Troubled times: disability, sexuality and futurity

in Mozambican, Ugandan and

Zimbabwean political cultures

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**ABSTRACT**

Since the earliest days of European expansionism, Africa has held a dual place in the Western imaginary, cast as a space of futurelessness even as white futurities were predicated on its exploitation. Appropriations of the future have persisted post-liberation, revealed in the divestment of futurity from bodies marked as queer or disabled. Drawing on historical moments and literary texts from Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe, and on insights from queer theory, critical race theory and disability studies, I seek to demonstrate that the logics of white supremacy can be seen at work in these mechanisms of exclusion, even where whiteness itself is displaced – but that literary invocation of queerness and disability can thus be used to mobilize critique of this continuity. In centring the circumscription of futurity at the heart of colonialism, heteronormativity and ableism, then, I underscore the critical value of reading these as reciprocal and inextricable systems of power.

*Keywords*: disability; race; sexuality; futurity; white supremacy; colonialism; postcoloniality; Mozambique; Uganda; Zimbabwe; Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa; NoViolet Bulawayo; Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi

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For as long as it has held a place in the European imaginary, the idea of Africa has served as a surface onto which the West could project its deepest fears and most optimistic fantasies about the future. As the Portuguese planned and recounted the landings and invasions along Africa’s northwestern coast that would set the juggernaut of European maritime expansionism in motion in the mid fifteenth century, the uncharted territory south of Cape Bojador figured, at once, as a space of suicidally perilous chaos *and* as Portugal’s great hope for the achievement of white Christian supremacy and continental prestige.[[1]](#endnote-2) While the detail of these projections has undoubtedly changed over the intervening centuries, their texture has remained consistent. African theorists have long made clear that Western epistemology itself is shaped around a frequently undifferentiated and massified ‘Africa’, which comes to stand only for negation and futurelessness: a ‘metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril’, as Chinua Achebe would have it.[[2]](#endnote-3) Concomitant with this use of Africa and Africans to represent the ‘bottomless abyss where everything is noise, yawning gap, and primordial chaos’ is their position as object of the extractivism at the heart of white racial capitalism.[[3]](#endnote-4) Revealed most conspicuously in plantation and extraction colonies, referred to by Achille Mbembe as the ‘baptismal fonts of modernity’, this predication of Western futurities on African resources and labour has only intensified since decolonization, albeit manifest in different forms.[[4]](#endnote-5)

 Similarly dualistic appropriations of futurity, which hinge the survival or thriving of one group upon the exploitation or elimination of another, have continued to flourish in different guises in the post-independence political lives of African nations – in which, as Panashe Chigumadzi notes, the logics of white supremacy abide even where white bodies do not.[[5]](#endnote-6) Whether used symbolically as the imagined endpoint of utopian nationalism, or violently forestalled as a means of enforcing or destabilizing political sovereignty, futurity has remained central to post-independence political cultures. Critique of these imaginings and uses of futurity has thus become a shared feature of African literatures that deconstruct the dominant narratives of both nation-building and global racial capitalism. It is this appropriation and subversion of futurity that I seek to address in this article, by exploring first how the uneven staking of an affectively and politically driven futurity in African subjectivities has manifested, and then how it has been culturally resisted. In particular, I seek to demonstrate how the political appropriation of futurity and authors’ writings of it can be thought through the lens of ‘crip theory’, which puts the insights offered by critical disability studies in dialogue with those of queer theory. Having outlined the theoretical and conceptual concerns involved in this approach, I will use it to examine the role of futurity in three political scenes from post-liberation Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Uganda – showing that the logics of racialization at the root of colonialism persist, post-independence, in the divesting of futurity from certain bodies – and three recent novels from and about those respective countries, namely Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa’s *Entre as memórias silenciadas* [Among Silenced Memories] (Mozambique, 2013), NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (Zimbabwe, 2013), and Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi’s *Kintu* (Uganda, 2014).[[6]](#endnote-7) My focus on these three countries and novels is intended not as a means of drawing facile parallels or straightforward comparisons between them, but rather to show how seemingly unconnected political events and literary interventions can be thought together in order to draw out underlying structures and systems that might otherwise remain unseen.

