

**Sexuality and Religion in the Novel *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson**

**Nozipho Princess Sibongokuhle Dlodlo (211559656)**

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**Supervisor: Dr F.G Settler**

## **Declaration**

I, Nozipho Princess Sibongokuhle Dlodlo, declare that this dissertation is my own original work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been acknowledged. I submit it this work to the programme of Sociology of Religion which is under the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. There are no parts of this presentation that have been submitted to another University or higher education institution for degree or examination purposes. Unless it is stated within the text, this is wholly my own work.

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**Nozipho Princess Sibongokuhle Dlodlo**

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this dissertation for submission

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**Dr F.G Settler**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is based on the novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* authored by Jeanette Winterson in 1985. The auto-fiction novel is about a young girl who is raised in a Conservative Christian background and learns that she is a lesbian. This novel is only a starting point for dialogue on homosexuality in the Church in Africa, in which I use a post-colonial approach and is not in anyway a model to be used in understanding same-sex relations in Africa.

The thesis begins its dialogue on the premises of the incoherent voices of the Church in Africa on its standpoint on homosexuality. While the church continues to deliberate on its position on homosexuality LGBTIQ persons continue to be victims of hate crimes, discrimination and society continues to relate to them as mysterious and exotic.

The question which is addressed is what issues on sexuality and religions are raised in the novel *Oranges* and how has the Church in Africa dealing with homosexuality. It is beyond the scope of my study to answer the question of which orientation is right or wrong. The main purpose of this thesis instead is seeking to facilitate a dialogue and develop positive sexual images and conceptions of expression of oneself sexually. In a way this will unburden the body from the expectations of the religious institution and the family institution. I present rising tensions between sexuality and religion in the novel and in the Church in Africa.

To accomplish this I made use of books, essays, videos, newspapers, websites and articles published on sexuality, homosexuality, legislation, the Churches and their varied positions and engagements with LGBTIQ persons was read and utilized.

The discussions that are on-going and past are twofold: (i) they reveal that the uneasiness around homosexuality, I argued, is rooted in the absence of positive language to talk about the body and sex in heterosexual relations that are supposedly the 'relations'. (ii) On looking at the homosexuality conversations, I argue they are philosophical and ontological and I argued that this intentionally/unintentionally excludes a certain group of people for an example, those at the grassroots of the community. This, I argue because the hate crimes directed LGBTIQ persons suggests that there is no clear understanding amongst most people of what homosexuality entails substantially.

In concluding, I argued that there is an urgent need for narratives of LGBTIQ persons to represent themselves and actively formulate their identities and theology. The agenda of non-

LGBTIQ persons writing as allies to the community are progressive and worth celebrating, however the outsider approach is limited in what they can offer in terms of daily experience and formulation on theology. I acknowledge that there is a lot of work that has been done on the theology of LGBTIQ persons, but not much has been done by LGBTIQ persons themselves. So what we have is theology about homosexuals and not with homosexuals. Lastly, it is recommended for further work that one explores if up-bringing impacts and shapes sexual orientation and to see how Christianity has maneuvered this area. Is there anything in Christian bible that prepares parents and children to understand their bodies and express themselves sexually?

**Key Terms:** *Homosexuality (LGBTIQ), sexuality, the postcolonial church*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *Introduction*

This study is motivated by an interest in how people who identify as LGBTIQ are treated in everyday life. This was sparked by my reading of a novel by Jeanette Winterson; *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*. Sexuality continues to be a hotly debated and contested matter among Christians the world over. From my positionality, as a woman of colour and a Christian, I have sought to understand the dimensions of debates on sexuality, theologically, pastorally and socially. I was introduced Winterson's novel and it provided me with a lens and language to read and speak about sexuality and religion that transcended traditional framings of the debates in the African church. I found that her style of writing showed great sensitivity to issues of power (social and ecclesiastical), practices of piety (oppressive and liberative), and of identity. Her exploration of both sexual identity and the religious is conveyed through her transgressive way of writing about the body – in desire, in leisure, and in decay or death. Thus for me, re-reading sexuality and religion through the lens of Winterson's *Oranges* helped me to understand both the complexity of sexual identity, the multifarious ways in which the church(es), both then and now, in England and in Africa, respond to sexuality. Finally, it helped me to have a greater appreciation for how queer Christian position themselves in the church, navigate the social identities, as well as their religious identities. In interrogating sexuality and religion in the African church through the lens of Winterson's *Oranges* I was struck by the recurrences of the themes of power, piety, and identity.

This in my view makes it possible to appreciate complex perspectives on the debate in the African context. *Oranges* does not represent an ideal for the African church to emulate, but rather, I understand it as one moment in an ongoing narrative related to the church and sexuality. My reason for drawing linkages with the postcolonial African church is because this is where I am located. Likewise, the use of Winterson is primarily because I was drawn to her style of writing and her framing of the discourse, than with her context of 1980s England. Thus this study must be understood as an interrogation of religion and sexuality in *Oranges* (a fictional context) and postcolonial Africa (contemporary social context). The postcolonial social context has been characterised by:

(a) increasing draconian laws to restrict homosexual activities, and queer identities. Downie (2014) has shown how homophobia has become institutionalized in Africa through the death penalty and criminalization of homosexual orientation and acts.

(b) increasingly hostile public culture that views homosexuality as un-African and unchristian (Haskins 2014; Tamale, 2007). Msibi (2011) argues that African political and religious leaders bear a significant responsibility for promoting patriarchy and promote heteronormativity.

(c) increasing contestation to heteronormativity through recognition of queer identities (Alimi 2015). Alimi (2015) argues that Africa has a long and rich history of recognition of homosexual practices and identity, opening new indigenous avenues for the promotion and protection of sexual diversity.

According to Tamale “Sexuality touches a wide range of other issues, including pleasure, the human body, dress, self esteem, gender identity, power and violence. It is an encompassing phenomenon that involves the human psyche, emotions, physical sensations, communication, creativity and ethics” (2011:8). Sexuality does not happen in a vacuum, but is also dependant on how people relate to each other through their bodies and words; there are set ‘expectations’ from cultural and religious groups. With this context in mind, in this project I read Winterson’s *Oranges* to re-imagine the debates related to sexuality and religion in the postcolonial African church.

## **1.1 The text: *Oranges are not the only fruit***

This project is based on the novel *Oranges are not the only fruit* (henceforth *Oranges*), a novel written by Jeanette Winterson. *Oranges* is a narrative about a personal struggle of coming-out as lesbian in a conservative Christian context in 1980’s England. *Oranges* is a semi-autobiographical account, written in 1985, of a young girl– Jeanette– growing up in a Pentecostal Christian household, and her journey of coming to discover herself and her sexuality. Rejecting her mother’s wish for her to become a missionary; the protagonist discovers she has “unnatural passions”– an attraction to other women that is contrary to what her Christian society would accept from her. The same context that *Oranges* arises from captures the struggle of many people in faith communities today. *Oranges* offers an account of negotiations of faith, gender, and sexuality. *Oranges* deals sensitively and assertively with



sexuality and religion. By this I mean that while reading the novel I was forced to think critically about sexuality, church, and family relations. In *Oranges* there is a struggle between the protagonist's emotions and desire; and her conflict with family and the church, as she resists pressure to submit to heterosexuality. Winterson, drawing on her personal experience of coming-out in a hostile community, in the novel offers a critical language in relating to the theological and social discourses that shaped her life. This novel is one to be read carefully because the struggles of the fictional character are partly a lived reality (autobiography) of the story of Jeanette Winterson, the author herself. In *Oranges*, she offers unapparent resources that can only be found through a close reading her work, in terms of speaking about sexuality and promotion of the value of personal faith. *Oranges* offers us a real story and lived experience of what it entails to be homosexual and be part of the Christian faith community.

It is my view that a critical reading of Winterson's book *Oranges*, offers avenues for reflection on sexuality for faith communities within the post-colonial African church. Historically, in England, based on the date on the publication on *Oranges* – 1985– there was much violence and rejection offered to those who identified and were identified as gay (Keele 2010). During the 1980s Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government passed a law stating that, "One shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" nor "promote the teaching in any government maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a possible family relationship" (Local Government Act 1988 (c9) Section 28). Therefore, the value of the work of Winterson can be best understood through an appreciation that *Oranges* as a text flourished despite the historical setting. The ability of Winterson to publish this novel in the context of heated discussions about sexuality in England is a testimony to the ability of the author to write and articulate homosexuality in a way that moves beyond the traditional church and state confines of the debate.

The novel *Oranges* is one of a number of books written by Winterson. Some of the other book titles are *Sexing the Cherry* (1981), *Written on the Body* (1993), *The Power Book* (2000), *Why be Happy when you can be normal* (2011), to mention but a few. *Sexing the Cherry* (1981) is about Jordan, an adopted boy who is the main character in the book. The novel attempts to interrogate the relationship between mother and son over the years. Jordan falls in love with a 'wild' woman. Some of the themes that emerge in this book are related to parent-child relations, love, and travel. *Written on the body* (1993) is a novel about love and

arousal. The protagonist is nameless and genderless. There is an attempt to remove all stereotypes that can hinder free flow of love. The themes vary from gender-non conforming identity to the value of the body. The *Power Book* (2000) is fictional story about a world in which you can control everything you do for one day. The novel centers on the theme of love of a married woman. The last book, *Why be Happy When You Can Be Normal* (2011), is a memoir of Winterson's life. It refers back to *Oranges* often, and is by many seen as the 'more truthful' version of *Oranges*. The themes that emerge in *Why be Happy When You Can Be Normal* are searching for birth mother, a language for expressing sexuality and lesbian identity. In all above work Winterson deals with aspects of the body, sex, love, risk and stereotypes that affect love. Identity, family and faith repeatedly arise as themes in the novel *Oranges*.

Winterson draws her readers in on the importance of the language through which sex and sexuality is expressed. Allowing distinction in terms of sexual orientation, sexual acts, and gender constructs, creates a space to address the lack of language on the lived experiences of the LGBTIQ community. The absence of positive language on being gay is well documented by Butler and Astbury (2004). Also Soeteker et al (2015) argues that despite the South-African Constitution that is set to protect the LGBTIQ community, homosexuals continue to be discriminated against for expressing and living out who they are. Reddy and Stanford (2002) argue that language is key in representing experience. When naming the experiences of people who identify as LGBTIQ– as is done so powerfully by Winterson in *Oranges*– there is always the risk of being excluded from society because of their overt-expression orientation (Reddy and Stanford 2002). Similarly, Arnfred (2004) in the edited volume *Rethinking Sexualities*, shows how sex has historically been portrayed as unusual, self-denying and evil in both the colonial and post-colonial era, and that a new framing and discourse is needed in discussion of religion and sexuality in Africa. To change this norm, she points out that Africa should openly consider sexuality 'LGBTIQ' as a subject worth dialogue (Arnfred 2004).

## **1.2 The context: Sexuality and the church in Africa**

According to Epprecht (1998) homosexuality was frowned upon in Africa because the social responsibility of men and women in African community was to marry and have children and

failure to adhere meant you were a type of outcast in the community. Likewise, Mbiti (1999) argues that marriage and childbearing were at the center of being African and your whole-world was oriented around this reality. The silence on homosexuality in Africa is also evidenced by Essien and Aderinto (2009). Van Klinken and Gunda argue that “the mental image of two same sex members of the community in a sexual act disrupts social conventions and causes discomfort, therefore making social co-existence difficult” (2012:127). 38 of the 53 African states have ruled consensual same-sex acts as illegal and have punishments varying from a few years to a life time in prison (Msibi 2011:6). Some scholars have suggested that the passing of such laws instigates hate crimes and violence against queer persons (Bunting 2010, Ewins 2011). In a report *Laws on Homosexuality in African Nations* (2014), forty-nine African countries criminalized homosexuality arguing marriage was an institution only for persons of the opposite sex.

Within the Sub-Saharan region, there remains a disagreement in stances towards homosexuality. Looking at a report on forty-nine African countries' laws are made showing how it is illegal to engage in consensual gay sex and South Africa is the only country that positively allows same-sex marriages (Kohut 2013). Even within South Africa, where it is legal to for the people of the same-sex to marry there are still many recorded hate crimes (Muholi 2009; Mkhize 2010). However, despite the progressive legal framework related to the protection of sexual identity under South African law, Mpho Tutu and Ecclesia de Lange (both from historically progressive churches) have experienced discrimination and expulsion from their churches. For example, Mpho Tutu van Furth who belongs to the Anglican Church, had to let go of her ordination license as the institution could not allow her to serve and embrace her sexual orientation (*BBC News: Mpho Tutu choosing between the church and being gay* 2016). Similarly, Ecclesia De Langa, a Methodist minister was fired from ministry and service after marrying her partner Amanda. Unlike Mpho Tutu, who has not taken the matter further, but battled it personally, Ecclesia made a court appeal for being unjustly treated (Vos 2015). Her terms of fighting for this are linked to the South African Constitution quoted earlier of both 1996 and 2006 of South Africa being a country that acknowledges same-sex marriages. Her case remains unresolved since 2015. These stories show the uneasiness around the church on the issue of homosexuality as a sexual orientation and as a sexual act and how the church continues to speak incoherently on its position on homosexuality. That the LGBTIQ community remains vulnerable even in countries like South Africa where homosexuality is legal, is an indication of the hue task still ahead of the

church in Africa in dealing with the matter regardless of denomination or country. Despite rampant hate-crimes against homosexuals, many churches continue to exclude queer persons from fellowship (Iiyayambwa 2012, Santo 2014). These and many other stories show a need to continue dialogue openly and finding more suitable language to talk about homosexuality.

### **1.3 Research focus**

The study presents a close reading of *Oranges*, within the context of the post-colonial African church. This reading of the novel challenges what appears as normative in relation to sexuality. In this study I examine how sexuality and religion are articulated in the novel *Oranges*, and read it in context of contestation over the place and identity of LGBTIQ persons in the church in Africa.

#### ***Research Question***

In what ways does Winterson's articulation of sexuality and religion in *Oranges are not the only fruit* intersect with contestations over sexuality in the postcolonial African church?

#### ***Objectives of the Study***

- (a) How does Winterson articulate and interrogate religion and sexuality in *Oranges are not the Only fruit*
- (b) What are the dominant theological and ecclesiastical discourses about sexuality against which Winterson writes? And How does it resonate with the contemporary African context?
- (c) How does reading Winterson offer insights into contestations over religion and sexuality in the postcolonial African church?

### **1.4 Postcolonial theory**

In this project I make use of postcolonial theory to problematise both the context and the identity politics that frame debates about sexuality in the postcolonial African church. Postcolonialism is not simply africanization, but is a theoretical frame that critiques practices

of colonial dominance and imperialism. The idea that homosexuality is un-African will find critique from postcolonial theory because such claims are essentialist because it focuses Africans into 'new universals' that in its expulsion of the colonial - are fixed and dogmatic, undermining agency of postcolonial citizens, identity and social reality. Finally, postcolonial theory makes possible an interrogation of the relation of power that frame social relations after colonialism – not just in society but also in the church. Using this theory I will look at what it means to be different and to the minority. I will also focus on hegemony, how the powerful detect what happens to the less powerful. Lastly, I will focus on issues of identity (how one is viewed by self or others, and how language is a tool to liberate or oppress the other. Postcolonial theory allows me to analyze the improvement and remaining oppressive practices in faith communities and in the family when talking about diverse sexual orientations (Gandhi 1998).

Post-colonial theory can be defined as looking into how control by the colonial masters affected the thinking patterns and identity of the colonized. Postcolonial theory focuses particularly on the marginalized and othered groups of society. I posit for the purposes of this theory in my study that the protagonist Jeanette in *Oranges*, who is a lesbian, in the context of this study is the subaltern. This claim is made on the basis that heterosexuality is the dominant orientation within the novel, and that in the context of the novel homosexuality is seen as a spell from Satan/sin (Lloyd-Lee 2004). Drawing on the interrogation of representations, presented by Hall (1997) my examines how homosexuals have been presented by heterosexuals as the 'other sex'. It is the aim of my research to draw and 'offer' space and step aside so the voices of the silenced and lived experiences of the 'marginalized', so that the marginalized can be heard as presented in both the novel *Oranges* and in the post-colonial African church. This raises the issue of agency. I use the term 'offer a space' reluctantly because who am I am, and what position I am in to be able to 'offer' or 'give' agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

## **1.5 Discourse analysis**

In this study, I made use of discourse analysis to present a critical reading of *Oranges*. Discourse analysis views "language use holistically often in combination with other forms of semiotic behavior from the angle of what can broadly refer to as social practices" (Cunnings 2010:122). Cunnig (2010) by this suggests that when looking at a written piece of literature,

every statement, word, choice of writing style, metaphors, allegorical narratives are all important to the bigger narrative and the development of the plot. Within the novel *Oranges* I looked at which story is told, what metaphors and words, and I explore the deeper detailed meaning. The importance of this approach is that it elevates the role played by language in communicating to others and enforcing existing social systems and structures. I relied on Laura Alba-Juez in *Perspectives on Discourse Analysis: Theory and Practice*. Alba-Juez helped me look at (i) “power relations and sexism are manifested in the conversation between men and women”, (ii) The use of irony or metaphor for certain communicative aims (2009: 26).

