Third World', *New Left Review I* 218 (1996), 75-101.

be normatively dangerous in that it functions as a mechanism of exclusion of all those who do not identify with normative sexualities. Thus, Western activists who claim tolerance for homosexuality as a Western value, effectively leave non-Western queer activists vulnerable to accusations and insinuations of being Western agents, fifth columnists and so forth, typically levelled against them by local opponents. Likewise, Third World queer activists insisting on the indigenous location of homosexuality, even if for tactical reasons, are often unwittingly reinforcing the very politics of nativism that is used to oppress them, by implicitly agreeing that only practices that can be territorially located within the container of the postcolonial nation-state can claim legitimacy and acceptability.

The politics of encounter

In his book *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, David Harvey urges that we move away from an Aristotelian conception of the world as composed of distinct and autonomous things, each with its own essence, to more dialectical and process-oriented philosophies that hold that things have no unchanging essence and 'do not exist outside the processes, flows, and relations that create, sustain, or undermine them'.[14] Criticising the rigid ways in which geographical concepts such as space, place, and environment tend to be deployed by non-geographers in the social sciences, Harvey lays out a complex conceptual apparatus that might enable a more sophisticated appreciation of them. For example in the chapter on space, he suggests that space and time can be understood in three different ways: absolute, relative and relational. Absolute understandings of space and time visualize the world as a static grid within which the unique locations of individuals and things can be plotted in space and along a linear conception of time (this is how the 'politics of essences' tends to operate). Relative space-time is concerned with processes, flows and motions and maps the world very differently, retaining the potential—for example—to imagine a number of locations as relatively equidistant from a central point in terms of time or cost, even if they are positioned at different absolute distances. Relational spacetime is the realm of immaterial feelings of affiliation or belonging with others who may be both near and far in absolute and relative terms, that while immaterial may nonetheless have objective social consequences.[15]

One of Harvey's key claims is that the move from Aristotelian essences to dialectical, process-based philosophies could have important liberatory potentials. Harvey notes that one of the key repressive characteristics of governmentality and its associated political economy has been to confine our understanding of space and time to its absolute

[14] David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 232.
[15] Ibid., ch. 7.

dimensions.[16] The clear and unambiguous location, definition and classification of people and things in absolute space and time has been most conducive to serving state and capitalist interests in the appropriation of resources, and the political control and manipulation of subjects.[17] Conversely, those subjects have tended to feel less alone and more capable of resisting their subjection precisely when they have been able to think and act outside of the absolute dimensions of space and time by drawing on the potentialities of relative space-time opened up by advances in transport and communication and by constructing relational solidarities across borders. Yet rather than simply privileging relative and relational conceptions of space and time in a neat reversal of the existing epistemic hegemony, Harvey urges that we begin to think about these multiple conceptualizations in dialectical relation to one another: after all, the workers of the world have never achieved their objectives simply by thinking in relative and relational terms, unless these efforts have manifested themselves in the form of bodies that threaten capital in the absolute space and time of streets and workplaces.[18]

We have seen how the location of homosexuality/homophobia in absolute space and time is both analytically disingenuous and normatively dangerous, excluding queer subjects from postcolonial understandings of the nation-state and demanding from them the construction of revisionist and occasionally romanticised same-sex histories so as to make the case for their inclusion in accordance with broader canons of indigeneity and belonging. Might it be possible to bring Harvey's preferred dialectical and process-oriented epistemologies to bear on the problem of understanding the institutionalisation of homophobia in postcolonial states and societies? And could such understandings have the liberatory potentials that Harvey claims for them? In what follows, I introduce briefly some trends in queer scholarship that construct genealogies of homophobia in more dialectical terms before going on to explore the relevance of such approaches in one contemporary instance of the institutionalisation of homophobia in present-day Uganda.