With this in mind, and taking as a point of departure Mbembe’s assertion that African literature dealing with ‘the memory of the colony’ frequently depends on a ‘critique of time’ that undermines colonial teleology, I suggest that certain narratives in the three novels expand this critique to question the validity of futurity in the postcolony.[[7]](#endnote-8) In order to do so, the authors invoke an alternative sense of time by channelling latent confluences of queerness and disability, thus bringing unspoken continuities between colonial and post-liberation sovereignty to the fore. Alison Kafer’s concept of ‘crip time’, which reimagines time through the orientations of queer-disabled existence, will be engaged and interrogated here as a means of disentangling these vexed narratives.[[8]](#endnote-9) My aim, then, is to centre the circumscription of futurity common to white supremacist colonialism, heteronormativity and ableism, and the points of discursive convergence between these regimes, in order to draw out what is at stake at this intersection.

 The surface commonalities between queer and disabled modalities, whether assumed or imposed, are many; as Carrie Sandahl shows, both queer and disabled people ‘have been pathologized by medicine; discriminated against in housing, employment and education; stereotyped in representation; and isolated socially, often within their own families.’[[9]](#endnote-10) In his work on disability, Ato Quayson uses the spectre of familial guilt and rejection indicated by this last point to differentiate disability from race or ethnicity, noting that ‘in the case of disabled people it is historically and cross-culturally the case that the structure of affirmation is fissured from both within and outside the home’ – a rupture profoundly familiar in queer experience.[[10]](#endnote-11) These commonalities, however, are but the surface of a far deeper interrelation of disability and queerness, wherein the line between the two becomes so blurred as to be inscrutable. Perhaps most familiar in the global North is the sociopolitical interweaving of homophobia and ableism that revealed itself to devastating effect during the West’s 1980s–90s AIDS crisis and its aftermath, a historical watershed captured by Susan Sontag in her 1989 work *AIDS and its Metaphors*.[[11]](#endnote-12) Starkly visible here was the nature of disability and queerness, and indeed race and class, as mutually constitutive and inextricable categories, a conceptualization of identity and oppression indebted to an intellectual tradition pioneered by Black and Xicana feminist theorists such as Angela Y. Davis, the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, among many others.[[12]](#endnote-13)

 It is this reciprocal relationship between queerness and disability that forms the basis for Robert McRuer’s *Crip Theory*,[[13]](#endnote-14) whose title refers to the author’s term for an expansive, political and radically anti-assimilationist theory of disability, with ‘crip’ doing similar work for ‘disabled’ as ‘queer’ does for ‘gay’.[[14]](#endnote-15) McRuer argues that much as compulsory heterosexuality both prohibits and produces homosexuality, disability is produced by an equivalent matrix of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’. Moreover, these systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness are not only connected but contingent.[[15]](#endnote-16) Here, McRuer builds on work exploring the marginalization, or queering, of disabled sexuality, such as Mark Sherry’s assertion that ‘Disabled people have been “queered” through various cultural processes of enfreakment, particularly those that produce (often contradictory) notions of asexuality, vulnerability, inexhaustible sexual voraciousness, perversion, and exoticism.’[[16]](#endnote-17) For Sherry and McRuer, given that both queer and disabled subjects are positioned in the abject realm of the deviant and pathological, the perceived straightness of an individual is contingent on their being read as able-bodied (and able-minded), and vice-versa.

