A. SCHOLARLY RESEARCH, ADVOCACY AND POLITICS

The intellectual origins of contemporary scholarship on homosexuality in southern Africa are threefold. First, from the late 1970s onwards, in labour and social histories. This included pioneering exposure of male homosexuality in militant African gangs and prison networks in the Witwatersrand and in the social structure of migrant labour from across eastern southern Africa to the gold mines and within the mine compounds, and, with reference to female-female relationships, in communities heavily affected by men’s prolonged absences. Much of this work relied heavily on oral interviewing. Second, public health and medical research in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Finally, activist, artistic and creative, and political perspectives on "queer Africa", as having specifically African identities and not simply mimicking the western imaginary of gayness. From these origins has come a rich cross and multi-disciplinary corpus of scholarly work.

Significantly, the international focus on homosexuality in Africa and similar interest amongst South African scholars both commenced in the mid-1990s; when Edwards and Epprecht were, separately, conducting research which now forms the basis of this book. Both were also participants in founding academic seminars, one of which led to the formation of GALA in the late 1990s. Both viewed their respective scholarly research as also part of wider human rights struggles: Epprecht with GALZ and Edwards more directly using historical research as political empowerment.

This book has five key conceptual themes:

- Power and agency: how power is constituted and manifest in and around gender/sexuality, and how forms of human agency seek to counteract that power
- The complex relations between history, memory, and politics and how various forces seek to influence and control how the past is remembered
- Orality and oral history narrations as potential disrupters of dominant forms of knowledge, and the methods used by historians in finding meaning in oral sources
- Binary forms of historical knowledge. Radical historians of contemporary southern Africa and African nationalist politicians have both deployed a binary notion of history. Here complex issues are seen as either or good or bad, straight or bent, right or wrong. In this way the crucial change from settler colonial to post-colonial liberation is viewed as colonial=bad and post-colonial=good, occluding often critical nuances and continuities.
- How indigenous senses of homosexuality are manifest and indicative of significant human agency on the part of the men who are the focus of this study.

B. OUTSIDE OF HISTORY

Our primary focus is on a commonplace binary as promoted by Big Man and populist politics, traditional leaders, and faith-based organisations and movements among others. This is the binary between "African culture" and "the West", in which the former is imagined as essentially without, or denying or repressing, sexual diversity. Homosexuality is seen as a colonial curse with African homosexuals being "outside of history," having no humanity and thus no human agency. We hope that testimony gathered from as long as a century ago can inspire reflection on the more complex
reality, and on how simplistic binaries undermine contemporary struggles for social justice.

C. PEOPLE IN HISTORY

We now wish to introduce two groups of men, and boys, who are this book’s key voices, here speaking to you from across the entire twentieth century.

- **The Izinkotshane zaseGoli (The boy-wives of Johannesburg)**
  In 1907 the colonial government in the Transvaal convened the official Confidential Enquiry into Alleged Prevalence of Unnatural Vice Amongst Natives in Mine Compounds on the Witwatersrand. As the mines re-opened after the South African War ended in 1902, it had eventually become public knowledge that African mine workers, coming from the greater south eastern southern Africa, were living in mine compounds as man and wife. The colonial government and mine authorities were aware of this, preferring to turn a blind eye, as the practise offered many benefits for the gold mining industry struggling to re-establish itself. The 1907 Enquiry was designed to conduct a quick investigation and remove the issue from further public scrutiny and so avoiding any further public outbursts of moral outrage.