Using discourse analysis, I found that Winterson uses language in *Oranges* that goes beyond that which can be read in a sentence. She challenges boundaries through a play of words (Stubbs 1983:2). This connects with the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) who focuses on the silences in the construction of a story. Thus, this project focuses on social contexts and use of language. It is my view that language can be a form of resistance and can be used as push back against oppressive systems in a community. This mirrors the view of Fairclough (1989), who asserts that the relationship between society and language cannot be ignored.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter begun by showing the complexity of conceptualizing of sexuality in the novel *Oranges*. In reading *Oranges* (1989), I begun to appreciate the value of art and spoken words. It was challenging to read *Oranges* slowly and carefully, because most of the time when I read fiction, I do so for recreational purposes rather than research purposes. It was also challenging during the preparation of this research to not incorporate her follow-up novel *Why Be Happy When You Can be Normal* (2012), because it was a less dense read and its continuous reference to unresolved issues in *Oranges*. However, eventually focusing on reading *Oranges* (1989) meticulously, I was able to unearth some underlying theological and social perspectives on sexuality in the normative and non-normative. In navigating the post-colonial African church and its engagement with diverse sexualities, I struggled with the conspicuous similarities in these contexts, although they do play out in different ways. My interest when I begun this study was to explore how Christianity ‘deals’ with diverse sexualities.

As I drew towards the end of this research project I began to question my position as an 'outsider' in that I am not part of the LGBTIQ community: rather, I am an ally. I consider it a privilege to be allowed as a researcher to move in this difficult terrain, and this process has been enriching and challenging.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### *Introduction*

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first is a discussion of what has been said about the work of Jeanette Winterson. The second section presents an outline of academic discussions of religion and sexuality at an international level. While there are sexual orientations and practices that are suppressed by religion, there has nevertheless been a gradual inclusion, and some liberating theologies have been developed more recently. The third section looks at sexuality and faith in the African context. In this section I also discuss attitudes and views on homosexuality. The fourth section discusses the framework that shall be used in the analysis of the novel; post-colonial theory, as presented by Said, Spivak and other post-colonial theorists.

### **2.1 What has been said about Winterson's *Oranges*?**

The novel *Oranges* is set in the 1980's England. This period was known famously for the rule by Margaret Thatcher who was a conservative (Stepney 2013). Matos (2014) and Jepson (2010) agree that the novel *Oranges* is a bildungsroman. It is seen as a novel of personal development and coming of age novel. The two differ in that Jepson (2010) insists that Bildungsroman is not only about the coming of age, but a journey to reach personal enlightenment, requiring one to leave society for a while and re-enter back at some point. Matos (2014) dwells on the tension and friction that start when the protagonist in the novel Jeanette's sexual orientation clashes with her faith. While Jepson (2010) elaborates on the novel as a post-modern narrative of Jeanette's rebellion against the extremely controlling church and the mothers control, for Matos (2014) the novel is about the mother's ritualistic devotion to her church and a desire to steer away from convention and normativity, which would allow *Oranges* to be read as an LGBTIQ literature. Jepson (2010) says the novel splits into two types of rebellion: the mothers and the daughters. In their own personal journeys they show as desire to fight against what is normative in an attempt to keep personal integrity. Thus Jepson (2010) sees the play as dualist in nature.



Hinds (2003) illustrates that Winterson's novels *Oranges* (1985), and *The Passion* (1996) are highly praised by scholars and feminists. Hinds compares the reading of *Oranges* by the LGBTIQ and heterosexuals to see if there is a difference in the reception. Hinds (2003) thematically looks at power of institutions (church and family) in controlling sexuality, and he applauds the power of Jeanette to live through intolerance. He subsequently points out that the novel, when it was published, was not seen as an advocacy novel until it was linked to the personal life of the author. Hinds (2003) is skeptical but accommodating of the liberal humanist reading of *Oranges* as it embraces lesbians, which he sees as limiting. Bollinger (1994) views the novel as a maturation story and categories as being auto-biographical in the genre. She argues that the plot runs in two ways: (i) Jeanette attempting to grapple with lesbianism and (ii) Jeanette seeking to maintain a relationship with her mother who is resentful of her sexual orientation (Bollinger 1994). Bollinger (1994) views this dilemma as key in biblical texts, focusing on how the chapters are named by biblical names (Genesis to Ruth). The success of *Oranges*, in her view, is the emphasis on female loyalty in comparison to female development. Bollinger (1994) thus suggests while she acknowledges lesbianism as an orientation in her work the value of the story is in Jeanette's return home towards the end of the novel. Brown (2008) would agree with Bollinger (1994) in that she also sees lesbian articulation as inseparable from the revisionist engagement of the bible. Brown (2008) sees the novel as being about identity and she emphasizes the role of the prophetic voice of the novel in terms of sexuality.

Schmitz (2004) views the novel as important, but focuses her work on the television adaptation of the novel. The two themes that she points out are (i) representation of lesbian love and (ii) the church as an enemy to homosexuality (Schmitz 2004). Ernest (2015) sees the novel as having sexuality at its center. He points to the importance of Jeanette leaving her home and church in order to find her voice. He argues that location matters in the process of establishing identity (Ernest 2015). Carter (1998) agrees with Ernest (2015) by saying that in the novel, the identity and voice of the protagonist are threatened by being in homophobic patriarchal church. Moreover, they also view Jeanette being a preacher (male duty) and her love for women (in the novel, it is normal that males love females) as a form of resistance to the patriarchal system (Carter 1998, Ernest 2015). Carter (1998) raises the pain of an absentee mother as a possible reason for Jeanette's love of other women, and the pain of her adoptee-mother choosing a church over her daughter could be a reason for who she becomes. Delong

(2006) also sees lesbian identity as Jeanette's need to both separate from her mother and yet retain an attachment with her.

Ellam (2006) sees the novel as challenging notions of the biological family, to question the institution of marriage as presented in the novel. Ellam (2006) also picks up on Jeanette's anger towards her adoptive parents. On the other hand, Wiel (2009) focuses in on the value of the story in *Oranges*. It is seen as addressing trauma and identity by using words as art. In this, Winterson is seen to be doing self-narration (Weil 2009). Weil (2009) focuses on the liberating potential of blurring boundaries between fact and fiction in women's autobiographies. Xhonneux (2012) seeks to unveil systems in the novel *Oranges* that make homosexuality invisible. He also says the novel is not only about lesbian Jeanette's coming-out, as this would limit the scope of what the novel carries (Xhonneux 2012). However, the aim should be to inquire about what has kept her (Jeanette and LGBTIQ community today) closeted for this length of time and resist and this in a way will be done to disempower those systems (Xhonneux 2012). Therein lays the interest of my study.

In my project, I aim to explore how the novel *Oranges* can be read as a resource in the post-colonial African Church. Rusk (2002) and Woods (1998) show that this bridge is possible because the novel contains obvious similarities to Winterson's real life. It is my view that this story can be placed in a real context and also read in as part of its genre— auto-fiction— so as to draw meanings from the text that are applicable somehow in a 'real' context. Rusk (2002) challenges the dynamics of heteronormativity, which is something that I also do in this study. Rusk (2002) and Woods (1998) argue that the deliberate ignorance and silences around the homosexual lifestyle cannot be ignored, and that these are the issue that require further discussion and analysis.

It is my view that the above scholars locate Winterson's work *Oranges* as a work of fiction that is suitable to be read as a resource to LGBTIQ communities, and for those wishin to support this community. The scholars I have cited above bring up the family and the church as oppressive institutions. The arising themes vary from identity formulation and assessing the role played by the church and the family in dominantly patriarchal backgrounds. Mullan (2007) argues that in the novel patriarchy is foundational for deciding how to relate to LGBTIQ identities. While Marshall and Hallam (1994) conclude that *Oranges* is a story investigating the moral dilemma of humanity's inhumanity toward others in a community based on a church which is principally a movement that is reliant on people. Like Riesman

(2009) it is my view that the novel *Oranges* is an opportunity to question heteronormativity which is the privileged way of being in the community. He further points to how life cannot be reduced to dualistic relation to objects and people, and challenges the practice of denying the idea that something is wrong or right, good or bad, homosexual or heterosexual (Riesman 2009, 12). It is against these discussions that I seek to explore and discuss the novel. *Oranges* encourages an open minded discussion of what constitutes sex, gender constructs and sexuality, as well as the heteronormative and patriarchal systems that maintain these.

## **2.2 International perspectives on religion and sexuality**

Sexuality and religion has many facets, including, but are not limited to (i) its relationship to women, feminism, LGBTIQ, and men, (ii) its relationship to health such as (HIV/AIDS), (iii) its patriarchal nature, (iv) regulating when and who has sex with who and (v) scripture/religious scripts used as foundation to what happens in a sexual relationship. In this section I will highlight these intersections that show the on-going link between sexuality and religion globally.

Taylor and Snowden (2014) see religious identity as a factor considered when thinking and articulating sexual orientation. In their study that looks at the LGBT persons' connection with Christianity in the UK. In this study, they are paving the way for queer identifying religious youth (Taylor and Snowden 2014). The significance of this study is how they explore the interface of preserving a Christian identity that is not at odds with a queer sexual orientation.

Jones (2013) presents the position of the Evangelical Church as regulating heterosexual sex through teaching abstinence until marriage. She raises issues of gender difference in terms of respect and equality in the church. She also comments on issues of sexual desire and how they are experienced and play out in the lives of both men and women (Jones 2013). Similarly, Laboy and Mururay (2011) discuss problems affecting heterosexual homes, which are contributing to the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS and failure to curb it, namely: (i) marriage-childbearing, (ii) multiple sex partners, (iii) alcohol and drugs and (v) premarital sex. The expectation by the Catholic and Pentecostal church is abstinence before marriage like in the Evangelical Church (Jones 2013).

Aarmor (2010) analyses what it entails to be homosexual and Christian in what is termed post-modern context. She uses Michel Foucault (1986) and Judith Butler (1990) to engage issues

of sex, gender and sexuality. In analyzing the two Armour (2010) presents (i) subjectivity, (ii) value of meta-narratives, (iii) how sexual sin (sodomy) developed in Christianity and questions about if sexual orientation is viewed as a choice from a religious standpoint. She dwells much on the four issues because she argues that Christianity is a global religion and that it continues to threaten life and livelihood of LGBTQ persons (Armour 2010) .

Hunt and Jung (2009), state that religion remains a powerfully influential cultural force that shapes people's lives. Religious belief decides what is deemed as 'good sex' (Hunt and Jung 2009). This work proposes (i) an elimination of silence and secrecy that hovers the bedroom, (ii) deconstruction of religious traditions such as—a reconstruction of what sex is, motherhood as not compulsory and not limiting sexual activity to reproductive activity, and (iii) remove thoughts that suggest erotic, sexual entanglements are spiritually dangerous distractions (Hunt and Jung 2009).

Klein (2011) in a way seeks readers to not accept the control of sexuality from conventional religious narratives. I so doing, Klein (2011) challenges, in particular, the following four normativities (i) that mistrust of erotic energy, (ii) to the idea that one must limit sexual expression and encounters, (iii) heteronormative sexual hierarchies in which body parts like the penis and vagina are seen as the only acceptable form of sexual contact. Through doing this Klein (2011) illustrates how religion continues to control sexuality and sexual practices in a heteronormative fashion.

Rambo (1998) asserts that sexuality has been a prime issue for Christianity and should be accorded a central focus in understanding body and soul problems. He also seeks to revise the understanding of sex as merely demonic, or for pleasure and joy, and suggests that sex is about connecting and intimacy with a loved one regardless of sex or gender. (Rambo 1998) Moreover, Young and Trothen (2015) argue that religion and sexuality evoke strong responses from individuals and groups because religion and sexuality are usually understood as core components of identity. MacDougall (2010) claims studies blame religious ideologies for the restriction and norms imposed on gender and sexuality.

Iglesias and Valdes (1998) purposes to confront the implications of religion in its dogmatic power exercised by churches of sects to sexuality churches or sects. They argue that sexual orientation vis-à-vis religion does not provide an opportunity for interrogation of the interplay between 'nonconforming' sexuality vis-à-vis organized religions. Iglesias and Valdes (1998) suggest that the field of sexuality is broad and cannot be studied universally. Moreover, they

argue that when religion is institutionalized it can be a firm perpetrator of patriarchy, homophobia, white-supremacy and euro-centrism.

According to Grewal and Kaplan (2001) the study of sexuality in the twentieth century was not only politically progressive but resulted due to identity politics. For Grewal and Kaplan (2001), the family as an institution is important because sexual desire and sexual expression have been understood in this context. Grewal and Kaplan (2001) separate LGBTIQ's by sexuality and LGBTIQ by race, class and ethnicity. The way LGBTQ's of different race, class and ethnicity will have the highlighted categorizes as shaping factors in how they articulate and express their sexual identity.

From the above references religion and sexuality have an established relationship globally. I agree with Shipley, who notes that religion and sexuality often appear in conflicting relationships in the public sphere (Shipley 2014). The conflict between the two can be seen when Young (2010) says that religious voices have been at the forefront of opposition to same-sex relations. An example of a religious voice is Kettell (2013), who claims that no Bible believing God fearing Christian would allow practicing homosexuals in their church community. Rubin (1984) points to the importance of discussing sexuality and 'explore' those institutions that cripple full sexual expression. Because of the family being central to sexuality (Grewal and Kaplan 2001), Spina (2016) denies same-sex relations claiming that they undermine notions of the nuclear family. I disagree with the view that because sexuality is rooted in the family and serves primarily the purpose of reproduction, it supports the denial of homosexuality because of the idea of same-sex person unable to reproduce.

Daly (2004) notes that homosexuality is dismissed as inappropriate for Christian (religious) conduct. These homophobic attitudes are 'supported' through particular interpretation of biblical texts (Daly 2004). Comstock (2009) agrees with Daly (2004) by observing that Christian biblical textual interpretations have been used to the oppression of the expression of the LGBTIQ sexual orientation. West (2012) like Erendira (2013) does not expect that in our critical work with religion/religious texts and discussion around sexuality and or sexual orientation we throw out the Bible or the Islamic text. Instead the two scholars seek to re-read the religious texts as a resource to embrace sexuality.

Helman (2007) and Rudy (2011) identify families as potential institutes to harbor homophobia and oppression of expression of same-sex love. The fight is for a sexual ethic that is inclusive, and promotes hospitality despite sexual orientation. Heyward (2011)

advocates for equity in daily relations, both in families and in religious sectors. For Heyward, however, religion is segmented into (i) personal and (ii) social. In this he argues that when practicing religion, there are two parts, namely (i) personal convictions on matters and (ii) communal faith (Heyward 2011). They further argue that the two need to remain apart to maintain and avoid intrusion on other members of community's expression and behavior. Stuart (2003) agrees with Heyward that liberation from such oppression comes from changing the system holistically (Stuart 2003). I argue that if there will be any constructive change in the relation between religion and sexuality, there is a need to explore more on the communal faith in the Christian religious institute to see what has been generalized in-terms of teachings on sexuality.

Turner (2012) points to religious leaders and claims that change is reliant on their roles and positive contributions. However, he argues that they remain ill prepared in dealing with homosexuality, due to absence of progressive education in dealing with homosexuality and sexuality as a whole (Turner 2012). It is my view that the importance of the position taken by religious leaders if approaching religion communally, shapes how the members of the institution engage and embrace same-sex relations. However, if leaders respond negatively to same-sex orientations, this should not limit the members of the institution. On a much larger scale Ohnstad argues that stigma from religious institutes lead lesbians and gays to perceive their sexual orientation as shameful. Lindblom (2015) concurs with Ohnstad (2010) elaborates showing how homophobia causes the need to hide one's identity and not express oneself sexually. The pain of keeping one's sexual orientation as private due to insecurity can cause mental exhaustion, stress and suicidal thoughts to some people. Thus the need for talking about sex openly, especially in faith communities.