 Using this interconnection of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality as a point of departure, in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* Alison Kafer explores the positioning of queer-disabled existence in relation to futurity, deconstructing the hegemonic received wisdom that ‘any future that includes disability can only be a future to avoid’ and seeking instead ‘a politics of crip futurity’ (*FQC*, pp. 2–3). She cites as evidence of this exclusion of disability from ‘our’ future a comment by James Watson, the Nobel prize-winning geneticist partly responsible for the discovery of the structure of DNA, that ‘most couples don’t want a [child with Down syndrome]. You would have to be crazy to say you wanted one, because that child has no future.’[[17]](#endnote-18) For Kafer, rejecting this teleological eliminationism, which ‘casts disabled people (as) out of time, or as obstacles to the arc of progress’ (*FQC*, p. 28), in favour of a future ‘in which disability is understood otherwise: as political, as valuable, as integral’ requires a rethinking of time, the seeking of what she terms an ‘elsewhen’ (*FQC*, p. 3). This framework of ‘crip time’ is held in opposition to ‘curative time’: that is, ‘an understanding of disability that not only *expects* and *assumes* intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention’ (*FQC*, p. 27). In this dominant temporal framing, ‘the only appropriate disabled mind/body is one cured or moving toward cure’, which, when achieved, is then held aloft as ‘the sign of progress, the proof of development’ (*FQC*, p. 28).

In articulating this framework of crip time, Kafer draws on and interrogates the critiques of time and future offered by queer theory. Chief among these is Lee Edelman’s scathing polemic *No Future*, in which the author contests that the hinging of political thought on the ‘ideological Möbius strip’ of reproduction, crystallized in the symbolic figure of the Child, excludes queer subjects from futurity altogether.[[18]](#endnote-19) In response, queer subjects must ‘withdraw our allegiance, however compulsory, from a reality based on the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism’[[19]](#endnote-20) and ‘insist that the future stop here’.[[20]](#endnote-21) Kafer identifies here the threat of reproductive futurism shared by queer and disabled subjects, citing the eugenic practices of sterilization, prenatal testing and institutionalization that ‘are touted as necessary for preserving the future health of the state and the nation’ even as they marginalize, exclude or eliminate disabled people (*FQC*, pp. 29–30). Yet for Kafer, it is precisely these practices and their heavy histories that limit the usefulness of Edelman’s insistence ‘that the future stop here’ in the context of disability. As she puts it, an outright rejection of futurity ‘takes on a different valence for those who are *not* supported in their desires to project themselves (and their children) into the future in the first place’ (*FQC*, p. 31, emphasis in original). Edelman’s identification, and rejection, of the figure of the Child as the hegemonic symbol of the future fails to take into account that the said Child is always already white and able-bodied and -minded. Here, Kafer expands on José Esteban Muñoz’s own critique of Edelman,[[21]](#endnote-22) showing that this symbolic Child is, more specifically, the bearer of an ‘always already whiteness [that is] framed by and understood through regimes of health and hygiene’ (*FQC*, p. 32).

 It is at this juncture that a convergence becomes visible between the exclusion of disability and queerness from the future articulated by Kafer and Edelman, and the appropriations of time, ‘progress’ and futurity identified by Achebe, Mbembe and V. Y. Mudimbe as underpinning colonial epistemology.[[22]](#endnote-23) Indeed, as Ellen Samuels and Therí Alyce Pickens show, the pasts and presents of the eugenic practices Kafer lays out are intimately bound up with the histories of colonization and white supremacy, of scientific racism and its anxieties of white degeneration.[[23]](#endnote-24) And while the collusion, in the late nineteenth century, of the Partition of Africa, Darwinism, colonial anthropology and knowledge of heredity may have initially given prominence to such practices, their legacies are far from relegated to the past. In 2007, James Watson – whose remarks on Down syndrome I cited above – commented to the *Sunday Times* that he was ‘“inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa”’ because ‘“all [the West’s] social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours, whereas all the testing says, not really”’.[[24]](#endnote-25) Kafer does include this racist comment of Watson’s in her book, but relegates it to an endnote, a gesture that crystallizes a crucial shortcoming of her important work. In hesitating to engage meaningfully with the histories and theorizations of colonialism – in separating Watson’s ableism from his racism, literally and figuratively – Kafer falls short of acknowledging that the logics of modernity and progress that underpin curative time were forged in imperial endeavour, in the conjoined violences of colonial extraction and dispossession. Curative time, with its language of development, improvement, productivity and usefulness, shares both a vocabulary with colonial time and a deep historical root.