African mine workers, Ferreira Gold Mine compound, *circa* 1907

African Witwatersrand gold mine workers’ living quarters, early 20th C
These men were deep level miners; certainly the toughest cheap labour work in southern Africa. Elder men would take younger men (and boys) as their "wives of the mine" (tinconcana etimayinini); they doing domestic chores, being close friends, sleeping partners, and having intracrural sex.
Epprecht consulted the Enquiry record and report, held in the South African National Archives in Pretoria, when researching his work on dissident sexuality in southern Africa. Much of the testimony comes from missionaries, compound managers (white) and “boss boys” (black), including men like Saul Msane, a leading voice in the nascent African nationalist movement. Much of this testimony is speculative, scandalized, and racist or tribalist in tone. Some, however, is provided by men and boys who did not deny having been involved in izinkotshane relationships. This is sometimes quite poignant. As James Ngonyana explained when asked if he knew about the practice, “Yes. The men make love to the younger boys and sleep with them and use them as wives, lying with them from the front, between the thighs. I have never heard that there has been actual sodomy… I did not know it was a crime because when some boys who refused to be practised on complained to the Compound Manager, nothing was done. The boys like being “inkotshane” because of the pay they receive and the money their fathers get. At this mine this practice is very prevalent.” As for ‘Tail’, defending his own relationship, “I love Jasi. We exchange presents and money. I am his “inkotshane”. When he is cold, he sleeps on my chest.”

Once completed, Epprecht’s copied primary source went into a filing cabinet, stored for possible future use.

- **The Izingqingili zaseMkhumbane (The homosexuals of Mkhumbane) and the oral history project**
Researching the social history of Mkhumbane shacklands for his 1990 PhD thesis, Edwards undertook extensive oral history interviewing. Many narrators; black and white, men and women, spoke of a distinct homosexual shack settlement called Emnyameni (“The Place of Darkness”) where the men lived openly and publicly homosexual lives. Mkhumbane and the surrounding Indian-owned areas is remembered for its destruction during apartheid community clearances. This destruction was fiercely resisted by Mkhumbane residents, often led by ever stronger and more militant ANC and ANCWL-led campaigns in Mkhumbane and across the city. Largely non-political and having made enemies within the ANCWL it was during this resistance that the Izingqingili zaseMkhumbane fled Emnyameni and dispersed.

![Mkhumbane, circa 1950s](image)
ANC Women’s League leader confronts SAP commander, Victoria Street Beerhall, June 1959

It was only after 1994 that Edwards was able to meet men of Emnyameni. This came through one of his politically active mature students, given the pseudonym Fieldworker. At that very time the Izingqinqili were meeting on Saturdays at Albert Park, with the head chef at the famed Tropicale Roadhouse being a leading figure in the Izingqinqili revival. The Izingqinqili sought to reconnect with each other, remember their traditions, start a co-operative club and, with ANC political support, publicly ‘come out’. Edwards’ project was designed to assist the Izingqinqili revival.

The Izingqinqili revival: Founding agenda, late 1995
An introduction:

- Fieldworker

Born in Mkhumbane, youthful ANC political activity led to exile as an Umkhonto we Sizwe cadre, and on return part of a cohort of politically active mature students. Became project fieldworker and link person to Izingqilingi and regional ANC.

However the ANC spurned the Izingqilingi. Simultaneously, in mid-1996, Fieldworker sent Edwards a letter describing homosexuality as unchristian and withdrew from the project. A few years later Fieldworker had a letter published in a prominent South Africa newspaper. Here he declared homosexuality a western indulgence foisted on Africans, and exhorted black homosexuals to seek purifying redemption in the Afro-Renaissance. So, an oral history project holding so much promise was cut short for opaque political reasons.

Yet much had already been achieved. In the oral narrations was critically important information challenging established wisdom in South African historiography and, as importantly, myths and prejudice within triumphal contemporary political discourses. From the oral histories, it became clear that Emnyameni was a community of homosexual men establishing their own settlement on the outskirts of the city, during the early 1930s, in order to `come out`. Here they lived, and in the 1950s their settlement was surrounded by and became part of the vast shackland sprawl of Mkhumbane. So every Sunday the residents of and visitors to Mkhumbane would gather at Emnyameni to watch the Izingqilingi celebrate memulo and wedding ceremonies.