### **2.3 Africa, faith and homosexuality**

These are some of the key scholars who deal with African Religion are Mbiti (1970), Magesa (2002), Maluleke (1998), Opoku (1993), Nyamiti (2002), Dopamu (1999), Idowu (1973), Awolalu (1976), Bediako (1995), Dickson (1984), Parratt (2005), Okot p'Bitek (1983) to mention but a few. Within Africa, religion is presented as fundamental and influential in the life of most Africans (Awolalu 1976). Agibji and Swart (2015:1) argue that religion "constitutes an inextricable part of African society". Both Awolalu and Agibji (2015) agree with Aderibigbe (2015) that religion is a crucial component of being African, and that

African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam are the most dominant religions in Africa. Mbiti (1999) maintains that religion invades the social, economic and overall life of most Africans. Kenning (2009) in his work presents statistics that showed that in Africa, 0.1% of people did not pledge allegiance to any form of religion. Chitando (2016) draws attention to the central-active role played by religion in Africa. Therefore, I agree with Butselaar's argument that "religion has not only played a powerful role in Africa and for Africans in the past, but will also be of crucial importance for shaping the future of human life on that continent, 'life in all its fullness'" (2014:229).

While Christianity was looked upon as a foreign religion in Africa, Onaiyekan (1980), Michael (2013) and Parratt (2005) argue instead that Christianity is African. Some scholars have sought a bridge to contextualize and include tradition as part of Christianity and this is known as inculturation (Magesa 2014, Nche and Okwaosa 2016, Ezechi 2011). Ogunleye (2014) argues that this inculturation entails embracing African culture and religion within Christianity. Adamo (2011) who writes from a post-colonial approach argues for an embracing of African Traditional Religion alongside Christianity and treating it with respect. Both Dube (2002) and Gehman (1989) offer a reading of the Bible from an African perspective. Derick (2008), argues that we cannot dwell too much on this concept of African or Christian theology as concepts that are difficult, but rather use them to promote life and hope in the community. Christianity and African tradition have life denying systems such as patriarchy and the unequal relation between women and men, all of which require interrogation and critique (Yusak 2016, Griffiths (2013), Daly 1985, Mugambi 2005).

Sexuality in Africa is often in scholarly literature broken down to health, female and male categories, heterosexual relations, and rejection of homosexuality as un-African and un-Christian or not life promoting. Ahlberg (2011) and Caldwell (1999) argue that there is a link between religious value and sexual conduct. Pointing out that Christian values could be used in curbing what they see as 'problematic' sexual behavior in Africa, they argue this can answer the problems faced by Africa in the context of the advent of HIV/AIDS. Heald (2011) discusses sexuality from the an East African perspective and argues that sexual relations between a male and female form the foundation of a family relation. She also points to how East African culture restrains and control sexual activity asserting that the value of the coitus is in the production of children (Heald 2011). Similarly, West (2007) points to denial of same-sex in Africa as due to the 'inability' to have children.

Tamale (2004) defines sexuality in broad terms and points on how sex in Africa is predominantly celebrated for its purpose of procreation. However, she argues against pivoting heterosexual sex as the only way of living out sexualities as it excludes sex for pleasure and desire (Tamale 2004). Both Tamale (2004) and Thornton (2014) point out how society has rules, norms, and values set to socially organize and control sexuality. At the center of these rules usually is religion and most people, then curb and shape their sexual passion around the religion so as to remain acceptable Bartelink (2016).

Arnfred (2004) argues against the control and denial of female sexuality through things such as female genital mutilation. She promotes feminism and discourses of female agency to liberate women from the contextual patriarchal control of women's sex (Arnfred 2004). Mohanty (1991) argues that the plight of Western feminism and the struggles faced by African women is different as women's sexuality in the third world is looked at as the other sex. Oduyoye (1998) introduces the study and protection of African Women through the formation of the Circle of Concerned Women dealing with contextually African Women problems.

Within Africa much work has been done also on male sexuality, for example by Connell (2005), Lewis (2011), Chitando (2012), Reid and Walker (2005), Epstein (2004), Msibi (2011), Ratele (2013) and Haddad (2001). African Masculinities have been associated with HIV/AIDS, as discussed for example by both Chitando (2012) and Silberschmidt (2004) make this connection. They speak about heterosexual sex and how men endanger women and make them victims of unprotected sex due to cultural rituals (death of husband, brothers inherit wife) and practices (Chitando 2012, Silberschmidt 2004). Chitando and van Klinken (2012) focus on policies and economic, social and political practices in the community that undermine the role and position of men in the community. Epstein (2004) locates masculinities within a context of gender inequalities and analyses relations in a dualistic manner. In this Epstein (2004) dwells on masculine and feminine identities and how they shape social identities and sex is seen as a power issue. Ozugane (2005) breaks masculinity into a discussion of three concepts, namely: (i) Africa – as diverse, different, inequality and presenting complication of language and culture, (ii) theories of masculinity –hegemonic masculinities and how not all men have the same power and opportunities and (iii) gender in Africa –as raising issues of feminist agency, sisterhood, womanhood and motherhood in the context of masculinities.



Ward (2005) argues against the need for males to control sex in Africa. Msibi (2011), in the work *Masculinities and homophobic violence in South Africa* brings masculinities into question. He rejects violence as a way of sidelining homosexuality and Kimmel (2001) agrees.

Msibi (2011) speaks against male constructions of a patriarchal South Africa that construct a situation where so-called effeminate men as seen to be 'betraying' masculinity, and women who appear masculine are seen as challenging the role and place of men. He advocates this in the face of unending rapes to lesbians (corrective-rape), physical violence to gays and verbal harassments to the LGBTIQ in general (msibi 2011). Similarly Ratele (2013) argues that your outward appearance as male or female define how people will relate to you and expect you to behave. By this he suggests that masculinity is not a given, or the possession of the anatomical structure (penis, sperm) that define masculinities, but comparing oneself to another male will position you and provoke you to shift to the more masculine persona (traditional masculinities) (Ratele 2013). Therefore, I agree with Isherwood (2006) who argues that sexuality forms an integral part of identity. Yanyi (1997) argues that socialization in African community to 'heterosexuality' as the normative orientation contributes to the reception of homosexuality. This ties up with Alhberg's view (1994) that sexual identity and orientation is instilled, practiced, directed and socially controlled.

Reid and Walker (2005) argue that the three main issues that African sexualities have to deal with are HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and homosexuality. They argue that this is due to the secrecy around sexuality in Africa, and the effect on this on addressing HIV and homophobic violence (Reid and Walker 2005). The silence around sexualities in Africa, Osha (2011) argues, is due to the violence of colonialism and recorded continued silences are in the process of decolonization. I argue that silences on sexuality in Africa, particularly in relation to religion and faith, can be addressed through engagement with indecent theology and through finding ways of liberating diverse sexualities (heterosexual as the norm) from these concepts (Althaus-Reid 200), Bongmba 2007).

Epprecht (2010) engages with sexuality in Africa and how the subject has made itself into the world of scholarship and fiction in the process of emergence of gay rights discourses. Yet, Chi-Chi (2006) argues that sexuality remains as an underdeveloped field within Sub-Saharan Africa. Adoyo (2012) says that silence around sex is common in most of African culture and she attributes this silence to sex being mystical. It is mystical in the sense that it is not spoken

of (Adeyoyo 2012). She verbalizes the difficulty in talking about sex even in conversations that have to do with heterosexual relations. Moreover, West (1997) attests to such silences around sexualities in general in Africa. Okami and Pendleton (1994) argue that problem of sexuality in Africa is linguistic. Mdlala (2004) says within the African language, in the already almost non-existent language around sex/sexuality, there are many words that are deemed as inappropriate.

Robert Mugabe the current President of Zimbabwe has argues that homosexuality is un-African and immoral (Boykin 2001). Mkwiya (1999) documents politicians of Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria, the Gambia president (Bajaha (2015), Ghanaian president (Cock 2003), criminalizing homosexuality, claiming it is not part of African cultures. While there is much hostility towards homosexuality, and much argumentation that positions homosexuality as un-African Epprecht (2004), documents the history of homosexuality in Africa and argues that claims that homosexuality has not existed in Africa are incorrect. Msibi (2011) endorses homosexuality as part of African sexualities. Lyonga (2014) argues the representation of homosexuality as un-African causes many LGBTIQ to remain closeted in fear of stigma and violent attacks. Lyonga (2014), through an analysis of gay films, argues against negative stereotypes of LGBTIQ communities and individuals. Wieinga (1999) rejects heterosexual sex as the standard sexual relation accepted in Africa.

## **2.4 The church and homosexuality in Africa**

In terms of the church and homosexuality in Africa, Bartelink (2010) argues that mainline churches often shy away from openly addressing sensitive issues around intimacy and sexuality. Phiri (2013) also argues that churches in Zambia have not explained the concept of the image of God in Christian LGBTIQ. Schalkwyk (2002) suggests that looking back onto Christianity to find where the image of God was lost in the identity of women, would be a useful way in which to counter and critique homophobia and patriarchy. Similarly, I argue that this would enable us to see the connectedness of religion to sexuality, and to explore the construction of heteronormativity on the continent as experienced in society.

Theologically Moore (2008) argues that same-sex relationships are sinful and hell-bound. Kehinde (2013) addresses the subject of homosexuality as unacceptable and unnatural, even in regards to the ordination of gay bishops and the recognition of homosexuality within the

church. Akinola (2008) bases his interpretation of the reading of the creation story in Genesis 1:27-28 by arguing that the order set by God is man to woman and doing otherwise would be against God. Similarly, Genesis 19 (story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot), Leviticus 18:21-23, 1Corinthians 6:9, are texts that are deemed to clarify God's dislike for homosexuals. Montoya (2008) argues that homosexuality is a sin because it's viewed as a choice. He argues for the view of homosexuality as a sin on four bases (i) creative order, (ii) God's law, (iii) Disrespect to God's kingdom and (v) sin against God's holiness (Montoya 2008). Like Masango (2002) I believe that conservative churches have misused Christian biblical texts to strengthen their condemnation of homosexuality. Masango (2002) suggests the church should rather than reject and condemn, respond in love and offer healing ministries.

According to the Kwazulu Natal Council Churches' 2015 report on mainline churches response to homosexuality in 2009 the church (i) confirmed that they reject homophobia or discrimination based on sexual orientation (ii) argued that marriage was acceptable but all pastors to decide based on their conscience (iii) that while some may agree to marry and endorse homosexuality others openly dismissed it claiming its un-biblical and not compatible with Christianity, (iv) that banning marriage, embracing the identity, but denying sexual acts among people of same-sex, (v) the question arises that if homosexuality is a sin, why is it not allowed to exist like other sins in the church –in any to condemn expulsion from the church due to sexual orientation. Bohlin (2008) in *Can homosexuals' Change* suggests that homosexuality is a choice and one can change once going through appropriate teaching and counselling (conversion therapy). Reddy (2002) argues against representations of LGBTIQ persons as perverts and sodomites, and claims that these attitudes are the reasons for why homophobia manifests itself through hate-speech and language used against the LGBTIQ.

## **2.5 Postcolonial theory as a theoretical framework**

There are a number of scholars who have dealt with post-colonialism, such as Kennedy (2008), Dirlik (2011), Bhabra (2014), Brauenelin (2014) and Ashcroft (1999). Apart from these, the key scholars are Edward Said (1986), Gayatri Spivak (1999) and Homi Bhabha (1993) whose writings my project draws primarily on. Bhabra (2014) argues that postcolonial theory emerged as a way in which to challenge historical narratives, and to form a critique of historical traditions emanating from Europe. Bhabra's (2014) work focuses on

traditions of post-colonialism and the de-colonial thinking processes of knowledge production. Dirlik (2011) argues that colonialism was also a process through which the identities of both colonizer and colonized were transformed and shaped. I will make use of postcolonial theory in the analysis, and draw on its sensitivity on the marginalized and the othered groups. Postcolonial theory “recognizes that colonial discourse typically rationalizes itself through rigid oppositions such as maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive” (Gandhi 1998:32).

Said (1986) in his book *Orientalism* explores the production of knowledge, and particularly the ways in which the West has produced knowledge about ‘the Orient’. In this, he examines how the West exerted power and control over the “Orient” (e.g. Africa or the less powerful) and how the identities of the West and the Orient are intimately tied together (Said 1986). Said writes that, “identity is who we are, where we come from, what we are is difficult to maintain in exile, we are the other...Silence and discretion veil the hurt” (1986:16). However, although silence can mask hurt and pain, it is also possible that silence is agency. Ashcroft argues “agency refers to the ability to act or perform an action” (Ashcroft 2000:6).

Bhabha (1994) in *Location of Culture* examines understandings of minority cultures in a post-colonial context, and he argues that cultural differences are based on a combination of factors in the process of history transformation, which emboldens the inclusion of less-normative practices in community. In this, he states that social experiences shape change and what is included as cultures. Because of this, Bhabha (1994) insists on the importance of looking at aspects of culture that are formed in the public sphere and the private sector arguing for the public not to impose itself on the home.

In her work Gayatri Spivak (1988) shows how the comparison between one system or practice or people meant to illustrate one as progressive, civilized and better is discouraged by post-colonial studies. Moreover, she critiques ideas about conventional truths and what is termed as reality, and deconstructs these systems by showing the built in bias. In order to do so, Spivak (1988) claims that scholars must unlearn and reject knowledge and systems presented by colonization and maintained through globalization, arguing that this is imperative in addressing patriarchal oppression. Therefore, Spivak (1988) cautions us against over-representation whereby those outside a culture seek to speak and represent the needs of those represented, positing to be clear on the struggle of ‘minority group’. In this project I seek to understand the identity of the protagonist Jeanette in the novel *Oranges* by Winterson

and the experiences of LGBTIQ in the context of post-colonial African church. While I argue favorably for the LGBTIQ, I acknowledge the limitation of my study in that I remain an outsider – I am not an LGBTIQ person.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter summarizes literature on religion and sexuality. The responses and attitudes towards homosexuality vary from (i) open, embracing, (ii) embracing with reservations (iii) outright homophobia and refusal to marry members of the same-sex. While there are non-progressive attitudes, there have been progressive attitudes on homosexuality. Themes that arise in the African context that I will further explore in the remainder of this dissertation include (i) silences (ii) piety, and (iii) identity. It is in the interest of this study to analyze how these play out in the novel in reviewing the language and the relationship between sexuality and religion as presented in the novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Winterson (1985). Through the post-colonial theory as a framework of my study I will look into (i) knowledge, power and forms of resisting the powerful as postulated in *Orientalism* by Said (1985), (ii) I will also look into issues of identity, difference and desire as presented by Spivak (1999) and (iii) in focusing on the minority group (LGBTIQ) I will review their social experiences and narratives. This study observes that while work has been done in the field of LGBTIQ there remains much more to be done, based on the premises of the incoherent voices (i) theologically, (ii) politically (iii) socially in responding to homosexuality. This study offers a close reading of the novel *Oranges* and the African Church and community in its relation to homosexuality.

## Chapter 3: A reading of *Oranges*

*“Sexuality was carefully confined. It moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple lay down the law. The couple imposed itself as a model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy.” (Foucault 1978, 3)*

### ***Introduction***

This chapter begins with an introduction to and overview of *Oranges Are The Not The Only Fruit*, before it moves into a brief review of some of the other books Jeanette Winterson has written. In my overview of *Oranges*, I have selected three key themes for discussion; sexuality, piety, and power. I explore in particular the points of circumventing heteronormativity found the book through exploring four of the novel’s key characters. These characters each represent a way in which the issue of sexuality and religion is navigated in the book.

### **3.1 Introduction to the novel and the author**

*Oranges* is a novel about a young girl– Jeanette– born into a Christian conservative family. The family belongs to and participates in a church that conforms to heterosexual normativities that takes a clear stance against homosexuality. Both Jeanette’s mother and the church struggle to embrace Jeanettes as a lesbian, which can be seen where they refer to lesbianism as an unnatural passion (*Oranges*, p 88). Because of the context that she lives in, Jeanette battles with her sexual orientation and her desires. When she comes to term with the fact that she is attracted to other girls, she also realized that this disrupts the norm in which sexual relationships are seen to only exist males and females. This story is not a model of how to deal with homosexuality in Africa, but the novel integrates all three issues that I work with in my study.

The author of the novel *Oranges*– Jeanette Winterson– has a writing style that uses gender non-conforming language. An example of this can also be seen in one of her other books *Written on the body* (1994). In this book the protagonist remains nameless and genderless throughout the book, but nevertheless experiences love and passion, and is a valid and honoured member of society. Throughout the book Winterson leaves the reader wondering if the protagonist of *Written on the body* is male or female, man or woman. Although it is clear that the protagonist in *Oranges* is a girl, Winterson uses gender non-conforming language in the novel to which brings questions about male and female behaviours and roles.