 In the cultural and literary analyses that follow, I seek to work from this genealogy, showing that confluences of compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory able-bodiedness and futurity in post-independence African political life reveal, in stark terms, the endurance of white supremacist logics even where whiteness itself is one step displaced. It is this ability of queer-disabled existence to bring these structures to the surface that imbues its use in literature with critical power. Achille Mbembe has stated that the remembrance of the colony in the African novel depends ‘to a large extent on the critique of time’: on the recognition and writing of time as ‘born out of the contingent, ambiguous and contradictory relationship that we maintain with things’.[[25]](#endnote-26) I seek to show that the troubling of time can also be used to articulate political critique in the postcolony. More precisely, the contested positions of queerness and disability in relation to the future allows their confluence in literary texts to expose time as political and negotiable, revealing the contingency of post-independence sovereignty on the apparatuses of the colonial past. What might it mean for us to use time in order to think ableism and compulsory heterosexuality together as residues of colonial white supremacy?

 In the case of Mozambique, a starting point for such analysis can be found in the notions of productivity and reproductivity, which became twin undercurrents of the nation-building project that followed independence from Portugal in 1975, led by ruling party (and former liberation movement) Frelimo.[[26]](#endnote-27) The periods immediately prior to and following independence in Mozambique saw Frelimo rely increasingly on the rhetorical image of a utopian future, centred primarily on the figure of the Child. The bearing and rearing of children, or ‘continuadores da Revolução’ [continuers of the Revolution] as they were known in official party parlance, became an explicit national imperative.[[27]](#endnote-28) As the initial elation of independence, the hard-won outcome of ten years of bitter armed struggle, was superseded by the ‘civil’ war – in fact a destabilization campaign secretly led by the white minority governments of Rhodesia and South Africa, on the stage of the Cold War – this natalist position became only more entrenched.[[28]](#endnote-29) Meanwhile, Frelimo, true to the Marxist-Leninist affiliations it had officially espoused in 1977, foregrounded collective production as a necessary means to the same utopian future. The role of Mozambican citizens in this drive towards national production was a heavily manual and regimented one, with an emphasis on field and factory labour. The *enxada*, a type of hoe, became almost as iconic as the AK-47 in the visual propaganda of the time (and, indeed, still has a place crossed with it on the national flag). Public health, crystallized in the image of the strong, resilient, labour-ready body and mind, was framed primarily as a means to this end of ensuring the productivity of citizens. The two key paths to futurity represented by production and reproduction were furthermore strongly intertwined, to the point of conflation, particularly when it came to the position of women in nation-building praxis. Agricultural production was Frelimo’s key weapon in the fight against malnutrition among Mozambicans, and malnutrition was recognized as impeding both reproduction itself and the breastfeeding and rearing of healthy children, who would in turn become the *continuadores* of production.[[29]](#endnote-30) Reproduction, then, necessitated production, and vice-versa.

 On the flipside of this regulation of bodies in service of the Mozambican nation were the disciplinary mechanisms aimed at eliminating modes of sexuality and labour at odds with official discourse, exemplified perhaps most succinctly in the party’s anti-sex-work campaigns during the 1970s and 1980s. During these campaigns, which culminated in the 1983 launch of ‘Operação Produção’ [Operation Production], a national drive aimed at eliminating the informal economy and unifying the nation against the ‘inimigo interno’ [internal enemy],[[30]](#endnote-31) Black women sex workers were denounced as threats to the Mozambican nation through a range of discursive mechanisms hinging on pathologization. In the proliferation of political speeches and pro-state media interventions that emerged during this period,[[31]](#endnote-32) the sex worker’s body figures both as vector for future disability via disease and as the means by which the enemy might infiltrate and thus successfully ‘disable’ the national body.[[32]](#endnote-33) Within these convergent narratives of nation-building, we can see clearly how the nationalist construct of futurity that served to both produce and sustain Frelimo’s ideological position in the first decade of Mozambique’s independence relied on the compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness at the heart of Portuguese colonial extractivism and racial capitalism, in spite of Frelimo’s radically new ideology of post-racial Marxism-Leninism. Indeed, the futurity imagined by Frelimo served to further naturalize and rarefy the categories of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality, with the non-reproductive, non-monogamous subject marked as queer through exclusion from normative sexuality, and the subject that could not or would not participate in approved labour marked as disabled. The reciprocal contingency of these categories as identified by McRuer is, moreover, shored up by the conflation of productivity and reproductivity implied within this matrix.