Emnyameni thus becomes South Africa’s first homosexual city community; and this a shack settlement not a middle class urban locale. Their weekly weekend festivities were fashioned from various styles: childhood memories of Zulu memulo and weddings, Shembe dancing, and Durban’s male N’goma dancing culture. So here must also, surely, be South Africa’s first `gay pride` celebrations.

But, there the matter rested, an oral history project cut short, now filed away.
D. THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES
The stimulus to recover Edwards and Epprecht’s respective primary sources from filing cabinets came in 2012 with the controversy surrounding celebrated artist Brett Murray’s ‘Hail to the Thief’ exhibition. A critique of the African Big Man’s avarice, corruption and sexual proclivities, within the exhibition was a work entitled ‘The Spear’. This depicted then South African and ANC President Jacob Zuma standing in the image of the classic 1967 poster of Lenin by Viktor Ivanov, but with his genitals well displayed. Murray’s satirical concern about leadership and personal and public probity was quickly turned into an assault on black men’s sexuality - even likening Zuma’s treatment to that of Saartjie Baartman. Edwards wondered whether ‘the emperor has no clothes’, and if the time was not right to revisit the izingqilingi archives as a means of pushing back against racialized and masculinist political demagoguery. Edwards discussed the matter with Constitutional Court Justice Edwin Cameron, providing the full project files for scrutiny. It was with Justice Cameron’s support that the process of creating this book began, with Edwards then reaching out to Epprecht.

The structure of our book is clear but unusual. An introductory essay is followed by two sections, each with identical components: first an essay together with maps and photographs, and then our respective two sets of primary sources. Importantly, the book includes a section on research ethics and methodologies, including our own, and a glossary containing many never before published words and phrases. These are of two origins: from spoken izinkotshane and izingqilingi argots, and also words indicating a pre-modern isiZulu philosophical understanding of observed behavioural difference from heteronorms.

E. ORALITY
Our primary sources are both originally oral in nature. Published here, these allow the reader to understand the importance of orality in allowing us to gain insights into poor ill-educated men and boys’ human agency in the face of hugely disproportionately powerful vested interests.

- 1907 Enquiry
  The Enquiry had its origins in the public disclosures of ‘indecent’ sex practises amongst African mine workers by a Methodist priest, the Rev. Baker, active in proselytizing amongst the mine compounds. Reading the transcripts of the 1907 Enquiry with historical imagination it is possible to
glean important information about the nature of the obvious power imbalances between high-placed white government officials and interviewees, largely very poor and highly vulnerable African men and boys.

There is no record of the methods involved in collecting these interviews. We can surmise that each man appeared individually before the two commissioners with an unidentified translator and a secretary or transcriber by the commissioners’ side plus likely some form of security. The prevailing assumptions seem to be that when a white official asked a question it would be answered truthfully; that the translator could be relied on to render responses in multiple languages accurately into English; that white witnesses could reasonably assure themselves of having an implicit authority of truth and rightness on their side; and that there was no undisclosed agenda that might corrupt the commissioners’ editing process and findings.

Readers will quickly notice that these were certainly all faulty assumptions. The white interviewees were probably all invited with some intimation of them doing their civic duty, or, as in the case of the missionary Rev. Baker, volunteering information because they felt it required urgent attention for the public good. It is likely that some, if not all, the African miners were coached or threatened in advance on what to say or not to say. Factual knowledge on key issues was elusive, not the least of all considering subtleties and euphemisms around the language of sexuality. And then listen, noticing the various means whereby the black miners sought to explain, equivocate, deny, dissemble, divert and otherwise confound openly discussing their valued male-male inkotshane culture, which was after all, the subject of the Enquiry.