In contrast to the battles between queer activists and homophobic conservatives that I describe in the first section of this paper, some queer scholars have tended to tell a murkier story in which the institutionalisation of homophobia is located in the discursive encounter between colonial and indigenous elites. Marc Epprecht has argued that while politicised homophobia in Zimbabwe does indeed have some roots in traditional African culture, 'it is also enormously indebted to Christian missionary propaganda, Western pseudo-science, and the demonstration effect of White Rhodesian "cowboy" culture.'[19]

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[16] Ibid., 257-8.
[17] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
[18] Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, 153, 272.
[19] Marc Epprecht, 'Black skin, "cowboy" masculinity: A genealogy of homophobia in the African nationalist movement in Zimbabwe to 1983', *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7:3 (2005), 263.

Drawing on the scholarship of Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai on representations of same-sex love in Indian literary and historical texts, Arvind Narrain notes an amplification of homophobia in colonial India under the influence of Western discourses of law, medicine and literature.[20] These writers attribute the erasure of indigenous traditions of androgyny and same-sex behaviour to a perceived need to construct virile African and Indian nationalisms capable of overthrowing the colonial yoke. Something remarkably similar may be going on in contemporary Iraq where, a recent HRW report suggests, the humiliation of seven years of occupation has engendered a crisis in Iraqi masculinity, which sectarian militias now seek to recuperate by hunting down men perceived to be gay, effeminate or otherwise subversive of established gender codes.[21]

Scholars of gender in Iran have offered some of the clearest and most detailed accounts I have come across of how and why the institutionalisation of homophobia has to be understood in the context of the encounter between modernist Iranian and European elites in the late 19th century. Janet Afary has written about the prevalence of 'status-defined homosexuality' in pre-modern Iran, typically involving partners of different ages, classes or social standings.[22] She chronicles the abundant representation of same-sex love in classical Persian literature, the wealth of allusion to homoerotic relations in the Persian language, and the widespread prevalence of homosexuality and homoerotic expression in public spaces beyond the royal court, including monasteries and seminaries, taverns, military camps, bathhouses and coffeehouses. While not free of moral judgments, she argues that until the late nineteenth century, Iranian representations of same-sex love were far less judgmental than the contemporary Western regime of sexuality.[23]

Afsaneh Najmabadi argues that as Iranian elites came into contact with Europeans and realised that polite European society held such practices to be abominable, their response was one of disavowal and dissimulation.[24] Iranians began to find themselves 'explaining' to European visitors that the latter had mistakenly read homosociality (men holding hands, embracing and kissing in public) as homosexuality. Homoeroticism in Sufi poetry began to be read as purely allegorical and metaphorical for communion between the devout and the divine. Practices of representation underwent dramatic shifts. While notions of beauty were largely undifferentiated by gender in early Qajar (1785-1925) paintings with beautiful men and women being depicted with similar facial and bodily

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[20] Arvind Narrain, *Queer: Despised sexuality, Law and Social Change* (Bangalore: Books for Change, 2004), 41-5; Ruth Vanita & Saleem Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 200.
[21] Human Rights Watch, *"They Want Us Exterminated": Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq* (August 2009), http://www.hrw.org/node/85050, 34.
[22] Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 3.
[23] Ibid., 107.
[24] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), ch. 1, 2.

features, by the end of the nineteenth century the portrayal of beauty had become less androgynous and more gendered. Similarly, while biographical writing well into the nineteenth century contains numerous non-judgmental references to diverse sexual preferences, twentieth century references to same-sex relationships become more disapproving. Modernist Iranian intellectuals began to speak of homosexuality as situational, as something that Iranian men did in the past because of gender segregation. By implication, as the sexes were allowed to mingle freely in a modernising Iran, homosexual relations would disappear. One of the central projects of early Iranian feminism was the transformation of heterosexual marriage from a loveless procreative contract to a romantic one, but the flip side of this was the stigmatisation of other forms of desire, leaving—in Najmabadi's words—'a birthmark of disavowal of male homosexuality on the modernist project of women's emancipation'.[25] The larger point here is that by the late nineteenth century, the heteronormalisation of Iranian society had come to be regarded as a marker of modernity as a result of the encounter with a European modernity that was perceived to be more advanced, civilised, developed.