This implicit contingency is made hyperbolically explicit in *Entre as memórias silenciadas* [Among Silenced Memories], Mozambican writer Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa’s seventh book and fourth novel. The text is structured as a series of interwoven, non-linear narrative threads, loosely connected by the characters’ genealogical ties, which together serve as a retrospective critique of political life in the first ten years of Mozambique’s independence. The themes of pathology, sexuality and disability are mainstays of each of the novel’s narrative threads, but here I will focus on one minor character, the former carpenter João Chaúque. We are introduced to João through his estranged wife Marta, the aunt of protagonist Josefa, a medical student in early 1980s Maputo. We learn that an indeterminate number of years prior to the novel’s present, João was castrated ‘em termos artesenais’ [in a rustic fashion] by a group of armed men of affiliations unknown (*EMS*, p. 129). Following a lengthy hospital stay, he finds himself unable to engage in sex, and consequently proclaims his life over and leaves his wife. In so doing, he relinquishes his claim to heterosexuality, implicitly alienating himself from sexual normativity. At the same time, João finds himself somewhere between psychologically unable and unwilling to work. He abandons his Maputo carpentry workshop to return to his isolated hometown in Inhambane, where he produces one final item – a wooden chair to sit on – and spends his days doing just that, reminiscing and daydreaming about sleeping with women and building with wood, sometimes simultaneously.

 Significant here is João’s seamless conflation of work and sex, a mirror of Frelimo’s ideological slippage between production and reproduction. In creating a causal link between João’s violently imposed sexual impotence and his inability to work, Khosa follows this pivotal aspect of Frelimo discourse through to its logical conclusion. The reliance of Frelimo’s vision of futurity on the corporeal regulation and demand for uniformity inherited from colonial extractivism is thus made clear. Equally important, however, is the way João’s subjectivity speaks to a refusal of time. It is specified that João is tempted by the self-destruction of suicide and alcohol abuse, but eschews both in favour of a dogged determination to pursue a life of physical inactivity. This conscious assumption of inertia can be understood in terms of Kafer’s crip time as a resistant modality that rejects curative as much as colonial time, stripping of meaning the vocabulary of productivity, improvement and usefulness that betrays their shared roots. João’s wilful refusal of forward motion – his determination to literally sit still, imagining scenarios he has already precluded – functions, then, to question the naturalization of a futurity predicated on corporeal instrumentalization. By checking João out of curative time, Khosa uses the character’s queer-disabled existence to undermine both the exclusionary utopianism of Frelimo rule, and the colonial fiction of evolution and progress that served as its foundation. In his entangled disability and queerness, then, João comes to figure in Khosa’s narrative as a peripheral, yet distinct, refusal of white racial capitalism in all its guises and iterations.

 Given the early strategic and ideological alliance of Frelimo and ZANU (later the ZANU-PF), led for nearly four decades by Robert Mugabe, it is to be expected that the political use of futurity in post-liberation Zimbabwe had, at first, much in common with that of post-independence Mozambique.[[33]](#endnote-34) Mugabe’s speeches from this early period, alongside wider ZANU propaganda materials, make clear that production and reproduction, together with continued struggle for land redistribution, would form the bedrock of the Zimbabwean nation to come.[[34]](#endnote-35) The corporeal and sexual instrumentalization implicit in Mozambique’s conflation of these two pillars was clear, too, in the Zimbabwean case, as evidenced by ZANU’s anti-birth control stance.[[35]](#endnote-36) As Clement Masakure shows, the same year Operação Produção took hold in Mozambique, Zimbabwe launched its own version, ‘Operation Clean-Up’, a social engineering project that, like Frelimo’s anti-sex-work campaigns, reproduced the oppressive regulation of sexuality and labour installed by the colonial regime.[[36]](#endnote-37) Despite these similarities at the level of early political discourse, however, the countries’ distinct histories, demographics, and relationships with their former colonizers and neighbouring countries ensured that their ultimate trajectories were very different. As the twentieth century drew to a close, the entrenched inequalities of property and land, a legacy of British settler colonialism and white minority rule that dominated Zimbabwe long after liberation, acted in tandem with Mugabe’s increasingly ferocious authoritarianism and demagoguery to weaken the new country’s social fabric.