- **Izingqilingi zaseMkhumbane oral history project: the narrators**

  - **Introduction**

    - Twenty five years on from the oral history project, all attempts to contact Fieldworker and the narrators have failed. Consequently all have been given pseudonyms, which properly encapsulate their particular narrations, in order to protect their privacy

    - Tip: in the book are edited transcripts of interviews, now printed. To ‘listen’ to an interview transcript avoid merely reading; rather speak (softly) and listen to yourself.

    - Readers of the edited oral interview transcripts should remember that oral interviews involve not just speaking, but performance. My note on one of the original verbatim transcripts reads as follows:

      “The interview is now completely chaotic. Angel has in front of him one of my old framed original late-nineteenth century photographs of a Zulu maiden with beads and feather in her immaculately combed hair and a photograph of Mqenge’s daughter’s memulo. He has taken my Cambodian krama and shaped it into an impressively styled doek. Angel and Fieldworker are excitedly talking over each other, loudly, in isiZulu. All is loud, indistinct, and indecipherable.”

Now let’s meet and listen to the narrators.

- **Man About Town**

  Born on a mission reserve near Durban, with high school education in Durban he becomes a court interpreter and later professional at a
foreign legal aid non-governmental-organisation. He tells of his experience as a young man seeking the favours of young African women domestic servants living and working in Durban’s elite white suburb. It’s here where he encounters izandoqinisi men, employed as domestic servants, and their lovers, and their often now spurned wives. Listen:

“And they were clearly men. Because I was surprised one time when his wife came … in traditional gear. She came on a Saturday and he would not allow her into his room. And then he just took her away.”

- **Mqenge**
  Born in rural Zululand, a poorly educated, functionally illiterate, migrant worker, first a domestic servant rising to become a ‘tycoon’ - a successful tout for a financial services company - and the last leader of the izandoqinisi zaseMkhumbane. His narrations are given from that perspective. Married to Angel during the 1970s. Listen:

  “We homosexuals are using the concept ‘ironing’. We do not use the concept ukusoma. The isikhesan never liked a person who is being ironed and irons. … The mbube likes to iron; he likes to be ironed.”

  “Women! All the time! They felt that this was a threat to their husbands. At [Mkhumbane] they even went to call the police. Behind the police were always the women.”

- **Leader’s Son**
  Born in Mkhumbane, the son of one of the most prominent Zulu nationalist populist leaders in Mkhumbane; leading ANC politician in the area, shack rentier, and the owner of the shackshop patronised by the izandoqinili. Fieldworker’s childhood friend. Listen:

  “For even now if you ask my boys about these people wearing Zulu beads, they know nothing. But now if you go to the [Zulu countryside] and see Zulu wedding, I can say ‘No, I know these things because I saw them in the izitabane: man and woman.’”

- **Young Onlooker**
  Born in 1929 in an area adjoining Mkhumbane, his recollections are of childhood encounters with the izandoqinili and adult reflections, all coloured by his distaste for homosexuality. He is an Umkhonto we Sizwe comrade of Fieldworker. Listen:

  “We used to call them izitabane. … but they used not to like that name. They like it when you call them isikhesan.”

- **Angel**
  A poorly educated, functionally illiterate, man born in rural Zululand; a girl in a boy’s body, determined to live as secure a city life as possible in the style of a married Zulu women. Married to Mqenge during the 1970s. Narrations all centre on his sense of identity as isikhesan and nkosikasi. Listen:
"Well I was at school. And everything I was doing was not like the boys. Looking at cows, everyday? Me? Every time I go to cooking. Fetch water in the river. I do everything same like a lady, the women, the girls. ... I tell [my father] 'I am a girl'. ... 'I am pure lady'. He say 'What is your name?' I tell him 'My name is Angel'."