Scholarship locating homophobia in the politics of the encounter between colonial and indigenous elites might get around some of the analytical and normative difficulties identified earlier in the more essentialising accounts of some queer activists and conservatives. They acknowledge the pre-colonial existence of homosexual behaviour without valorising pre-colonial histories as uniquely tolerant; they recognise the power of example, instruction and imposition wielded by colonial powers; but they also recognise the agency of indigenous elites in *choosing* to confront the colonial challenge in part through strategies of mimicry deployed to construct virile masculinised nationalisms. Dialectical genealogies of homophobia seem intuitively attractive because they seem to allow for what I called earlier the mixedness of all places—the universality of both homophobia and tolerance of non-heteronormative desire—but can explain the institutionalisation of homophobia at particular junctures with reference to elite ideas about the relationship between sexuality and civilisational progress, and to the ways in which those ideas are challenged and reshaped in interaction with external actors.

In what follows, I try to think through the analytical and normative potentials of such dialectical accounts of the institutionalisation of homophobia in the context of an ongoing controversy in present day Uganda. The fact that the 'encounters' in this situation are ongoing, enables analysts to interrogate internal and external actors in this instance of the institutionalisation of homophobia, allowing them to ask questions about the provenance of ideas and the agency of the various actors implicated.

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[25] Ibid., 7.

Uganda and the politics of encounters

On 13 October 2009, a self-described 'Anti Homosexuality Bill' was introduced in the Ugandan Parliament, proposing to enhance punishments (extending to the death penalty) for homosexual conduct in specified circumstances, asserting extra-territorial jurisdiction over these offences, and criminalising any form of organisation in support of rights for homosexuals.[26] The Bill is informed by the familiar view of homosexuality as Western, un-African and un-Ugandan, clarifying its aims as, inter alia, 'providing a comprehensive and enhanced legislation to protect the cherished culture of the people of Uganda, legal, religious, and traditional family values of the people of Uganda against the attempts of sexual rights activists seeking to impose their values of sexual promiscuity on the people of Uganda.'[27] In response, sexual rights activists have been trying to construct genealogies of homophobia that highlight the deep implication of external—specifically Western—actors in the production of homophobia in Uganda. In Harvey's terms, they are attempting to remind the Ugandan public about the ways in which places and localised ways of life such as 'Ugandan culture' are relationally constructed by a variety of processes occurring at different spatio-temporal scales.[28] To do this, they have been drawing attention to two encounters. My own (ongoing) empirical work in Uganda has so far focused on trying to understand the complexities of deploying these arguments in the Ugandan public sphere, and assess the success with which they have done so.

The first such encounter refers to the increasingly close relationships between Ugandan politicians and clergy on the one hand and Western—mostly US—conservative evangelical Christians on the other. A number of scholars and activists have begun to draw attention to the efforts of US Christian conservatives to recruit prominent African religious leaders to a global campaign seeking to restrict the rights of queer subjects. It has been suggested that it is no coincidence that the Ugandan Bill was introduced in the same year that US anti-gay activists Scott Lively and Don Schmierer held a prominent 'Seminar on Exposing the Homosexual Agenda' in Kampala, Uganda, which received considerable attention from local politicians, clergy and the media. Briefly, the relationship between these different actors which is said to culminate in projects such as the Ugandan Bill is understood in the following way. As Western churches such as the US Episcopalian Church (ECUSA) move in increasingly liberal directions on questions such as abortion, the ordination of women and homosexuals as priests and the blessing of same-sex unions, conservatives have begun to find themselves outnumbered and on the