In *Oranges*, at least in my understanding and background from my upbringing in an African, Ndebele home, gender roles are reversed and Winterson seems to represent women, sometimes, as having male characteristics and roles. For example when she writes that Mrs. Winterson loves to wrestle, that Mrs. Winterson has a dominating personality in such a way that she got to detect what was acceptable at home, that the renovation of the bathroom and building seems to be done by Mrs. Winterson. In my culture all of these activities and behaviours are traditionally given to men. Thus, I argue that the author through the role of Mrs. Winterson unsettles gender identities and norms. Moreover, Winterson’s style of writing challenges the readers to review what is deemed as normative. For example, within the novel, Jeanette the protagonist is able to somehow stand against her pastor and her mother as seen in when they say that her behaviour and way of talking is wrong. Instead of just listening to them, both people that have a lot of power, Jeanette explores new terrain with her thoughts. This can be seen in her remark, “*Knowing Melanie was a much happier thing, so why was I beginning to feel so uncomfortable?*” (*Oranges*, p 101). It is unclear up to this point what shaped Jeanette’s uneasiness with being with Melanie in an intimate way, and what motivated her to be secretive on her visits to Melanie, apart from knowing that her mother knew that they had spent the night together.

This style of writing is unsettling in that it attempts to ascertain what in the structures is a social construct and what is unchangeable, especially in relation to gender roles and norms. One example of this is the question whether Jeanette’s mothers’ views on homosexuality can change, or go against what is normal, since she has non-normative ideas about gender and her relationship with the father in the house. This idea of going against what is seen as normal can also be followed in Jeanette’s resistance and unchanging position in fighting for the then ‘unknown’ unconventional sexual orientation. Jeanette’s preparedness to go to the extent of leaving home and building a life for herself a living suggests a fight for a greater cause. The

protagonist, Jeanette in the novel is an example of someone who does not stick to conventional ways of being. She is unconventional in her relationship with Melanie a girl and later in her relationship with Katy.

*Oranges* falls under the literary genre known as auto-fiction. The value of the genre used by the author is that one can move between fiction and real life stories (biography) without being dismissed as overly emotional or personal. This style in my view promotes critical distance as the author is able to offer space for readers to fill in ‘gaps’, and it involves us as readers in the story. When explaining her choice of genre in her writing Winterson has said;

*“I believe in fiction and the power of stories because that way we speak in tongues. We are not silenced. All of us, when in deep trauma, find we hesitate, we stammer; there are long pauses in our speech. The thing is stuck. We get our language back through the language of others. We can turn to the poem. We can open the book. Somebody has been there for us and deep-dived the words” (Why Be Happy When you can be Normal 2012:52).*

Auto-fiction is, defined as “a fictional narrative involving what is called the protocol of triple identity, that is to say, the author is also both the narrator and the main protagonist” (D’Haen 2015:2). This is perfect definition because in *Oranges*, the protagonist’s name is Jeanette, which is the same name as the author. Also, as D’Haen states, “auto-fiction has the form of a novel which comes close to actual biography without spoiling itself” (2015:2). Although it is difficult to decide what is particularly the real life of Winterson and the fiction part, the uncertainty of not knowing which is what kept me as the reader intrigued and I kept wondering about this when I read the novel.

Farmer (2014) would criticize Winterson for her style of writing because he would consider her as having written fictionality which he argues is not the same as fictional. According to Farmer “Fictionality is fiction by intention. A book is fiction by intention if the author has knowingly made it factually untrue but also warned his readers that he has done this” (2014:3). Further it is clear that any story is fictional if it is not identical with real events, and the reader too has to know this. This disqualifies the assumption that *Oranges* is fictional and thus it is important to state that it is auto-fictional. According to Farmer “If the author does not inform the reader that the story is not true, the result will be fraud not fiction...The criterion for fictionality then is not the lack of identity and real events but also a warning that no such identity exists” (2014:3).



In *Oranges* this does not happen. In the follow up novel *Why Be Happy* Winterson dismisses *Oranges* as fictional. When talking about it and why *Oranges* is not 'true' she said that;

*"I had lines inside me, a string of guiding lights. I had language. Fiction and poetry are doses, medicines. What they heal is the rupture reality makes on the imagination. I had been damaged, and a very important part of me had been destroyed - that was my reality, the facts of my life. But on the other side of the facts was who I could be, how I could feel. And as long as I had words for that, images for that, stories for that, then I wasn't lost"* (*Why Be Happy When you can be Normal* 2012, 43).

For Winterson, the only way to discuss the difficult subject of religion and sexuality was a play with words. Beyond doubt in the oppressive non-open minded community that the story is setup, she would never have been able to send the message across. Her style is intentional and successful as it reaches people of all groups.

Winterson is valued as a writer for her magical play of words. She does not give clear answers or solutions but through her poetic choice of words, empowers the reader to participate and make personal conclusions. This is why I believe that the novel is of particular value to the focus of my study. The novel I believe, allows for the exploration of nuances around heteronormativity and the religious and family structures that suppress diverse sexualities. Winterson, when talking about fiction and her word, has said that "I believe in fiction and the power of stories because that way we speak in tongues. We are not silenced. We get our language back through the language of others" (*Why Be Happy When you can be Normal* 2012:52). From this quote I acknowledge the value of stories. This is not new to me, and it was an important part of my upbringing. Through stories were used to teach and shape our conduct; a story, whether fictional or true, allows for successful learning in an unconventional manner.

Winterson further says,

*"fiction and poetry are doses, medicines. What they heal is the rupture reality makes on imagination. I had been damaged, and a very important part of me had been destroyed, that was my reality, the facts of my life. But on the other side of the facts was who I could be, how I could feel. And as long as I had words for that, images for that, stories for that then I wasn't lost"* (*Why Be Happy When you can be Normal* 2012:43).

In my understanding of Winterson, storytelling helps one share parts of one's life that are otherwise hard to share, in this way telling stories can also have a healing factor. Fiction gives the writer a sense of control in that they can control how much they divulge, and what they chose to not write about. Fiction also allows you as the writer to visualize a world where everything is possible, the novel can be an alternative reality, and, with changing contexts, possibly transfer this to the real world.

My involvement as a reader in the African context is that I value story-telling and it has been in our tradition to tell stories to teach, warn and address (McLellan 2002; Reamy 2002). The benefits of story-telling include but are not limited to: (i) the ability to capture information that is unspoken of (Snowden 1999), (ii) it is an easy way to not forget important information (Wilkins 1984) and (iii) stories engage reason and emotion simultaneously (James and Minnis 2004). When discussing Winterson's style of writing, Sautour argues that "dissonance indicates the degree of discontinuity and lack of clear-cut identity politics in Winterson's writing. She indeed complicates her authorial identity more than she elucidates it..." (2014:1). It is my understanding that Sautour sees the author of both the novel *Oranges* (1985) and *Why be Happy* (2015) to be intentionally blurring and obscuring her identity in *Oranges*, as a way to try to make the book suit the context she was writing in. The terrain she negotiates leaves her in 'different' place, however. I applaud this style of writing as it probed her readers to begin to ask the hard questions around (i) her orientation, (ii) her family (mother) and (iii) institutions she was involved in such as the church. In my opinion, what Winterson seeks to achieve by this style of writing is to resist the dominant view that women write from experience while men write boldly and widely as thinkers (Sautour 2014). Winterson possibly opted for auto-fiction to be her literary genre for *Oranges* as a way of resisting existing assumption around female writings as emotional and unscientific or substantial. Therefore, through her style of writing Winterson is subverting gender binaries and producing non-gender conforming literature.

### **3.2 Four figures of sexuality in *Oranges***

Winterson (1985) is applauded for her initiation to dialogue about sex, faith and family, though she offers no set answers for how to deal intersect and resolve key issues around

diverse sexualities. To discuss this I will use four characters namely (i) Miss Jewsbury, (ii) Melanie, (iii) Katy and (iv) Jeanette to show how different sexualities are reflected.

### ***3.2.1 Miss Jewsbury – the closeted lesbian***

Miss Jewsbury is introduced as the character who plays the oboe and who conducts the Sisterhood choir. almost instantly she is described as clever and unholy. While this shows that she is involved in the functioning of the church it is unclear why she is referred to as unholy. It appears coincidental though that she is the one who decodes correctly what is happening to Jeanette during the time that she is supposedly ‘deaf’.. The significance of this period where Jeanette seems to be deaf is that it was at the time of her deafness that Jeanette learnt about her clitoris. Her deafness happened at a time when started to know her own body more intimately. I find it symbolically important that Miss Jewsbury is the one who comes to the aid of Jeanette and gets her access to treatment, instead of dismissing her as experiences as some spiritual event. This makes Miss Jewsbury an important character in the book, and she is placed on the ‘inside’, as someone who helps and supports Jeanette.

Miss Jewsbury radiates skill and expertise on managing to trade safely in the religious space while still maintaining her lesbian sexual identity. This was displayed at the time Jeanette and Melanie are called out for being lesbians in front of the church. As a protector Miss Jewsbury asks themall to calm down, it was as though she knew things would get better. Miss Jewsbury also waits for Jeanette after the meeting to take her to a safe place. While she is appears to be a protector and someone available to Jeanette, Miss Jewsbury also has a personal interest in Jeanette, as seen when she seduces her and takes advantage of Jeanette sexually when she was vulnerable. In this way, Miss Jewsbury acts both protectively and predatory towards Jeanette. Jeanette later expresses disgust for their sexual encounter. The complexity in this is that, of course Jeanette did need Miss Jewsbury and a safe-haven at this juncture, and yes, she did love other girls, but she was not sexually attracted to or interested in Miss Jewsbury at this time. Thus, the way that Miss jewsbury takes advantage of Jeanette is degenerating in that she plays an important role in Jeanette finding herself sexually, yet she also now ‘takes’ that away, because of her power. This could also reflect Miss Jewsbury’s twisted position in that church because, from reading the novel it is apparent that while most members in the church are aware that Miss jewsbury is lesbian she is not expelled or excluded from the church. The ways in which the church restrains her sexuality and her preparedness to align with these expectations, gives what one may term conditional

acceptance. This, to me, is a way of surviving in the conservative church system. While I applaud the availability of Miss Jewsbury and her support for I also recognize that because Miss Jewsbury is a closeted lesbian, she is not willing to completely fight to challenge the status-quo. She keeps herself hidden and in silence, she does not speak about her sexuality, which the church members then also do not do. The silence is vital and serves as a resource for her sexual identity to survive the church system in the novel.

### ***3.2.2 Melanie - a lesbian in a heterosexual relationship***

Melanie is introduced as the first girlfriend that Jeanette is in a relationship with. In explaining the relationship she had with her, Jeanette says that the most important things she got from the relationship was companionship. Jeanette also felt satisfaction in being together with Melanie, and what governed their relationship was more love than their sexual expression for one another. In the novel Melanie is a lesbian who later ‘converts’ to becoming heterosexual, because she does not want to live in a homosexual relationship because it is not acceptable in her context. While she does have feelings of same-sex attraction and desire, the Church tells her she is wrong in feeling this way, and they give her an opportunity to ‘repent’ (*Oranges*, p. 105). This raises the issue of how homosexuality is viewed as a biological fact. There are two aspects of this (1) people are ridiculed from same-sex relations because the ‘natural way’ for getting children is through heterosexual sex and (2) that homosexuality can be ‘cured’ through conversion therapy. This involves an idea of homosexuality as being the result of curiosity, experimentation and efforts to just ‘pass time’, something that has carried negative connotations/ implications for homosexual identity.

Melanie in the first parts of the novel is a lesbian, and she is in a relationship with Jeanette. After this, she ends up as being married to a stereotypically macho-man, a man who was in the army, with whom she has two children. From this, one can conclude that Melanie seems to have been under pressure to be ‘successful’ in reproducing. This again speaks to the biological lens through which homosexuality is viewed and judged. In the novel, Jeanette also argues along similar lines when she says “There were a lot of women, and most of them got married. If they couldn't marry each other, and I didn't think they could, because of having babies, some of them would inevitably have to marry beasts” (*Oranges*, p. 54). In this, Jeanette also suggests that the view in the community was one where women could not marry each other because they would be unable to reproduce. This, I find very interesting and paradoxical, especially considering that even Mrs. Winterson did not reproduce, even though

she was in a heterosexual relationship. Mrs. Winterson was not prepared to bear a child and opted for adoption, which is how Jeanette became her child. It was expected of Mrs. Winterson, as a woman, to be a wife and to bear a child the 'biological' way, but she was not interested.

It remains ambiguous throughout the novel if Melanie still has lesbian feelings after marrying a man, especially because of the jokes she makes about her intimate times with Jeanette, even though she stays in her marriage. Secondly the comment made by Melanie's husband to Jeanette that 'he knew about their lesbian encounter with Melanie but he forgave them' also indicates that the issue has not been resolved. I see this is a form of betrayal, and this is also how Jeanette felt, it is betrayal in representation and depiction of the lesbian desire and presents it as a choice or a game. From Melanie's character one can argue that homosexuality is a feeling you switch on and off, which downplays the weight of if same-sex desire and relationships.

From another perspective one could say the church was the authority that presented Melanie with choices. The choices were expulsion from the church or conforming to the acceptable sexual identity. Therefore the 'betrayal' of her desire and relationship with Jeanette, is not as simple as I may have indicated above, instead in my view what she is negotiating is her faith and her identity for survival and acceptance. Betrayal was not a choice but it was more about securing her existence and sexual orientation. Melanie leaving the sect as a repented lesbian suggests that being a lesbian is a choice, a sin and if you 'like' you are 'obedient' to the Christian fundamentals as presented in the novel *Oranges* you can 'avoid' being lesbian.

### ***3.2.3 Katy – the silent partner***

Katy is the last relationship that Jeanette has in the novel. Jeanette and Katy were in a long relationship, and also found a way to be involved in church work. Prior Katy getting into a relationship with Jeanette we are briefly introduced to her. She is presented as a devout Christian who is focused and hard working. One could confuse the character of Katy for the character Miss Jewsbury, because of their sexual orientations and the fact that they are both active within the church. However, the distinction between Katy and Miss Jewsbury is that Katy is presented as a person of faith, and she seems as a victim of Jeanette's sexuality. While Miss Jewsbury, on the other hand, is the one who victimizes Jeanette. The position of Jeanette as a spiritual church meetings, where she meets Katy, places her in a position of power, making the relationship between her and Katy unequal and complicated. The personal

desire Katy has for Jeanette could be also due to Jeanettes position of power. It could then be clear why the Church, does nothing Katy after finding them both in what was obviously a sexual moment. Jeanette is the one who has to deal with the consequences and punishment for the relationship between the two, as Jeanette is seen as the agressor. The church's silence on Katy's sexuality could be interpreted in different ways, such as: (i) the church silence on her sexuality makes it seem as if it does not exist, an idea that undermines what she experienced while with Jeanette, and (ii) it could mean that the church will gladly house a lesbian so long as she agrees to be 'undercover' as Katy is. In my view Katy comes across as someone who is clear about her sexual orientation, and that the church was in a state of limbo in that it was uncertain how to deal with her. This draws me to conclude that there appears to be a twofold nature to the silencing. By this I mean there are religious expectations that push one to be silent and suppress their sexuality; on the other hand the church itself is silent because it is unsure what to make of the lived reality.

This silence (of sexuality and desire) plays itself out both in heterosexual relations presented and homosexual relations. For an example, it can be seen when Mrs. Winterson is silent about her own sexual experience with Pierre. Even on the day that she eventually gives words to her story, she is apologetic and her identity as a religious person seems to be what causes her silence. Moreover it is symbolic that Jeanette goes deaf at the time of discovering her clitoris. This suggests that the church's silence on sexuality was so loud that Jeanette could not hear her own body. Jeanette's deafness is symbolic of the absence of language to speak and express sexual pleasure and female sexuality. Which is a facet of the limited space for talking about eroticism and pleasure within the context of the church in the novel. On the other hand, the deafness could also be interpreted to mean that the church suffocates Jeanette's body and sexuality so much that she cannot breathe. It is in these silences that one needs to find words, and one can maybe even find the words. The issue here goes goes beyond sexual orientation, into a need for words and and the ability to express oneself sexually.

#### ***3.2.4 Jeanette- the 'out' lesbian protagonist***

Jeanatte is at the centre of everything that happens in the novel and she is connected to all the above named characters. (i) Miss Jewsbury was her friend and supporter and they had a sexual relationship, (ii) Melanie was Jeanette's first girlfriend and through her they discovered the lesbian life, (iii) Katy was Jeanette's last relationship in the novel, and (iv) Mrs. Winterson is Jeanette's mother and most the conflict arises from here as she discloses

that she is lesbian to her. The novel does not pinpoint at what stage Jeanette knew she was lesbian, this could mean that the church in the novel does not believe one is born homosexual and it could mean that it was difficult for Jeanette to access her sexual feelings because of her Christian upbringing. For an example as seen earlier through the 'silences' that weigh down on the people in conservative faith communities, it is uncertain how this shaped Jeanette's behavior and ability to express/suppress her homosexual identity. The importance of Jeanette is her boldness and her identity as an out- lesbian.