"And I came to Durban and I see another one. Friend. And it is joyful. Acting like a girl. Me, I like it, I enjoy it. After that I go dancing. After dancing I get another friend. He tells me 'You know Mkhumbane? Because you love this thing. So he takes me to Mkhumbane where I see people dancing. He is wearing like a woman. Me? I join the same day"

There is one final introduction:

- **Norah.** Norah was not interviewed, she dying of HIV/AIDS in 1994. Born Mabulala Paulus Madondo in 1939, Nora and Angel were sisters, he the MC at Angel's first - western-style - wedding, both were women in men's bodies, and both 'client catchers'. Arrested for 'client catching' Mqenge was Norah's rescuer from prison. Such escapades, including Norah's, were the matter of public scandal, attracting crowds, and covered by *Ilanga lase Natal*. Listen to Mqenge:

  "Nora never put on trousers. Would walk right in West Street in a dress. ... One day Norah was arrested with another man, a white man in a park. ... She was wearing a brown skirt and a blouse. ... Now remember there is a female section in prison. There is a male section. No Nora, he spoke 'I am a homosexual. I am not a woman. ... Solitary confinement. Because the other prisoners were going to satisfy themselves with Norah."
F. WORDS MATTER: ISIZULU AND MEN’S HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY

In giving evidence to the 1907 Enquiry, the Izinkotshane zaseGoli offered up many words, in various indigenous languages, which they used as part of their argot. Amongst these, inkotshane has had a long afterlife around the region, from servant or "fag"; "mine wife" (in colloquial isiZulu at the time) to “homosexual” (in modern isiZulu) to hungochani - “homosexuality” (in contemporary chiShona).

In the mid-1990s the Izingqilingi zaseMkhumbane oral history narrators provided two main groups of words. First the names of key sexual actors amongst the men's hostels. For example:

- ingqilingi - homosexual men (pre-modern origins)
- inkonkoni - from the isiZulu word for the gnu antelope, sexually skittish (pre-modern origins)
- mbube - bisexual masculine sexual predators (male hostel colloquial)

Second, their own izingqilingi spoken isiZulu argot where they craftily used standard isiZulu words but with coded meanings known only to the izingqilingi. For example, for the izingqilingi the isiZulu word for ‘payment’ or ‘reward’ means ‘big penis’. Here are few izingqilingi isiZulu words concerning sexual identity, with their etymology and English equivalents as explained by Angel and Mqenge:

- isikhesan - feminine ingqilingi, from the isiZulu word ikhasi meaning “leaf”
- ayokhehla - the sexual style of the isikhesan as properly instructed by the ikhehla; a word meaning “grannies” and coming from the isiZulu for elder
- iqenge - masculine ingqilingi; inter alia from the isiZulu word for bullock with broadly spread horns
- i-ironing/ukuyaina - ‘ironing’ instead of the isiZulu word hlabonga for teenage intracrural sex

Further, as Man About Town and I checked the translations in the transcripts and drew up what became the beginning of this book’s Glossary, Man About Town provided some crucial pre-modern isiZulu words. Key ones are as follows:

- amayengandoda - a man who entices/is married to another man
amayengamfazi - a woman who entices/is married to another woman

ingqingili yendoda - a man who behaves like a woman

ingqingili yomfazi - a woman who behaves like a man

All of the narrators use one word, sometimes frequently, in Angel’s case as self-identifying, and others sometimes in respectful or disrespectful tone. None provided an etymology to this word with pre-modern origins. This crucial word and its meanings are as follows:

- isitabane (1) isiZulu word for feminine homosexual man
- isitabane (2) isikhesan word of self-identification
- isitabane (3) isiZulu and tsotsitaal word of harsh insult for a feminine homosexual man

The root of this word is the pre-modern isiZulu word tabane - a Zulu woman’s plaited grass menstrual belt.