[26] The Anti Homosexuality Bill, 2009, Bills Supplement No. 13 to the Uganda Gazette No. 47 Volume CII (25 September 2009) (hereafter The Anti Homosexuality Bill). Full text available here: http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/btb/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Bill-No-18-Anti-Homosexuality-Bill-2009.pdf.
[27] The Anti Homosexuality Bill (n 77) §1.1.
[28] Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, 112.

losing side of these ‘culture wars’. Rather than splitting off from their churches as they have tended to do in previous instances of disagreement, they have reached out to other national branches of their denominations—known for their social conservatism—so as to forge a global conservative alliance that might block progressive moves towards, for example, the ordination of women and homosexuals as priests and the blessing of same-sex unions, in global norm-setting fora such as the decennial Lambeth conferences convened by the Anglican Church. Additionally, within the Anglican Communion there have been, of late, a number of controversial moves in which parishes unhappy with the increasingly liberal trends within their dioceses, have seceded from those dioceses placing themselves under the temporary oversight of other national branches (referred to as ‘provinces’ in the Anglican Communion)—most notably, the Anglican Churches of Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya (and possibly others that I am unaware of). In return for demographic support in global norm-setting fora and ‘spiritual protection’ from the liberal onslaught in ECUSA, conservative Anglicans have rewarded African churches financially. (Some African churches have also begun to refuse financial assistance from liberal churches such as ECUSA.) Kapya Kaoma, the author of a report outlining many of these trends, has suggested that African priests and congregations—for whom homosexuality was not a significant issue before the mid-1990s—have essentially been coopted into the US culture wars through the lure of conservative money, which has tended to be offered with fewer strings and less demands for accountability than liberal Christian money.[29]

Liberal accounts of these relationships between African churches and dissident US conservatives have tended to describe them in terms of an exchange in which the material wealth of US partners is exchanged for the spiritual wealth of the African churches. Yet as Miranda Hassett has written in her erudite account of these controversies within the Anglican Communion, conservatives have been quick to respond with the argument that the insinuation that African churches would say whatever they were told to simply in exchange for a wad of cash smacks of racist condescension in its suggestion that African clergy are ready to sell their souls to the highest bidder.[30] Indeed what is striking about the liberal account is the way in which the American evangelicals are portrayed as the drivers and authors of homophobia in Uganda, with the Ugandan actors functioning as instruments of their will. With Ugandan conservatives arguing that homosexuality is Western, and Ugandan and Western liberals arguing that the real authors of homophobia in Uganda are American, African agency is in danger of being written out of this drama.

[29] Kapya Kaoma, ‘Globalizing the Culture Wars: US Conservatives, African Churches, & Homophobia’ (Political Research Associates, Somerville, MA 2009), http://www.publiceye.org/publications/globalizing-the-culture-wars/.

[30] Miranda K. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their African Allies are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[In my own interviews—which have so far been mostly with Ugandan sexual minority activists—I have been trying to put back African agency into the story by asking the following questions: When did homosexuality begin to become an important issue for African churches? How do we explain the timing of this? Would this Bill have been introduced without the influence of the American evangelicals? If so, what is the nature of their role and importance in all of this? One worrying implication of these questions is that reintroducing the agency of African clergy and politicians in the enhanced criminalisation of homosexuality deprives activists of one of the ideas that they have deployed to suggest that homophobia is foreign and therefore ought to be rejected. Whatever its other problems, the native/foreign discourse seems tactically useful given its continuing discursive power in Ugandan and other postcolonial societies.

Interestingly, many of my interviewees—virtually all of whom have been black Ugandans—seemed to agree strongly with the liberal critique that African clergy have sold out to conservative money. Unburdened by historic white liberal guilt, black Ugandans seemed ready and able to say that African pastors were in fact financially conscious enough to indulge in homophobic rhetoric in expectation of conservative Western financial assistance. Some of my interviewees pointed out further that the fact that churches in Uganda were not taxed and were barely regulated in other respects made the establishment of churches one of the most lucrative opportunities in Uganda.]