 The headlines of that period are well known: spiralling hyperinflation that left currency worthless;[[37]](#endnote-38) a dizzyingly complex series of land reforms implemented under the official rhetoric of decolonization that served cronyism well and the vast majority of Zimbabweans poorly; and an ever-intensifying intolerance of dissidence and political plurality. This latter aspect was manifest perhaps most conspicuously in the abject ethnopolitical terrorism of the Gukurahundi atrocities and the class violence of Operation Murambatsvina, both of which drew on the grammars and apparatuses of white supremacy even as decolonization was centred as their aim.[[38]](#endnote-39) In Rudo Mudiwa’s words, this appropriation of decolonial rhetoric highlights how ‘even radical signifiers have been ransacked of their meaning in Zimbabwe’.[[39]](#endnote-40) The forestalling of futurity entailed by state violence, and by the absolute uncertainty of hyperinflation and everyday scarcity, was compounded in visceral fashion by the AIDS crisis. Significant too, however, was the discursive displacement of futurity implicit in ZANU-PF’s relentless evocation of the past as a means of legitimizing its actions in the present. As Chigumadzi puts it, this represented an appropriation of ‘old colonial ideas’ designed

to create a new post-independence politics of time and space […]. In a complex management of time, ZANU-PF ‘inappropriated the now’, so that present struggles were a necessary sacrifice to the fulfilment of a revolutionary future which was a re-articulation of a glorious African past.[[40]](#endnote-41)

For many Zimbabweans, as NoViolet Bulawayo’s novel *We Need New Names* makes clear, the future became one dependent on leaving, often indefinitely. In this way, the twin pillars of national future-building initially shared with Mozambique – production and reproduction – were waylaid, as families were separated and labour was precluded by migration, disease and disability.

 In *We Need New Names*, these dislocations of normative ties form the basis of the plot as a whole, centred on the story of the narrator Darling. Darling is ten years old when we first meet her in an unnamed Zimbabwean city in the mid to late 2000s, shortly after Operation Murambatsvina. Midway through the novel, following the death of her father from AIDS, Darling is sent to live with her aunt in Detroit, Michigan. It is when Darling attends a wedding with her aunt and uncle that we are introduced to the minor character Tshaka Zulu, who is performing a traditional song following the ceremony. The character’s name refers to the early-nineteenth-century precolonial Zulu king Shaka kaSenzangakhona, an icon of Zulu history and culture, cast as monstrously cruel by the apartheid regime as part of its narrative of precolonial southern Africa as chaotic, violent and in need of white governance.[[41]](#endnote-42) Darling describes Tshaka Zulu as ‘beautiful and fierce in a knee-length skirt made of colourful animal skins. On his head is a hat made of animal fur. He wears matching armbands around his thin arms. In one hand is a long white shield scattered with little black spots’ (*WNNN*, p. 177). Singing at weddings, Darling explains, is Tshaka Zulu’s ‘thing’, and ‘looking at him at it you would never think there was something wrong with him, that he was really a patient at Shadybrook’ (*WNNN*, p. 178).