Beyond this, it is also key that coming out as lesbian in the context of the novel brought Jeanette loss of security, accommodation, food, shame, discrimination and feelings of loneliness. Precisely all what Jeanette experiences is because of her subordinate position as a child in Mrs. Winterson's home, and as a member of the church. Jeanette experiences pain in negotiating her place in the home and in the church, which ends in rejection and isolation. While some may suggest that it was because of her 'choice' in verbalizing and being open about her sexuality, the isolation is not caused by the identity of being lesbian but it is a consequence of how the family and the church perceive homosexuality. Moreover it is important to consider also the conflictedness in this decision making especially because Jeanette's church occupies a huge part of her upbringing, as does her family. However, it is important to acknowledge that what happens the novel is not standard to all coming-out examples. The church and the family do not always share the same values and position when it comes to the perspectives on homosexuality. The need Jeanette finds for negotiating her place in the church and in the home, and her melancholic tone on returning ,could suggest the unending fight to liberate her sexuality. Ending the *novel Oranges*, with Jeanette married and accepted by the church and family would make it superficial and possibly less meaningful.

All four characters— Miss Jewsbury, Melanie, Katy and Jeanette— reflect how the church as an institution shapes and controls the ability to express oneself sexually and to inhabit non-normative sexual identities. The powerful position of the Church determine who is accepted, who is excluded, and how one has to answer for what is considered 'unacceptable' conduct. On the other hand the characters themselves seem to have a need to remain in the faith community, and of feeling like they belong there and are accepted. For example, in my view nothing stops Miss Jewsbury from leaving the church but she puts effort into remaining 'religiously correct' in the space of the church. Jeanette is brave in so far as owning her sexual identity, but she still yearns for knowing that God is in support of her. She introduces a new dynamic when she separates God from the church; while the church has authority and

the power to expel those that do not adhere to expected sexual conduct, God has the upper hand and more authority, and his approval could mean more than that of the church as an institution.

### **3.3 Power**

Different institutions decide who has authority and holds power over determining what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in any community. Some of the dominant forces of power we see in the novel, are the church, the pastor, the bible, and the mother of Jeanette Mrs. Winterson. In the church the bible plays a key role determining the engagement with sexuality. This can be seen in that (i) Jeanette for a while wrestles mentally with whether to come out as lesbian. She intuitively feels the need to hide her relationship with Melanie in fear of the church's interpretation of the Bible to condone homosexuality, (ii) what Jeanette feared eventually happens when she comes out as lesbian and she is shamed in front of the church. This is done by the pastor in authority and is exerted through the power of the church. The church community pose a question requiring Jeanette to choose if she will remain in the church on the terms of the church, or whether she will leave. Her mother, Mrs. Winterson, takes an instruction from the Pastor, who is an authority in the church, to 'starve' Jeanette to pave way for exorcism. Through this, and her authority and power as Jeanette's mother, Mrs Winterson is able to tie Jeanette and starve her. Later in the novel Mrs Winterson chases Jeanette from home because of her authority as a parent and because Jeanette did not comply with her expectations. One issue that arises from this is the silence of the father throughout this process, and the need Mrs. Winterson feels to explain her position to chase her daughter away. She justifies her decision by saying that she had the backing of the church as an authority.

The church as an institution with authority controls Jeanette in that they manage to separate her from Katy. This goes to an extent where the church asks Jeanette to stop serving and working in the church because of her identity as a lesbian. The harassment Jeanette feels, compels her to leave home. Jeanette's resistance to authority can be seen when she fights for her relationship with God. Jeanette dreams herself as a prisoner while waiting for Melanie. She says;



*“Where am I? Where everyone is who can’t make the ultimate decision, this is the city of lost chances, and this is the room of the final disappointment. You see, you can never climb as high as you like, but if you’ve already made the fundamental mistake you end up here in this room. You can change your role, but never your circumstances” (Oranges, p. 112).*

This imagery presents her as a prisoner of the church authority and religious system. Her body is captured by the normative way of being in the community, which is heteronormativity. Jeanette, while coming of age, learns she is a lesbian and while this is nothing new as she has seen the character Miss Jewsbury who is a lesbian, she nevertheless continues to hide it. In essence Jeanette is not introducing something new into the community, but she is verbalizing and articulating a marginalized orientation. Jeanette seems to suggest a need to fight for your sexuality no matter which authority stands against you, knowing that it is more than a choice, it is who you are.

The bible as an authority, adds power dynamics can also be seen in terms of the use of the bible to place women in the church. Jeanette says,

*“The real problem, it seemed, was going against the teachings of St Paul and allowing women power in the church. Our branch of the church had never thought about it. We’d always had strong women and the women organized everything. Some of us could preach and quite plainly the church was full because of it” (Oranges, p. 135).*

The more patriarchal traditions still sought to hold women back in ministry and exercising their roles freely within the church. However, in the church in the novel the representation of women as powerful and in leadership positions suggests a paradigm shift in a sense because this seems more acceptable than lesbianism. An example of a powerful woman in authority is Mrs. Winterson, yet she herself contradicts the role and place of women by supporting the oppression of women within the church. Despite the fact that the novel is set up in during the rule of Margaret Thatcher in United Kingdom, Mrs. Winterson says (i) Sunday school and sisterhood was their best role in ministry (ii) the preaching of the word belonged to men and (iii) perceives Jeanette as confusing herself by taking up a role as a preacher was probably the reason for breaking God’s law and her ‘perverted sexual expression’ (Oranges, p.136). While the role of women is more progressive it is my view that there remains those women who help keep women locked in the oppressive system. Within the novel, it is Mrs.

Winterson, Melanie and the woman who caught Katy and Jeanette, who support the pastor in his authority to act against Jeanette's lesbianism. Moreover, they insinuate that Jeanette's authority while preaching at the tents gave her access to Katy and other girls. This somehow serves to disqualify their relationship as one between two mutually consenting adults in love.

It is my view that Jeanette's choice to leave the church is a form of rejection of control, to authority which in itself seems unjust. In resisting authority you go away by either leaving the church, the society or the people that oppress your ability to express yourself. After leaving home Jeanette is asked if she still thinks of her mother or of going back home, and she says: "I do think about going back. People do go back, but they do not survive because two realities are claiming them at the same time" (*Oranges*, p. 164). Jeanette here seems to suggest that going back would mean that one would go back to being controlled by the old system- the church, the mother, the pastor. She further says:

*"You can salt your heart or kill your heart, or you can choose between the two realities. There is much pain here. Some people think you can have your cake and eat it. The cake goes moldy and they choke on what's left. Going back after a long time will make you mad, because the people you left behind do not like to think of you changed, they will treat you as they always did, accuse you of being indifferent, when you are only different"* (*Oranges*, p. 171).

By these words Jeanette suggests that if you stay in the oppressive situation you can lose your identity. There is pain in the process of finding yourself, coming out and establishing yourself and sexual orientation in most communities. Jeanette suggests that you cannot have the best of both worlds, like one cannot hope to stay home in a comfort zone and have 'space' to express yourself sexually in a normatively heterosexual home background until this context is also challenged. Therefore Jeanette argues that in the event that you go back, people in your community may still call you names, and label you because there are not ready to see you grow and change. This suggests that sexual orientation and coming out as a homosexual and the decisions surrounding disclosing your orientation are life changing. Jeanette says

*"There are many forms of love and affection some people can spend their whole lives together without knowing each other's names, because naming is difficult, time consuming and it concerns essences and means power"* (*Oranges*, p.175).

### 3.3 Piety

In this section I will look at how religion is associated with sexuality in the novel. I argue that sexuality is a part of who we are and that it does not reduce our relationship to God. However, I also acknowledge that the church, in the form of members and leaders, has different expectations of what is sexually correct. Conservative Christian depictions of those who fail to adhere to heteronormative guidelines leads to (i) an opportunity for those out of bounds to repent and correct themselves, (ii) silent looks of judgment and discrimination and (iii) excommunication where you are either asked to leave the church or you chose to leave because you cannot stay in such an unwelcoming environments. The church that is presented in *Oranges* promotes heterosexuality as normative, and an idea where sexual expression is meant to lead to reproduction. In this section I will briefly look at when and how those who fall outside the norm are treated.

When the lesbian relationship between Melanie and Jeanette is discovered Jeanette finds herself having to choose between (i) repenting, which meant leaving her homo-orientation and becoming heterosexual as a condition for God's forgiveness and (ii) not repenting, because there is nothing to repent for as this is who she is and this is her orientation. However, in reading closely this I find that Winterson also suggests that it is impossible in the world of the novel to be Christian and homosexual because that means you do not love God. I argue that such an approach to Christian faith and diverse sexualities is limited and this is a standard that the church puts, not God. Because of this representation Jeanette has to make a distinction between the church as God, or God *of* the church. She chooses God of the church and builds on their relationship. This can be seen when she says "I loved God and I loved the church, but I began to see that as more and more complicated" (*Oranges*, p. 129). However, Jeanette also clearly spells out that Christianity is not one big entity, but there is the church and God as two entities. In a later remark she says, "I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes" (*Oranges*, p. 175) These comments are made towards the end of the novel. This is important because she seems to maintain and have a special bond and relation with God despite her many fall-outs with the church and its members. Proving that those who desire to be in the church and in relation with the Christian God should not be hindered, and that the church itself should have a space for all, irrespective of their sexual orientation.

I value that in Jeanette's personal plight to coming out and embracing her sexual identity, Jeanette does not feel scared to take up a role in missionary preaching and evangelistic work. In her observation of her relationship with Katy she says "She was my most uncomplicated love affair and I loved her because of it" (*Oranges*, p. 126). This shows that despite her loss of Melanie in her life and being reinstated to work in the church and then meeting Katy was not a concern for her at all in terms of her ministry or her relationship with God. In her mind Jeanette saw her sexual orientation as separate from her church life and she was able to light heartedly compare her love for Melanie to her love for God. Jeanette's ability to be able to see no conflict between with her sexual orientation and her relationship to God, is an indication of her strength. I argue, though that the distinction Jeanette makes between the church and God does not alleviate social responsibility of leaders in how they relate to people in the community.

Jeanette's separation between the church and God, it may be because Jeanette possibly has not given up on the church as an institution. This can be seen when she says that church can change if it thinks more carefully about its instincts and attitudes (*Oranges*, p. 129). The harsh position of the church in the novel is one not to be used as a model for how to relate to persons of diverse sexual orientations, as the position presented in *Oranges* is homophobic and an inhumane way of relating to people. For an example, homosexuality as spoken about by Jeanette's mother as preposterous. Mrs. Winterson says "I made her ill, made the house ill and brought evil into the church" (*Oranges*, p. 128). It remains a question to be pondered on what part of Jeanette's orientation made her sick or made the house 'ill' and how homosexuality can be concluded to be an evil in the church. All these insinuations leaves one feeling alone on the inside as community refuses to be in association. Because of this attitude that you make the house ill have found themselves homeless after the family cannot stand you anymore. Since homosexuality is presented as an evil you are called to repent and change if you are to have a place in the church. It is my view that these are all positions that none of us should find ourselves in whether is homophobia from family, faith institutions or society.

Elsie, in my view, is a model of a positive engagement with homosexuality in the church. This is evidenced by the fact that Elsie fought and defended Jeanette on the day she was to be chased from home. Jeanette says about Elsie, "She knew what was happening, but still held me close...inviting her unreservedly to her house like usual" (*Oranges*, p. 134). Despite what she knew Elsie asked no questions of Jeanette and they did not discuss the rights or wrongs or anything. Elsie looked after Jeanette by giving her what she needed the most, ordinary time

with a friend. This was after the Melanie incident and the Katy incident, yet Elsie's love and support for Jeanette remained unchanged.

It is also true in some cases that because of the rejection from the church some homosexuals find themselves asking God to rid them of those feelings. For example one instance Jeanette asks God to assist "when she'd gone, I pulled up my knees under my chin, and begged the Lord to set me free" (*Oranges*, p. 123). This to me is an important stage wherein the Jeanette battles to get to a point of accepting her sexuality.

The process before one finds themselves and ones sexual orientation and identity, and is able to withstand negative talk from a society that is negative, is a very painful and lonely period. This can be seen when Jeanette says.

*"So at dusk you say goodbye to the place you love, not knowing if you can ever return, knowing you can never return the same way as this. It may be some other day that you will open a gate by chance and find yourself again on the other side of the wall" (Oranges, p. 126)*

In the novel this was a period of reflection wherein Jeanette had to leave home. Leaving home for her was not because she liked being rebellious, but because she needed to go a place where she could fully discover herself and understand her sexuality and her body. The reference to the gate and wall speaks of sexual boundaries that she eventually was able to bring down. Jeanette expresses the inner turmoil as she has to forgo her church fellowship for a while, attempting to find a space for both her and her sexuality. Despite all forms of bias, especially as projected by the church in the novel, fellowship remains an essential part of doing church and fellowship entails constant engagement with people from all walks of life. I argue in my work for the importance of a church that is inclusive for all not a church for heterosexual people and a church for homosexual people.

### **3.3 Sexuality**

Lemon (1993) and Stenbnick (2012) both agree that sexuality involves the body, the feelings one has toward others in a community, social responses to whom you love or receive love, and how you communicate and live out what you feel within. Medlar (1998) elaborates on the importance of fulfilling or living out your sexuality and argues that it embodies the spiritual,

the emotional, and the physical. Through these definitions sexuality is not reduced to the question of orientation and who one has sex with, but a combination. It is my view that sexual acts are not central to any one orientation. While sexual orientation is not limited to whom you have sexual intercourse with, it speaks also of whom you find companionship, partnership and emotional support from. If one's orientation is not accepted or an 'accepted' means of showing love and being loved, Stenbnick (2012) argues that this may be difficult seeing that within all humanity there is an innate need to feel desired and wanted. On the other hand, one may learn that their orientation is unacceptable from verbal demeaning words used, visual rejection of the 'other', and refusals to touch or be in the company of those who are perceived as abnormal (Medlar 1998). In what follows, I will use these definitions to analyze sexuality as repressed, expressed, and perceived in the context of the novel *Oranges*.

In this section I will look at how (i) people speak about the body, sex and feelings. For example, I make the observation that the way the novel *Oranges* opens, is significant.

*"Mrs. Winterson had a mysterious attitude towards the begetting of children, it wasn't that she couldn't do it more that she didn't want to do it. She was very bitter about the virgin Mary getting there first" (Oranges, p. 1)*

It is my view from this that Mrs. Winterson seems uncomfortable with talking about sex and her body, thus her choice of ambiguous language when talking about sex. She speaks as if she does not want ever to take part in sexual acts. This can be seen in that while talking to her daughter about sex she says "Don't let anyone touch you Down There and she pointed to somewhere at the level of her apron pocket" (*Oranges*, p. 91). Mrs Winterson does not ever the vagina or sexual acts by name although it is clear what she is talking about, which I believe is very significant.

Child bearing is normal, at least among women, but Mrs Winterson is openly against having sex, even when it is for the purpose of procreation. She seems not only uncomfortable in her body having sex, but also in anyone else around her having sex. Hence, we find Mrs. Winterson calling gypsies "fornicators" (*Oranges*, p. 5). The term fornicators is a biblical term that is used to talk of 'illicit sexual acts' among people, suggesting that religion shaped a great part of how Mrs Winterson perceived and engaged sexualities.

This leads me to point out that religion is very central in the novel, at least in terms of how Mrs. Winterson is able to express her own and others sexualities. She presents a picture

whereby the flesh and the spirit are in constant competition and success is defined by suppressing one's feelings sexually. This can be seen when "Mrs. Winterson tells a story about a brave person who had despised the fruit of the flesh and worked for the Lord instead (*Oranges*, p. 6). This character is applauded by Mrs. Winterson because this individual does not give into what she terms as 'nameless desires' (*Oranges*, p. 16). In my understanding of the presentation of the story suggests that sex is the fruit of the flesh and that rather than following the flesh one should be wise and ignore the body and feelings and instead work to please God. Mrs. Winterson elaborates her fears of the sexual perversions as can be seen in her refusal for Jeanette to go to school claiming it's a 'breeding ground' of some evil (*Oranges*, p. 17). In another incident Mrs. Winterson is seen protecting Jeanette from the neighbours who are 'fornicating' and tries to close Jeanette's ears so she cannot hear.

Despite the fact that most of the comments on sexuality that come from her mother are projected as negative, Jeanette still expresses herself sexually. This can be seen when Jeanette meets Melanie, (her first girlfriend) for the first time and is attracted to her. Jeanette is in love with Melanie and she finds herself talking about her all the time. This progresses into intimate naked nights spent together, and to countless sleepovers at Elsie's house. A similar incident of expressing oneself sexually, can be seen in the story of Mrs. Winterson and Pierre— the Frenchman. This man had claimed Mrs Winterson to be the most beautiful woman in the world, and she for a time imagined them getting married. This encounter between Mrs Winterson and Pierre seem to be a source of Mrs Winterson's unease around sexuality, as it for her was a sin.