These difficulties with delineating agency in collaborative relationships point to broader theoretical difficulties and perhaps hint at ineluctable tensions between the analytical and the normative, between the preoccupations of the academic and the activist. Somehow, it does not seem to be enough to say that homophobia in contemporary Uganda is a hybrid formation. We know that hybridity can conceal hierarchical relationships, and we then want to know which partners in these relationships have what sorts of agency. But in attempting to delineate agency in this fashion, the temptation is to split the hybrid formation into its constituent parts, and to endow these parts with an essence: the homophobic Americans, the instrumental (or the easily deluded) Africans. Somehow in discussing the politics of encounters, we have come back to the politics of essences. At least this, it seems to me, seems to be the activist temptation.]

The second encounter that might speak in productive ways to the ongoing debate over the place of homosexuality in Ugandan culture takes place in the late 19th century. In his illuminating account of the genealogy of homophobia in southern Africa, Neville Hoad recounts the fate of the last precolonial native ruler of the kingdom of Buganda (now the Central Region of present-day Uganda). Missionary sources of the time make reference, somewhat coyly, to Kabaka Mwanga's avowed tendencies towards 'unnatural desires', which he was accustomed to consummating with pages in his court. When, after their

conversion to Christianity, some of these pages refused his advances, Mwanga had them burned to death, setting off a chain of events that culminated in the awarding of a royal charter in 1888 to the British East African Company, which was charged with preserving law and order in Buganda. Hoad is careful not to use this incident to call Mwanga a homosexual or to suggest that homosexuality is African. Indeed he cautions that the missionaries may have recorded and re-coded as 'unnatural vice' a set of older practices that served 'ritual, religious, initiatory, or fealty-producing functions'.[31] Far from being reducible to idiosyncratic depravities, he suggests that the corporeal intimacies that Mwanga demanded of his courtiers may have served as tests of political loyalty in a time of eroding authority. Just as Mwanga's demands were political, resistance to those demands may also have been political, so that physical intimacies may have stood for much more than they might appear to contemporary readers steeped in an identitarian view of sexuality. Thus from the point of view of the participants in these events, it may have been the case that ' "chastity" marked loyalty to Christianity and the white missionaries, [while] "sodomy" marked an allegiance to the kabaka and the Ganda state.'[32] While resisting a modern sexual identitarian reading of these events, Hoad nonetheless uses them to remind readers that the corporeal intimacies that are claimed by African elites to be the result of Western cultural imperialism were the very practices that were stamped out by an earlier wave of European imperialism. Indeed, in a highly provocative reading of this incident, Hoad goes so far as to say: 'I wish to stage Mwanga, retroactively produced as a pervert and moreover a weak and evil man, as equally heroic, as someone who fucked (with the full and bizarre semantic range of that verb) both Christianity and imperialism and ultimately lost.'[33]

[This story has been a major focus of my interviews so far. Before I came to Uganda, I expected that it might have been seized upon by activists as evidence of the indigeneity of homosexuality. Yet this has not really been the case, apart from a few stay references in articles by Sylvia Tamale (Dean of the Faculty of Law at Makarere University) and Andrew Mwenda (an independent journalist in Kampala). So much of my questioning has focused on why this might be the case.

First, in line with Hoad's own careful readings of this incident, the events of the 1880s are not read primarily as a tale about sexual morality, but as an account of conflict between church and state, between natural/divine and positive/human law and the primacy of the former over the latter. To use this story in the argument about indigenous

[31] Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 12.
[32] Ibid., 15.
[33] Ibid., 19.

and alien forms of sexuality would seem to require the exaggeration of what has tended to be seen as a rather minor aspect of the narrative.[34]

Second, using this story productively—from the point of view of sexual minority activists—would also require a reversal of the positive and negative codings of the various actors in it. For it is the pages who were burnt to death for their political disloyalty and religious faith, who have been celebrated as the heroes of this tale in postcolonial Ugandan history, canonised by the Catholic Church, commemorated in a shrine at Namugongo and remembered every year on 3 June, which is celebrated as Martyrs' Day. Given the power of this hegemonic narrative, it seems that it might be an uphill task to hold up Mwanga's behaviour as setting normative standards of sexuality—even if only to counter the ahistorical and inaccurate claim made by contemporary conservatives in Uganda that such sexualities are unAfrican and unUgandan.