In 2012 the Zulu monarch, speaking in isiZulu, made what appeared to be, on initial translations into English, homophobic comments attracting controversy. Zulu historian Professor Jabulani Maphalala quickly came to the monarch’s aid, and in saving the situation made what are the most significant comments on homosexualities in Zulu history now in the public record. Maintaining that homosexuality has existed since time immemorial and was well documented in Zulu oral history, Maphalala continued:

“There were same-sex relations amongst both men and women even then. Both homosexuals and heterosexuals were drafted into the army … Not once did Ingonyama use any of the historic terms relating to homosexuality like ongingili, izinkonkoni or izitabane”

However, from the 1870s, from the earliest published English-isiZulu dictionaries onwards these and other LGBT words are very rarely included in standard or official dictionaries. This includes the acclaimed English-isiZulu and isiZulu-English dictionaries as published by Wits University Press from the late 1940s, with the 4th edition of their combined LGBT-free dictionary recently republished by the PANSALB and publically announced with much fanfare as the South African government’s official English-isiZulu isiZulu-English dictionary.

There is a final, tragic, issue. Soon after leaving Emnyameni the ex-Izingqingili zaseMkhumbane dispersed. The ierungili customs and argot suffered grievously, not being transmitted to a younger generation of self-identifying gay working class men, and boys. Instead all that was accessible was, and remains, words, as used by the izingqingili, but now within the masculinist and often sexist and misogynist tsotsitaal, stripped of their etymology and pre-modern and Izingqinili cultural meanings.

G. CONCLUSION
In this book we offer a range of analyses and suggestions for consideration. These include:

- Cautioning against masculinist and triumphalist patriotisms and their foundations in binaries of good and bad, straight or bent
- Cautioning against viewing gay history in South Africa as a continuous narrative of steady progress
- Considering the implications of introducing homosexuality into South African historical analysis
- That homophobia in contemporary South Africa is, we suggest, an artefact of current ongoing struggles to find scapegoats as an elite-driven transition, based on apartheid era fundamentals, produces generalised levels of insecurity and stress
Recovering pre-modern languages and their philosophies of difference from heteronorms without romanticising pre-modern life or ignoring the existence of prejudice and the oppressive power of patriarchy.

Updating long-lost philosophies of empathy and so develop languages of dignity, respect, and tolerance for all.

Reimagining an inclusive view of past and present as a crucial means to re-imaging a greater South African future good.

Reassessing strategic understandings of advocacy and scholarly relevance in public affairs.

Ours is a book with two interlinked overall themes. First, our desire to set out an initial historical narrative of working class homosexuality in the making of modern South Africa. Establishing the public existence of the Izinkotshane zaseGoli and the Izingqingili zaseMkhumbane is of critical importance. Further, we show, often through direct personal experience, how politics seeks to influence the ways in which historical pasts are interpreted so as to fashion present day social and collective memory - including prejudice - in favour of certain interests, and to write others ‘out of history’. In so doing, the making of this book has been one of journeys of discovery and recovery: of concealed, lost, and suppressed history, thought and language, and so human dignity. There is much to be learnt. Our deepest hope is that this book will stimulate a new generation of citizens to take up the challenge of researching history and gaining insights from the experience that can help build a more inclusive, just, and democratic society.

Iain Edwards is an independent contemporary historian with scholarly interests in historiography and historical methods, particularly concerning life histories and public heritage and history. He was a member of the African National Congress’ national commission on public heritage and led the successful public campaign establishing the Kwa Muhle Museum. He has also been an historical expert witness in Land Claims Court hearings, was involved in the Freedom Park Heritage and Museum precinct development. His publications include works on African life in Durban, a founding cadre of Umkhonto we Sizwe, and a collection of the private political papers of South African Gandhian anti-apartheid and pro-democracy leader.

Marc Epprecht is a professor in the Department of Global Development Studies at Queen’s University, where he teaches courses on culture and development, HIV/Aids, and southern Africa. He has published extensively on the history of sexuality in Africa, primarily in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. His research engages with human rights questions and the ethics of research, activism, and knowledge production in Africa and the Global South more generally. He was a contributor and associate editor for the African contribution to Howard Chang (ed.) Global Encyclopedia of lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History published in 2019.