In *Oranges* there are examples whereby sexual expression or assumed sexual expression shapes how people relate and engage with an individual. For example, Mrs. Winterson, when speaking to the neighbor, shows high intolerance for their sexual conduct. Even in her relationship with them she uses the bible as a tool to condemn and judge . One cannot ignore her choice of scriptures such as "The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with ulcers and scurvy, and the itch which cannot be cured" (*Oranges*, p. 56). Mrs. Winterson through this approach continues to exude uneasiness around sexual expression and uses the bible to backup and qualify her uneasiness. This negative attitude is not limited to homosexual relations, but includes heterosexual acts and relationships.

Homophobia can also be seen in that Pastor Finch, upon discovering Jeanette and Melanie's lesbian relationship, shames the two in front of the Church. Church Pastor Finch suggests the

following methods of making amends; (i) the need to accept Jesus and repent from 'sin' and (ii) the refuse to acknowledge their homosexual desires and love God instead. Such an approach is not only homophobic but also pressuring form of heteronormativity. The Church in the novel, through role players such as the pastor and Mrs. Winterson, created a hostile environment for Jeanette, forcing her to eventually leave the church after her relationship with Katy. In the novels homosexuality is presented as a choice rather than as biological. Jeanette when speaking of her orientation says, "While some of our churches forgave me on the admittedly dubious ground that I couldn't help it my mother saw it as a willful act on my part to sell my soul" (*Oranges*, p. 129). In this, one can observe that the church is still struggling to make out what homosexuality is, and how to engage it. Mrs. Winterson view is that homosexuality is evil, and that if you are homosexual you cannot have a proper relationship with God and you are only set for 'hell'.

In fear of being discriminated against and some refrain from 'coming out' and stating openly that one does not conform to heterosexuality as an orientation. An example of this can be seen in the life of Miss Jewsbury. Miss Jewsbury's sexual orientation is revealed when when Jeanette goes deaf, and Miss Jewsbury is the one who discovered that she was deaf and not 'in the Spirit' as the pastor and her mother had concluded (*Oranges*, p. 23). It is at this time that Miss Jewsbury is first referred to as unholy by Mrs. White. Miss Jewsbury is referred to as unholy; calling her unholy is evidence of their discrimination and rejection of homosexuality. Miss Jewsbury sexual orientation can be seen openly in her intimate sexual encounter with after Jeanette is humiliated in the church.

It is my observation that the fear of coming out in such communities leads some individuals get into heterosexual relations in order to fit in and attempt to be in 'normal families'. This can be seen when Jeanette's aunt says "There's what we want, she said, putting down a jack and there's what we get remember that" (*Oranges*, p. 74). This in my view alludes to how at times one may suppress ones sexual feelings and go instead for expressions that are accepted in the community. However the use of 'want' when talking about orientation suggests that living out your sexuality is a luxury and something that one may do without. I argue that *Oranges* challenges nuances around heterosexuality as the only way of being right in the community. Uneasiness around homosexuality can be seen when Jeanette says, "Knowing Melanie was a much happier thing, so why was I beginning to feel so uncomfortable? Why did I not always tell my mother where I stayed at night?" (*Oranges*, p. 101). I believe that



what is uncomfortable for Jeanette is that the community saw her love for Melanie as sinful and unnatural.

### ***Conclusion***

In *Oranges*, sexuality remains partly unexplored in the sense that it is not always clearly spelt out if sexuality is a choice or biological. Moreover, sexualities seem to be a central connector and disconnect in relations within the novel such as: Jeanette and her mother, Melanie and Jeanette, The Church and Jeanette, Katy, the church and Jeanette. However, in terms of piety, the protagonist ensures that she distinguishes between the church and God as two separate bodies. Through this, her orientation does not reduce her spirituality or God's acceptance of her. The bible and the expectations the church has for both heterosexual and homosexual individuals are established by the power the community gives to them otherwise its power and authority means nothing. Leaving the church in my view is a shortcut in a journey of sexual acceptance and church acceptance. Leaving the church to join a so-called 'gay church' is to circumvent and rob churches of an opportunity to grow and challenge themselves to inclusiveness to diverse sexualities.

In this chapter I have discussed these concerns, through an in-depth exploration of the novel *Oranges*. This chapter has illustrated how Jeanette's sexual orientation is controlled by powers outside herself, and that she has to make the hard choice of leaving her family and faith in order to be true to herself. In this, we see Jeanette preserving her personal faith and relationship to God, despite pressure and rejection from her mother and the church community. Chapter 5 explores how the power of the church and family shapes the identity of some of the characters and in so doing attempt to show how identity formulation is reliant on community views and this ideally should be changed.

## Chapter 4: Sexuality and the Post-colonial African Church

*“Homosexuality is compared to a fish bone caught in the church’s throat that the church can neither eject nor swallow entirely” (Nugent 1989:7)*

### **Introduction**

This chapter engages various issues relating to sexuality and power in post-colonial African churches. This chapter discusses of the progressive and retrogressive ways that the church has approached homosexuality. One clear and disturbing perspective on understanding the lived realities of queer person in Africa is captured in the Testimony of FannyAnn Eddy to the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNHCR in 2004 :

*“We do exist. But because of the denial of our existence, we live in constant fear: fear of the police and officials with the power to arrest and detain us simply because of our sexual orientation. For instance, recently a young gay man was arrested in Freetown for being dressed as a woman. He was held in detention for a full week without any charge being brought. Though I personally was able to argue with the authorities to release him, most people like him would have been held indefinitely because there are very few of us who are able to speak up.*

*We live in fear that our families will disown us, as it is not unusual for lesbian, gay bisexual, and transgender people to be forced out of their family homes when their identity becomes known. Many people who are forced from their homes because of their sexual orientation or gender identity are young with nowhere else to go, and thus become homeless, have no food, and resort to sex work in order to survive.*

*We live in fear within our communities, where we face constant harassment and violence from neighbors and others. Their homophobic attacks go unpunished by authorities, further encouraging their discriminatory and violent treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.*

*When African leaders use culture, tradition, religion and societal norms to deny our existence they send a message that tolerates discrimination, violence and overall indignity.”*

(Eddy 2004, speech delivered to the UNHCR)

In the above declaration by Eddy, she raises the following key points (i) how the community she lives in denies the existence of gay persons and how this silences gay persons, almost as if to avoid clashing with the authority of the communities, (ii) how while you ‘talk’ the fear is the consequences that come with coming out could leave one destitute, (iii) the fear or rejection and hate crimes and (iv) that people have used culture, tradition and religion to qualify their ill attitudes against gay persons. This presents a glimpse into the context in which I seek to interrogate the intersection of religion and sexuality in the African Church. Eddy becomes a starting point to a critique of the church in relation to LGBTIQ persons in Africa.

#### **4.1 Sexuality and the post-colonial church**

In doing this study I found that church commentators, clergy and political leaders have commented on a *generalized African sexuality*. It is conceptually inaccurate to generalize that homosexuality is un-African and unchristian. Ndibe (2014), in responding to the use of ‘Africa’ in this generalized way, suggests that it is not possible to speak of exceptional Africanness. Similarly Binta, argues “The claim that homosexuality is ‘un-African’ is quite difficult to digest because with no single African culture, it is near impossible to label anything as fluid as sexuality as solely African or not” (Binta 2009:6). While I am cognizant of such generalization on homosexuality and what constitutes African sexuality, the resources at my disposal engage from this angle.

This study does not focus on *one denomination* of Christianity, because it , as it aims to point to the complexity of religion in Africa and to emphasize the intersection of religion and sexuality as a social phenomenon. Focusing on one denomination in one or two countries reduces the discussion to an ecclesiological/church law matter. It is fairly accurate to say that even within the same denomination in a church there are different positions on homosexuality and on issues such as the ordination of women, all of which vary according to the context. The issue of homosexuality in South Africa is complicated in that while the country ruled

favourably on legal provisions for LGBTIQ persons, different denominations and local communities have received homosexuality inconsistently, in both favourable and unfavourable manners. Moreover, there is what I call an authorial clash, for example the country's constitution is an authority so is the church, yet what happens to those that find themselves in between? In my view, because of this sophistication in one country, I do not focus on one country or denomination as it would not represent the tensions around the discussion around homosexuality as an identity.

The *sociological approach* that I use looks at society at large, rather than a particular aspect of sexuality. Thus, my interest in this subject and context is that despite the recognition in some countries and some churches, sexuality remains a contested issue in as far as LGBTIQ identities are concerned, debates which slides into conversations around 'lifestyle' as envisioned by Christians. It is important to point out that it is not the aim of the study to transform legal rulings, or the ecclesical position of any church or denomination, but to discuss all these from a sociological perspective, to try to understand the common approach to homosexuality.

#### ***4.1.1 Sexuality as contested: un-christian and un-African***

Yip (1997) argues from the position that the general approach to homosexuality and Christianity is that the two are incompatible. It is here that he expresses that most Christian homosexuals resort to believe and be apart of the church from a distance, yet this does not exonerate the need to find peace between their sexual and religious identities (Yip 1997:1). The value of the work of Yip (1997) is his positional view that the church is the stigmatizer, as well as the way in which his work attempts to affirm their diverse sexual identities. Yip (1997) posits that continuing in relation with the church has the challenge that

“In their relationships with the Church, gay Christians are subjected to the Church's vocabulary of motives that labels their lifestyle as unacceptable. In response, gay Christians have to develop an alternative vocabulary of moral motives that label their sexuality and lifestyle as compatible with Christianity” (Yip 1997:4).

However, before fighting this stigma Yip (1997) shows the bible verses that make people view homosexuality unfavourably, such as Genesis 19; Leviticus 18, 22, 20, 13; and Romans 1:26-7. I will not elaborate on these here, suffice to acknowledge that the conventional exegesis of these passages is primarily, though not completely, responsible for the Church's

unfavorable stance on the issue of homosexuality” (Yip 1997). Like Yip (1997) I agree that the first point of call is to invalidate the standard interpretation of these texts on the basis that the texts do not speak about homosexuality as is it spoken of today, and that these texts are read out of their socio-historical context. This also interpretation also suggests that, “there is no contradiction in being homosexual and Christian. The contradiction comes because of the Church's rules and regulations and Church's doctrines. It is the Church who says that love between two men is wrong” (Yip 1997:5). This would also posit that the Church in the work of Yip (1997) is a context of its own and thus the need for its own laws and expectations. Also more substantially, the underlying issue is if what is in question is the church dogma and doctrine, these form the foundation of the church and cannot be changed instantaneously. Therefore analyzing those may be key in the process of their revision and amendment, however, what one may ponder on also is how willing is the Church to sit down and have this conversation. Yip (1997) moreover argues against the hypocritical approach and double standard from the church. This can be seen when he says

“There is this difference between what the institution says and what people are at the grassroots level. So for example the Church, the Vatican would say, 'You can't do this. You mustn't do that. Homosexuality is intrinsically disordered, so on and so forth.' The hierarchy in this country would say, 'Well the Vatican says so, so therefore it should be it 'But if you go and talk to a sympathetic priest ... to me that is critical.. The fact that I find a priest who is understanding towards gays and the Church that officially is not . . . This is a contradiction and hypocrisy” (Yip 1997:10).

I acknowledge that in my work up until I started this project, and saw arguments such as the one presented by Yip (1997), I celebrated those ministers that he would call sympathetic to the homosexual agenda and identities, however this is not enough. This shows how not only do different churches have a different positions towards homosexuality, but even in the internal structure of the church the position of the leaders may not necessarily be the position that the all the leaders adhere to, nor the people at the grassroots.

While the approach used by Yip (1997) focuses on the Church, Mahaffy (1996) seeks to make sense of personal experiences, and he explores the possible failures and successes in embracing identities as both Christian and lesbian. Mahaffy (1996) begins arguing from a position that those who are evangelical and grew up in the church are more likely to experience tension in living and expressing their lesbian orientation. He also argues that it is

true of his study that there was less tension between orientation and lesbian identity among those who became Christian in their adult life; claiming most were prepared to face the conflict rather than forfeit the benefits of being in the Christian fellowship (Mahaffy 1996). It remained unclear, though, why Christian lesbians preferred to work out the tension between the latter than the espoused route of walking away like in the novel *Oranges*.

The approach offered by Mahaffy (1996) would be resorting to. He argues that

“Dissonance arousal linked with personal responsibility leads to a motivation to reduce the tension. This is followed by a change in cognitions and a reduction in dissonance. Some of the practical insight into the specific strategies used to alter cognitions. These included reinterpreting problematic Bible verses, becoming acquainted with other gay Christians, and distinguishing between spirituality and religion” (Mahaffy 1996:400).

It is my view that while many people struggle to make sense of the stern position of the Church, Mahaffy offers more practical ways of changing the normative problematic image such as re-reading Bible verses. Moreover the model suggested Mahaffy (1996) includes what is called identity synthesis. In detail,

“Identity synthesis may be an important predictor of whether a person withstands the pressure to conform to societal norms, The act of coming to terms with a stigmatized identity early in life or choosing an affiliation voluntarily may in fact be a source of strength enabling the individual to affirm, as in this study, both identities” (Mahaffy 1996: 401).

This model suggested by Mahaffy presents a position and opportunity whereby one doesn't have to denounce one's Christian faith, yet is able to remain an adherent of one's sexual orientation. For example, one respondent from the *Metropolitan Community Church* argued, “Being a lesbian and Christian is accepting the unique creation that God created me to be. Love is beautiful no matter how it's expressed. The difference doesn't have to mean sin” (Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000:333). With such conversations and deliberations around sexuality and the church this lays and sets the tone of my reading of the African Church(es) and its response to diverse sexualities.

## 4.2 Church and state authority in regulating sexuality

Stewart (2016) states that there are laws on policies that remain insistent on hostile public perceptions of LGBTIQ identities. He stresses that while there are those countries that condone a homosexual life, South Africa since 1998 is not in this category (Stewart 2016). However, in those countries that do not accept homosexuality the argument is that, ‘a natural union’ should be between a man and a woman and anything else is ‘indecent’. The decision of what is ‘natural’, ‘decent’ is reliant on the authorities, yet I argue, like Altaus-Reid (2000) that nothing is ‘indecent’. She states that

“In indecent theology there are shifts in the structure of sexual feelings which disrobes the underwear of heterosexual theology. A kind of coming- out process in which we are no longer hetero (sexually) neutral” (Altaus Reid 2000, 19).

While we do this theology or nervously dodge this terrain, the report on “The Laws on Homosexuality in Africa Nations” (2014) shows how many countries in Africa frowned upon homosexuality as un-natural. Kretz (2013) says that in parts of Africa, punishments vary from three months to life imprisonments and are partnered with heavy fines. In the piece, *African Church Resist Gay, Call It a Colonial Import* by Fredrick Nwili (2014) argues that African churches and Western Churches are clashing because the assumption for long has been that discourses on homosexuality are the same as colonialism and slavery, insofar as it has been used to regulated black people’s sexuality. I concur with Kirk (2015) that the effect of such legislation and rejection of LGBTIQ has left the community feeling vulnerable to persecution. The coupling of legislation with social traditions in the varied contexts has led to many queer citizens feelings of insecure in their own body.

Bangoshe (2008), a black Roman Catholic celibate priest, speaks of the hostile attitude towards couples and relationships of same-sex couples, and how Africa remains unsafe terrain for dwelling. For him, the hostility can be drawn from the silence on the subject and the extremely irrational legislation related to homosexuality is not new to the African context (Bangoshe 2008). As a person who self-declares as gay, but is celibate, he appears to both resist and submit to the church’s control how he should express his sexual identity. While one may posit that his life as a celibate priest was his choice, I argue that his fight against the church as controlling people’s lives sexually may be contradictory because in his own life, he allows the church to control his sexual identity.

While studies by Stewart (2016), Kretz (2013), and Bangoshe (2008) portray the almost non-existent tolerance for homosexuality, recent studies reflect a shift from these stern laws. Kaoma (2016) for example writes that Angola has called for the decriminalization of same-sex relationships, making sure to denounce corrective rape, physical assaults, torture, murder, arbitrary arrests. Mozambique has legalized same-sex marriages, showing signs of hope regarding legislation in Africa as becoming more inclusive. Similarly Totenge writes that, “Gaborone, Botswana recently in a court ruling recognized gays, however, this has sparked outrageous comments and responses from the church rejecting this legislation” (Totenge, 2016, 23). The arguments against this progressive ruling vary from homosexual unions being against God's plan for marriage and family, to more absurd suggestions that the devil seeks to confuse God's order. As I map these changing legislative positions, I recognise that Church and State are not often in the same position with regard to sexuality, nor is the church one unified body that is in agreement.