This does raise a number of interesting questions, which I hope to investigate further. When did the currently hegemonic reading of the events of the late 1880s become predominant, and how did it attain this status? Has the way in which this story is told changed over time, and if so how and why? Do non-hegemonic readings of these events that celebrate Mwanga as the heroic figure standing up unsuccessfully to British imperialism and an alien religion exist? Where—in what sorts of spaces and discourses (public, semi-public, private) do these non-hegemonic readings circulate? And might they be available for contemporary use?

But third, one of the other interesting points that has emerged in my interviews offers an additional explanation for why the story has not featured prominently in activist rhetoric. Some of my interviewees have cautioned that the suggestion that Mwanga engaged in same-sex intimacies (however carefully one phrases this) risks alienating the Baganda people, who as the largest tribe in contemporary Ugandan society wield enormous political and social power (as evidenced by riots that took place in September 2009 over an unrelated issue). In their view, any move that alienates the Baganda people risks certain political defeat. Other activists have insisted that the story be told despite these risks as a matter of historical fact. Still others have suggested that it matters greatly who *introduces these revisionist readings in public discourse: one interviewee suggested, for example, that counter-hegemonic readings might be better received when offered by elite Bagandans who already commanded respect within the community.]*

[34] This is also the view of Kevin Ward, 'Same-Sex Relations in Africa and the Debate on Homosexuality in East African Anglicanism', *Anglican Theological Review* (2002).

Conclusions

Notwithstanding my preference for thinking about the location of homophobia in the dialectical terms that Harvey advocates for reasons outlined earlier, my attempt to operationalise this in the context of an ongoing controversy in Uganda has run into a number of difficulties. Although I am at far too preliminary a stage of my research to reach definitive conclusions, it seems to me that there are very real tensions between the sorts of truths that activists and academics seek to produce. The impetus to 'locate' homosexuality/homophobia in fixed places, evinced by both activists and their opponents, arises from a need to legitimate practices of homosexual desire or repression by rooting them in an idea of locality and place. Both sides in these conversations share a politics of nativism, in which authenticity and legitimacy flow from establishing a connection with the places to which they claim belonging, even if they use these ideas of belonging for diametrically opposed purposes.

I have suggested that such practices of location are both analytically disingenuous and normatively dangerous and have suggested further that we ought to be thinking about the location of homophobia in more dialectical, process-oriented, or hybrid terms. Postcolonialism has tended to valorise hybridity as a mode of consciousness that is both analytically more precise as an account of encounters between different cultural formations, and as normatively preferable to a communitarian politics that insists on patrolling the borders of identity and community. Yet it seems difficult to use hybrid accounts of the institutionalisation of homophobia in struggles for queer liberation without, as I have suggested earlier, splitting the hybrid formation into its constituent parts and endowing each with an essence that can then be claimed or disavowed depending on what one wants to legitimate.

I am not sure where this leaves us. Does this vindicate Marxist critics of postcolonialism, who accuse the postcolonial discourse of hybridity—of complicity rather than oppositionality between the native and the colonial—of blunting the sharp edges of an earlier tradition of anti-imperial scholarship, robbing it of its fighting spirit?[35] Or does it suggest that all place-based strategies of legitimation, on which all parties in the battle for queer liberation seem to rely, are inherently conservative? Should queer subjects struggling for autonomy in a homophobic world abandon such strategies, notwithstanding their undeniable power in the discursive fields that we inhabit? But then what? Is there a way of appealing to ideas of place without imprisoning ourselves within them?

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[35] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1994); Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry* 20:2 (1994), 328-56.