With regards to legislation on homosexuality, there has often been a division and focus on regulating male homosexuality and female lesbianism. For example, in many African countries, there has been greater hostility towards men who have sex with other men. According to Haddad (2004) this hostility towards gay men and the Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men (MSM) could be driven by that in many parts of Africa, homosexuality has been associated with the advent of HIV/AIDS.<sup>1</sup> There are, for instance, countries that have laws that rule explicitly against MSM– such as Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe (Laws on Homosexuality in African Nations, 2014). King (2016) ascertains that sex between women is not considered illegal nor is it seen as culturally a taboo. According to King (2016) sex between women is considered a childhood practice and women are expected to grow out of it. Similarly, Shoko (1999) argues that “lesbianism, even though unacceptable in society, it could be unconsciously accommodated since the men remained ‘relatively’ blind to it”. It thus seems that lesbian identity is often not recognised as a lifestyle that continues throughout one's life but appears to be viewed as a choice associated with different life stages, and unlike MSM, it is regarded as less disruptive to the general social order..

Also, it is central to note that while the MSM do not necessarily identify as gay, FSF (females-who-have-sex-with-females) are not distinctly lesbian yet there is not separation of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqh6FcYJ6WE>



the two concepts. This relative blindness to lesbianism Shoko (1999) credits to absentee husbands, forcing women to resort to other women for support, emotionally and physically. Similar to Shoko (1999), Epprecht argues that “in a polygamous society, “sexual frustration among neglected junior wives also purportedly led to lesbian-like affairs” (1998:2). Even Mbah and Igariwey of West Africa (2013) also say that lesbians or women marrying women was common in Igbo society. Blessol (2013) points out that there is a separation, in some cultures, between lesbians, and female to female marriages. These female to female wives were for the purposes of inheritance and pro-creation. In such cases, women assume male identities and roles (Blessol 2013). I struggle with the presentation of lesbianism by Shoko because at least in the context that he writes from acceptance of lesbianism is circumstantial and it is only ‘right’ on the terms of a heterosexual home. The men seem to be consenting due to their shortcomings, not the women owning and claiming particular identities and sexualities.

The struggle many of minority sexual orientation faces is negotiating their identity against the powerful social prejudice against being a ‘stereotypical’ queer. In this section I will map a few social and religious articulation related to homosexuality that give a clearer picture of the social, political and ecclesiastical context.

From a political approach Frederick Chiluba, former President of Zambia, argues that “homosexuality is the highest level of depravity. It’s un-biblical and abnormal” (Long, Brown and Cooper 2003:40). Similarly, the Zambian Minister of Justice, Wynter Kabimba, insisted that there is “no room for gays in Zambia” because Zambia is considered a constitutionally, a Christian nation (Namaiko 2013:12). Recently, current President of Zambia, Edgar Lungu, stated that those advocating gay rights will go to hell (Kaunda 2016). This give a wide picture of how the leaders in Zambia view homosexuality as as a form of the corruption of human nature. While all three Zambian politicians argued against homosexuality, two emphasized that this homosexuality was against the scope of God's plan of human relations. The views of homosexuality expressed by these political leaders has wide influence and by virtue of their positions, leaves little room for dialogue and debate.

Mbah and Igariwey (2014) who writes favorably on minority sexual groups in West Africa, suggest that when Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan signed the *Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Pass* into law, it's aimed at two things, namely (i) criminalizing homosexual relations and unions, and (ii) outlawing meetings seen to advocating homosexuality.

Similarly, Nyeck (2016) shows that the *Uganda (East-Africa) the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2013*, prohibits the promotion of homosexuality, as well as same-sex marriage, with the threat of imprisonment of any person or company seen to be supporting sexual diversity. I believe that through the power of the legislation, political leaders in both West Africa and East Africa have taken away the rights of sexual minorities. Moreover, as lifestyle choices are not neutral, I believe that religion, society and culture influence identity and the ability to express oneself.

The dominant representations of resistances to homosexuality appear to rest on the notion of homosexuality as being a 'choice', as opposed to being born as an LGBTIQ. In this regard Robert Mugabe is quoted by Connor as having said:

"I find it extremely outrageous (shockingly bad) and repugnant (unacceptable) to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organisations, like those of homosexuals who offend both against the law of nature and the morals of religious beliefs espoused by our society, should have any advocates in our midst and even elsewhere in the world....If we accept homosexuality as a right as is being argued by the association of sodomists and sexual perverts, what moral fibre shall our society ever have to deny organised drug addicts, or even those given to bestiality, the rights they may claim and allege they possess under the rubrics of individual freedom and human rights?"(Connor 2011:12)

In talking about homosexuals not only does Mugabe use belittling language to describe LGBTIQ persons, he also compares same-sex desire as bestiality and zoophilia. Such associations of homosexuality with bestiality is dismissive of the rights and dignity of LGBTIQ persons. Moreover, according to Stanford and Reddy, "persons of homosexual orientation are made to think that their sexual feelings are not normal" (2014:37). I thus agree that both within a heterosexual orientation and in a homosexual orientation and lifestyle you do not control whom you are attracted to sexually.

In imagining the criminalised status of LGBTIQ person in African States, I concur with Reid (2005) who argues that the rejection of lesbians in many circumstances are informed by the fears of straight black men who fear their manhood is being threatened by lesbians who marry other women. Similarly, Shoko argues that "male homosexuality was discouraged not because it was believed to be evil or immoral, but because of how it impacted on the

patriarchal principle of male sexuality for the purposes of pro-creation. What was de-tested in same-sex intercourse because it was potentially wasteful of male seed” (Shoko 2010:12). What emerged quite clearly from the above discussion of both social and political (legal) objections to sexual diversity in Africa is that it threatens patriarchy and male privilege.

### **4.3 The church and religious values related to sexuality**

The church remains guilty also of homophobia. For example by its use of silence to dismiss the plight of LGBTIQ persons and the open disregard of hurt and violence perpetrated against LGBTIQ persons. This could, for instance, be seen at the funeral of David Kato (Ugandan activist). Kilborne (2015) says the church still picks stories and interprets them to suit their anti-homosexual agenda, such as the Story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the refusal to ‘bury’ Kato (Kilborne 2015,12). The context of this story being situated in Uganda sets the stage for the animosity that was there in terms of how homosexuality was meant to be punishable by murder as people begun to notice it. However, in my observation, it raises the thought that while the debate on whether to embrace or reject homosexuality, clergy (pastors) remain ill-equipped on how to engage meaningfully with LGBTIQ persons. Moreover, the silence of the church when people are hurt is not humane. In motivating for an embracing of homosexual marriages Haskins (2001) says “Same-sex couples were looking for God’s blessings on their unions”. However, he also alluded to the absence of high profile ministry and support for LGBTIQ couples, as there were no documents and policies stipulating what could or could not be offered to same-sex couples.

One progressive yet ambiguous position can be seen when *The Church of England ruled with the House of Bishops* that, “We do not reject those who sincerely believe it is (i.e. A relationship with someone of the same sex) God’s call to them. We stand alongside them in the fellowship of the church, all alike dependent upon the undeserved grace of God” (Nicolson 2008:34). The ‘offered’ leniency seems to hinge on the availability of God’s grace, suggesting there is something wrong that LGBTIQ persons are doing ‘wrong’ or that warrants a need for God’s grace. The question that arises is how many ministers are not able to share in the view of homosexuality as a way of life, but are able to not allow their position to interfere their efficiency in the task of ministry. This can be seen when Abrahams (2016) says “The role of caring ministry in this situation must surely be to remind us of God’s

forgiveness and love. We should not be further alienated by preaching of hatred and violence” (2016:83).

I argue analogously to Tutu, who says, “I came to understand homosexuality as an immutable characteristic like race and gender rather than a choice. This essentialist perception brought him to the conclusion that “discrimination against gays and lesbians was as wrong as that against blacks or women” as in (cited in van Klinken 2012:13). While I agree with his comparison of orientation as unchangeable, like skin colour, Tutu’s fight against homophobia seemed personal as can be seen when he said he would not worship a homophobic God and would rather go to hell than live in a homophobic heaven.<sup>2</sup> His position raised concerns as he is the Archbishop of the Anglican Church and his role during apartheid was noble earning him an powerful and influential role in the political and religious arena in South Africa. It seems almost too coincidental that 3years after this radical position, his daughter Mpho Tutu van Furth is recently married a woman.<sup>3</sup> It is my opinion that whether it is accurate or not that Tutu’s motivation to fight for homosexuality as an acceptable orientation was motivated by knowing that his daughter is lesbian or not, remains highly hypothetical. I believe that many parents find themselves torn between culture, religion, and family values on whether to embrace homosexuality or not, and nothing prepares parents for the ‘possibility’ of an LGBTIQ child. Kaoma argues there continues to be homophobic attitudes enacted against LGBTIQ persons from “the infamous claim that God does not make mistakes one is born either male or female and fails to take into account that some people are born intersex. Suffering the shame associated with being intersex, many families exist in the shadows of secrecy, fear and rejection”(2016:17). Similarly the birth of a child with ambiguous genital organs may appear straightforward with the parents choosing what they desire the child to be, however many find themselves unhappy and secretly suffer this emotions so as not to be an embarrassment.

Looking further into other parts of Africa and their reception of homosexuality, Ibrahim postulates that “while there is contemporaneously no shortage of home-grown homophobia, the recent push against LGBT rights is ideologically and financially supported by conservative Christian groups from the West” (2015:266). It is argued that Africa is not acting on its terms but appears to have inputs from the West. Moreover, while Ibrahim (2015) and Matarazzo (2012) argue that homosexuality appears to have no place because of the bible

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23464694>

<sup>3</sup> <http://city-press.news24.com/Trending/mpho-tutu-weds-in-style-20160508>

and the Christian faith, Haskins (2001) shows various positions in response to homosexuality namely that (i) God loves you but you cannot bless this meeting, (ii) God loves you repent of this terrible sin and (iii) the dominance of violent protests at same-sex wedding claiming homosexuality is a sin and the ceremony is wicked. Nicholas (2008) argues against Haskins (2001) by saying that “No Christian may reject or condemn anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation. It is a sad reality that in some cases Christians have contributed to prejudice, malice and hatred towards those of a homosexual orientation” (Nicholson 2008, 15). I argue that the approach offered by Haskins (2001) and Nicholson (2008) on the ability of ministers to express Gods love, yet condone and not bless the marriage is philosophical, in that what is the possibility of separating the person from who there are. Also Gods love appears conditional on the terms offered by the Christian community.

To explain this reception, Epstein says “the resistance and rebellion against homosexuality is because people do not understand how it works” (2012:4). In elaborating Epstein argues that the discomfort people sometimes feel about the LGBTIQ issues is often gender-oriented, for example, how girls and boys are expected to look stereotypically. Dowie argues that, “the spread of legislation against LGBTI communities has a contagious effect in Africa with nations drawing confidence from the bigotry of their neighbours” (2014:4). It is my understanding that seeing neighbouring countries rejecting homosexuality has appeared as rational grounds not to endorse homosexuality. The risk in going against the normative group decision as a country could place those countries that take the contrary position as an enemy and a target but I argue numbers are not a reflection of precision.

According to a report<sup>4</sup> on the position of homosexuality in Africa the resistance to homosexual relationship is often rooted in ideas that only heterosexual relationships are divinely instituted unions. This *Seventh Day Adventist* position also seems self-contradictory because it speaks of human needs and longings which are love, intimacy, joy, care and appreciation. It is my view that human needs and longings as numbered above should shape whom you are in relationship with and whom you have sexual encounters with the perspective of marriage as lifetime companionship. Fulfilment, love, intimacy and joy do not

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in *An Understanding of Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care, Seventh Day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper*, Voted on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Available online: <https://www.andrews.edu/sem/about/statements/seminary-statement-on-homosexuality-edited-10-8-15-jm-final.pdf>

come packaged in a box, but I hold that different experiences and different encounters offer us care and these attributes are personal and are dependent on individuals.

The result of institutional and country-wide rulings against the LGBTIQ aggravates the normalisation of abuse of LGBTIQ persons. For example King (2016) writes about Fanny Ann Eddy, a Sierra Leone lesbian human rights activist was murdered, and the issues surrounding her death. King argues that while her murder initially considered a hate crime because she was an out vocal lesbian activist, it was later moved from being viewed as a hate crime to revenge of dismissal at work as the arrested suspect was an employee (King 2016). The man suspected of murdering Eddy has not been convicted (King 2016). In my own words this means that Eddy experienced three types of deaths, namely: firstly in her struggle and boldness of owning her orientation, secondly the undignified death that she experiences as she is killed and has her neck broken and thirdly she dies when the suspect is let loose and the hate crime perpetrated against her is dismissed as just a case of a disgruntled work subordinate mate. I hold that the boldness of Eddy can be seen in that Sierra Leone as a country has not legalised homosexuality instead it promotes imprisonment and punishment of any suspected.

However Kaoma argues, “The *African Commission of Human and Peoples Rights* (ACHPR) broke African silence around homophobia and trans-phobia when it condemned acts of violence, discrimination and other human rights violation directed on sexual minorities (LGBGTI)” (2016:16). I believe that this is important, especially considering the deaths of Eric Lembembe, Duduzile Zozo, Patricia Mashigo, Eudy Simelane, Maurice Mjomba, Madieye Diallo, David Kato of activists and LGBTIQ persons who are named and have been hurt in community as posited by Kaoma and Chalwe (2016).

I differ in approach with Nicholas (2008) who says:

“It is important that the church works together to address the many problems that face Africa and the rest of the world. It is tragic that the divisions over homosexuality have dominated the discussion in the church so that on other issues in Africa child slavery, the stoning of women found guilty of adultery, the outbreak of killing in Kenya, the persistence of corruption in government- the church in Africa has on the whole been silent” (Nicolson 2008, 60).

While it is true that the church in Africa has been silent on some issues that require attention , the difficulty and my concern would be to put LGBTIQ on a lower pedestal because homophobia like child slavery continues to be unresolved. I agree with Nicholson that it is correct to point out that there are possibly more pressing issues, such as hunger in Africa, however I am of the opinion that homosexuality is not a problem, it would be like adding heterosexuality to the list above.

Martey (2000) says that liberation theology is “a response to oppressions of Africans by Africans. He concretely refers to the oppression of women, but in this time and age the question arises whether it may also include the oppression of people identifying (or identified) as homosexuals in Africa”. It is my understanding that in the case of discussion of sexual orientation in Africa, it is a site that needs liberation (Thatcher 1993) in that heterosexuals appear to be oppressive to the concept of other forms of sexual expression. The desire of belonging, acceptance and the need to be loved are more than normal needs of all humanity rather and limiting them exclusively to LGBTIQ persons I argue could be a way of mocking the needs of homosexual persons.

Matarrazzo points out that, “Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba says the church has welcomed same-sex couples into his congregation. But it will neither bless nor marry them and the church would not conduct same-sex ceremonies” (2012. 7). On a bigger scale, the Anglican Church of South Africa ruled that it would welcome persons of the same-sex but not marry, or baptise the child from this union but fight to protect against discrimination.<sup>5</sup> What it entails to marry people of the same orientation or bless is unclear in my understanding, and the Anglican Church seems to position itself in a politically safe space. In the language of Archbishop Makgoba he presents a ‘them’ and ‘us’ approach which could be putting one group to be the preferred group as compared to the ‘other’ who cannot marry and whom the child cannot be baptised. Moreover, withholding baptism for a child is discriminatory.

The church continues to be in dialog about what is possible and what is impossible. The Methodist Church of South Africa states that it “will accept persons of the same-sex who are in love and possibly having sex with each other but prohibits same-sex couples who are being

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/anglican-church-says-yes-homosexuals>.

honest and open from entering holy matrimony”.<sup>6</sup> For example, in South Africa within the Methodist church, a report from the Constitutional Court (2015) in says:

“Ms Ecclesia de Lange, the applicant, has approached this Court asking for leave to appeal against a decision of the Supreme Court of Appeal. That decision concerned her suspension and discontinuation as a minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (Church or respondents). The Church suspended and subsequently discontinued her role as an ordained minister after she had publicly announced her intention to marry her same-sex partner.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that South Africa, the country of which De Lange is a citizen, has endorsed same-sex marriage in its legislation since 2006, Church policy still stipulates that it will not accept the marriage. This double standard this shows illustrates that there is more work to be done around the subject. In a similar case to that of De Lange, Mpho Tutu van Furth recently found herself having to relinquish her ministerial role and license because the Anglican Church law of South Africa still does not recognize same-sex marriages.<sup>8</sup> The Church argued that gay clergy is to remain celibate if they wish to retain their positions in the church. Mpho Tutu van Furth transgressed this line by marrying her partner Marceline, which she argues, was a hard thing to do, but her decision was bound by her aim to do the loving thing. Having to choose to embrace ones sexuality or one's faith, I argue, is a difficult place to find yourself in especially knowing that religion is who you are.

Hoad and Martin (2003) argue that there is not enough information from a young age to know about your body and your desires. I believe that this is a very important point, there is a need to talk about sexuality openly from a young age to help children explore and articulate they have. In the work of Reid, Morgan and Martin (2005), some lesbians expressed feelings of displacement and felt the need to migrate in order to be able to live out their same sex-relations however they expressed also how their self-perception shaped their self-identity. It is my view that regardless of orientation, the platform created to openly talk about the body, feelings at puberty, and the changing body, is essential. This I assume will pave the way for discussing all sexualities, preventing negative feelings against one's identity and orientation

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-11-24-the-methodist-church-is-confused-and-irrational/#.WDGYBbJ97IU>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-11-24-the-methodist-church-is-confused-and-irrational/#.WDGYBbJ97IU>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36462240>



that come from self rather than outside persons in the community. Moreover, it is my view that the words in the community used to refer to homosexual persons are derogatory and could lead to the development of negative feelings and images about oneself (Morgan and Wieringa 2004).

Nicholson (2008) argues that the moral responsibility of the church in the debate on whether to embrace or reject homosexuality is to provide pastoral to be given to all regardless of sexual orientation. If the church prohibit same-sex marriages and companionship the church stands responsible to fill the vacuum in their lives by loving unconditionally and providing moral support (nicholson 2008). Shoko (2010) claims homosexuality that homosexuality there when they grew up, that it is unchristian and a foreign phenomenon. Both Mbiti (1973) and Magesa (1977) attest to struggling with embracing homosexuality in Africa on the basis that it is not life giving, and that by embracing homosexuality, humanity would lose its role as co-creators with God. Yet, Nkabinde in Abrahams (2016) says the history of black lesbians had been extremely difficult to uncover until the focus on sangomas emerged. It was not easy to uncover because the males were not interested in this practice. The concept of gay ancestors is a belief that as a girl the spirit of my grandfather is in me, causing one to desire girls and this spirit's relation were found mainly among Zulu traditional healers (Nelson, 2014). The detail on the gay ancestors and sangomas is a very significant observation because in the African Traditional Religion , sangomas played a pivotal role in the well-being and health of the community. . Reid (2000) says that decent theologies struggle for coherence like hetero-patriarchy and while indecent theology challenges the organic assumptions in our theological and economic structures built around the belief in these myths and their functions of obedience. He further suggests that “indecent theology questions the traditional field of decency and supports the multiple structures of life” (Reid 2000:191).

## ***Conclusion***

I argue that in attempting to understand Christianity it is loaded with the pressure and expectation from the African culture. Thus, one may observe that the cause not to embrace homosexual persons. Inversely also the culture justifies its rejection of homosexuality in Christian terms. There is then a lot of finger pointing and no one is willing to take responsibility for their position. This brings out the point that Blessol raises “LGBT persons are not aliens from space or from the West like it is claimed but there are a representation of

our African communities. The LGBTIs are part of Africa through and through and are part of the rich cultural diversity and our friends, neighbors and even grandparents of our African communities (2013:220).

In my understanding the intersection between religion and sex is normative in and thus there is need to analyze how religion can be a resource for sexual freedom and control. I argue that much of this negotiation is located in the actual narratives and memoirs of coming out that are told by LGBTIQ persons on their own terms. I am of the opinion that my contribution as an observer of the LGBTIQ community is not sufficient for meaningful results, though it can make one contribution. Rather a promotion of agency among homosexuals to tell their stories and how they feel God views them and relates to them is what is missing in the literature present. Like Katongole, I argue “all politics are about stories and imaginative stories not only shape how we view reality, but also how we respond to life and indeed the very sort of person we become” (2010:2).

## Chapter 5: Reading *Oranges* (as a text) in the African context

### *Introduction*

This chapter sets out to analyze the text, *Oranges*, in relation to the context of the post-colonial African Church. This chapter also serves a closing discussion for the thesis. While there is always significance to the context that a text arose from and *Oranges* is no exception, in that it reflects the contestations over sexuality in 1080s England. However, most texts also have the ability to exit and be read outside the context that they are produced in, with the view to provide new perspectives on both the text and the next context within which it is being read. In the case of the context that *Oranges* arose from, the novel raises several sensitive issues that can exist outside of the ‘historical’ context. It is my view that the novel *Oranges* can best be appreciated with respect to the animosity against homosexuality in the period that Winterson wrote the novel and the ‘intentionally’ in the context it is being read today.

In this study I have sought to show that *Oranges* can be viewed as a novel that offers ways of resisting the dominant heteronormative culture, and the way in which that context tries to discipline women’s sexuality and lesbianism through religious and social norms. Winterson, like many contemporary queer writers in postcolonial Africa, was located on the margins of society, and she was offering a critical view onto social and religious ideas and ideologies about sexuality. Shanjahan (2014) suggests that those writing from the margins often do so as a way in which to resist, because it exposes the underlying cultural ideas about colonialism and power and it gives opportunity to understand the issues raised in the text differently. For the purposes of this analysis I point out to several types of resistance presented in *Oranges* as the protagonist stand up against dominant cultural values, codes, narratives and behaviors in the text. In looking into the context, I draw on Bhabha (1993) who argues that the act of being yourself of showing self -assertion, in context that is hostile to you is a form of resisting and acting back that also is critical of traditional and colonialism ways to speak and think and write. Through reading this text in the contemporary African Christian context which is increasingly characterized by hostility to LGBTQI person, I set out to explore the following issues as it relates to religion and sexuality: (i) the power of naming and the how the power to name, can produce narratives of silence, (ii) how identity politics in the

postcolonial contexts serve to marginalize sexual diversity and (iii) the postcolonial African church in its three layers - community, institution and personal are implicated in regulating and domesticating sexuality. Through this analysis of *Oranges* I explore how these issues manifest in the African context in which I am located.

Homosexuality for different characters is conceived as, and presented in different ways in *Oranges*. For an example, Mrs. Winterson as a conservative evangelical Christian who saw homosexuality as a willful act to sell your soul to evil, while Jeanette sees it as an accident – something unexpected that she stumbled on. Another theme from the text suggest that some considered homosexuality an undesirable deviance, a choice or an experimental phase. For an example, this is how many cultures have viewed lesbian identity among girls, as something they will grow out of. What is clear from the text is the overarching, but never clearly written, stereotype and ideas of ‘who’ and what is acceptable sexually. In the *Oranges* the power and knowledge to author person and sexuality was upheld by religious ideals, norms and institutions. The book represents a narrative in self-authoring, such as when Winterson writes: “I still didn’t know what to do, wasn’t even sure what the choices were and the conflict seemed clear to everyone but me and nobody seemed likely to explain” (*Oranges* 1985). It seems to me that there is a need to discuss sexuality and diverse sexualities in the post-colonial African Church, which reflect similar contestations over knowledge and power to author, or erase sexuality, as in *Oranges are not the only fruit*.

## **5.2 The power of naming**

Derrida (197) states that language is not ideologically innocent, but always carries within it the interest of the speaker. As such it goes without saying that the process of naming is not a neutral one and a name carries a value of what it is understood to be in society. The meaning of a name can vary with changing backgrounds. For Jeanette naming is (i) time consuming, (ii) different, (iii) concerns essences and (iv) means power (*Oranges*, 1985). *Oranges* is a textual that refuses and resists the attempts to name the type of sexual relationship(s) Jeanette found herself in. Labelling would have made it easy for others to judge her sexual attraction is variously defined as rebellion, and an ‘unnatural passion’. This attempt to fix her sexuality a particularly social or religious knowledge system becomes clear when she is asked what sex is and in responding she does not state her sex, but instead asks if it matters what sex she is (*Oranges* 1985:83). This reflects a tendency to regulate and discipline non-normative and

homosexual sexualities through language and law. Similar debates are typical in postcolonial Africa, where government, churches and anti-gay advocacy groups seek to criminalise or at domesticate and silence discourse on sexual diversity. *Oranges* in this context then is a deconstructing counter-narratives against social, legal and religious authorities that try to domesticate sexual diversities through naming. In reflecting on both the text, *Oranges*, and the context of postcolonial Africa, it would be easy – in contexts where sexual diversity is being silenced and erased - to overlook the disruptive counter-narratives of silence, or self-silencing.

### **5.2.1 Silencing**

In the text *Oranges*, the several types of silences can be seen through different scenes. For an example, by naming Jeanette's sexuality as unnatural, or by the women at the paper shop having 'unnatural passion', the people do not belong and are seen as breaking the 'rules' and societal values. Though silencing LGBTQI sexualities, queer peoples voices and experiences are removed from the discourse. Jeanette also finds herself alone when the church has labeled her as 'demon possessed', 'sinful' and 'breaking the laws'. The type of silencing by the authorities in a community or church queer christian, without companionship, without the church community– Jeanette's only surviving 'imaginary' friend she has dies before the novel ends. Their silence cuts across throughout the novel. For example, Mrs. Winterson remains silent about the adoption of Jeanette as a blight on her reproductive ability as a woman, and Melanie remains silent about the shaming in the embarrassment at church. Winterson forces her reader to consider the silences, and silencing that occur in their own context. Winterson demands that her reader consider the value and meaning of self-silencing. I would argue that in the context of hostility and confrontation as can be seen in Mabvuria and Chigondo (2012) who argue that homosexuals continue to live secluded lives because of discrimination and prejudices, it would be easy for the church to ask queer Christians to tell their stories of alienation. Winterson, through privileging silencing, forces the detractors to reflect on their heteronormative privilege, assumption and ways of knowing. In the context of the postcolonial where the idea of the subaltern speaking is still dominant, self-silencing a form of resistance will prove very challenging.

### **5.2.2 Deafness**

Another theme which is related to silence, is deafness. In *Oranges*, in an attempt to drown out Mrs. Winterson's constant judging and labelling of all her offences she instead up with the

plan to play the piano to cut out the noise. This disempowers her and her authority or she the authority she thought she possessed. On another occasion, Jeanette inexplicably suffers from ear problems that renders her deaf for more than half a year. This must be read, as a deliberate narrative related to the embodiment of resistance to Mrs Winterson's attempts to control her, reform her sexuality and expel her unnatural desires.

I argue that the church is at the center of all that happens in the life of Jeanette and the church has the loudest voice in the novel, especially its position on homosexuality. Elsie's death in the novel, I argue, is symbolic of that the church is the institution that has a possibility to change and be all embracing. Moreover, the age she is when Elise dies suggests that there is a need that the church quickly changes to be more embracing. Especially as time is far spent going round in the dialogue and debates on homosexuality as a normal orientation like heterosexuality. Lastly, Elsie's death could suggest the continued attacks and pains on the LGBTIQ in community who think they have hope for being embraced.

Elsewhere, Winterson offers some insights into the ways that queer Christian have tried to shape resistance to attempt to name and demonise homosexuality through loud public campaigns. For example, within the post-colonial African Church Simon Lokodo of the Uganda declared that he would rather die than kiss a man (Smith 2014). Similarly Gambian president Yahya Jammeh framed homosexuality in dehumanizing terms, declaring homosexuals akin to vermin or disease. All these remarks show continued hostility to the LGBTIQ members who overtly own and are open about their sexual orientation. In these comments there is use of derogatory terminology and expressions of anyone who is named homosexual. It is such attitudes that I argue Winterson through her work *Oranges* attempted to fight. *Oranges* goes further insofar as it engages deafness as a form of refusal and of resistance. She refuses to engage the church and Mrs Winterson's dehumanizing discourse, without participating in a direct confrontation. Through deafness and self-silencing the hypocrisy of heteronormative, evangelical Christian discourse is exposed.

### **5.3 Identity**

In focusing on identity as an out lesbian there are things that one forfeits and it is in the interest of my work to check what those are. Firstly, sometimes out lesbians are left despondent for an example the protagonist Jeanette is one day left with nowhere to go and no

support structure in place to stand with her in the process of finding herself and formulating her identity. Even the person that seems to be the one that is helping her when she is embarrassed and called out in front of the whole church is the one that ends up perpetrating sexual violence against Jeanette. Within the context of the post-colonial African Church queer Christians are vulnerable to expulsion and abuse, very much like Jeanette in *Oranges*. On the one hand they are said to be part of an embracing confessional community, only to discover that the embrace and inclusion is conditional on them being in the closet, or being celibate, or agreeing to conversion therapies. Jeanette lost the church fellowship and role in the community that she had played in a substantive part of her life. While no one dismissed Jeanette directly from the church the church continuously blurred the lines between who she is as a person (identity) and her presence and membership with the church and imposing and seeking to control her life she makes the 'hard choice' of leaving home so that she can be a person of her own not controlled by the power of the church. Likewise the Church appears to benefit from the idea of being inclusive, but maintaining homophobic church practices and liturgical policies, such as the refusal to allow gay clergy to officiate over church service, as in the case of Mpho Tutu-van Vuuren, and Ecclesia De Lange, both of who I have mentioned in this dissertation.

A second dimension of identity is the issue of intersectionality and the postcolonial African church. Jeanette is bold and brave in the face of change. For an example, she says "I am sad for the death of the dog, sad for my death and for all the inevitable dying that comes with change" (*Oranges*, p. 131). The African Christian church suffers from a decolonization paradox insofar as it has sought to recover indigenous culture, ways of knowing and being, as well as its pursuit of gender equity, it has remained stubbornly unresolved on the matter of same-sex relationship which has variously been declared as unAfrican and unchristian. Yet this appears to be done at the very cost of what it means to be the church.

The story of Binyavanga Wainaina in '*I Am Homosexual Mum*' (2014), expresses explicitly how lonely his life has been knowing from the age of 5 that he was gay, but not being able to express himself or verbalize on it until he is about to turn 30 years old speaks of the shame and prejudice that continues to shape LGBTIQ persons' lives in Africa. Through the character Jeanette and stories such as that of Wainaina there is an urgent call to review how better engage we may be with the LGBTIQ community as the post-colonial African Church. The story of Wainaina suggests that for long gay persons may remain in a limbo state, in fear of compromising their African identity and their need to be religiously connected.

## 5.4 Religion and church

In my observation between the text *Oranges*, and the Post-Colonial Africa context, the LGBTIQ persons desire to remain in the faith communities. This shows that while there is that aspects of faith that can be viewed as a resource for the devotional

### 5.4.1 Church as institution

The power of the church can be seen in how identities are formed in how the church and family appear to be ignoring the ‘new her’ (Jeanette). The frustration can be seen in Jeanette lament who says, “Perhaps it was the show/the food or the impossibility of my life that made me hope to go to bed and wake up with the past intact. I seemed to have run in a great circle and I was back at the starting line” (*Oranges*, p. 129). The placement of this lament could be twofold firstly one may view it as showing how discouraged she was by all the fights she had with the church and her family and the losses. However, on the other hand it can be viewed as a call for the church to review where it stands on homosexuality. Within the post-colonial African Church in those churches that view themselves as interacting with LGBTIQ and Rodriguez (2009) divides them into two parts namely (i) gay positive churches and (ii) gay friendly churches. The difference between the two is that the latter vouches for the implicit participation of gays and lesbians, but such churches do not typically address specific religious needs inherent in gay communities. Yet, gay positive churches would meet the needs of the congregants. I am not, however inclined to the division of the churches by orientation, however, I do agree this is a needed arena while the church at large remains indecisive on LGBTIQ persons

The church’s fight with Jeanette in my view was not only against her sexual orientation, lesbianism which challenged the traditional way of being community, but it included her ‘doing’ all supposed male roles in the church. Finally, this suggest that the battle over sexuality is not just about inclusion and exclusion, but really about disturbing the privilege heteronormativity that has shaped and informed church policy and practices for a very long time. Institutionally, it is not simply a matter of incorporating LBGTQI person into the church, but the very idea of who, and what constitutes the church has to be transformed, so much so that homonormativity becomes normative.



## ***Conclusion***

This study argues for the involvement of the LGBTIQ to tell their own stories and state for themselves how they want the church to be more involved in their lives. This means that they engage and not stay silent about what their needs are from both the post-colonial African Church and the community at large. To take away the stories and experiences of the LGBTIQ in society is to slowly cripple their liberation. While an ally can tell the story and advocate a place for them in community like any other member, it is my perspective that their position as ultimately outsiders who look favorably at homosexuals, this empathy does not go a long way. The literature databases are populated by those that write from pity and there is still not enough of personal narratives telling and showing their theology and encounters and how they have had ability to navigate a Christian life is desired with all sexual satisfaction.

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