Shadybrook, we later find out, is a psychiatric nursing home, where Tshaka Zulu is confined indefinitely for an unspecified mental illness. The next time we encounter him is some years later, when Darling and her aunt visit him at Shadybrook in order to talk to him in Shona, because ‘when the medicines they keep him on stop working, he refuses to speak in English’ (*WNNN*, p. 233). When they arrive, Tshaka Zulu is wearing traditional dress, and is surrounded by clippings of Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Desmond Tutu, Kofi Annan, a young Robert Mugabe and other pan-African popular heroes, alongside photographs of his children and grandchildren back in Zimbabwe (*WNNN*, pp. 235–36). Years later still, in the closing pages of the novel, we see him for the last time. He has painted his body red and adorned his hair with feathers, and is highly agitated and brandishing an assegai (short spear) (*WNNN*, p. 270). Before Darling or her uncle are able to stop him, Tshaka Zulu runs out into the street, where he is met by armed police; refusing to drop his spear, he is shot dead (*WNNN*, p. 273). Darling’s aunt and uncle have his body cremated and keep his remains in their house in Detroit, in the room of their son, who is fighting in Afghanistan. Just as the novel ends, we learn that Tshaka Zulu had wanted his ashes to be scattered in his father’s village, but Darling’s and her aunt’s undocumented status prevents them from carrying out his wishes just yet (*WNNN*, pp. 287–88).

 The juxtaposing of a precolonial Zulu icon, demonized in service of apartheid, with the signifiers of racialized police brutality across the Atlantic speaks to the multifarious ways that white supremacy is reproduced across space and time, something Chigumadzi reiterates when she reminds us that ‘the indifference to the missing Chibok girls in Nigeria […] is as much linked to the unpunished police shootings of unarmed black people in America as it is linked to the murder of black mine workers demanding better wages in South Africa as it is to extra-judicial killings in Kenya.’[[42]](#endnote-43) That Tshaka Zulu’s madness manifests in this specific way – as an increasingly hyperbolic physical performance of a very real historical past – serves, too, as a poignant parody of the Mugabe government’s cynical invocation of past struggle in their forestalling of a national future, their ‘complex management of time’, as identified by Chigumadzi.[[43]](#endnote-44) Like Khosa’s João Chaúque, Tshaka Zulu’s story resists the forwards motion of curative time, but while João’s refusal of time is found in inertia, Tshaka Zulu’s story sees him inverting colonial time in pursuit of an imagined precolonial life in a borderless southern Africa. Not only does his disability place him out of colonial and curative time, then; it also resists the colonial and curative spaces of both nation and nursing home. Yet Tshaka Zulu’s forced dislocation from normative family ties and from the dream of decolonization, signified side-by-side in photographic form, at the hands of the Zimbabwean state is also, ultimately, what leads to his death. The way that he is killed – for his Blackness, for his Africanness, for his madness, for his aloneness – reveals in stark terms the collusion of compulsory able-bodiedness, compulsory heterosexuality and white supremacy, embodied in the faceless figure of the armed US police officer and the machinery of guns, cars and sirens. For those inhabiting this intersection, Tshaka Zulu’s story suggests there is no ‘elsewhen’. Even the possibility that the character’s fragmented remains may reach his desired final resting place is displaced, located outside of narrative time altogether.

 While Mozambique’s late twentieth century saw an increasing instrumentalization of reproductive heterosexuality and able-bodiedness triangulated with national futurity, and the turn of the millennium in Zimbabwe saw a forestalling of futurity in part via the erosion of familial integrity and public health, the early twenty-first century in Uganda has seen both disability and national futurity weaponized in the violent enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality. Predictably, the West’s response to this sociopolitical scene has been couched as much in oversimplification, amnesia and paternalism as outrage and, indeed, prurience: the staging of ‘homophobia as spectacle’, in Keguro Macharia’s terms.[[44]](#endnote-45) As Macharia shows us, in the same way that Western identity was long formulated in opposition to the colonial narration of Africa as depraved and sexually atavistic, the West has set the renewed mobilization of laws and policies that ‘[define] African masculinities and femininities against the gender-bending and sexuality-fracturing specters of the trans and the queer’ against its own supposed acceptance of queerness as ‘proof’ of its superior progressiveness.[[45]](#endnote-46) In his historiography of state homophobia in Uganda, Kalemba Kizito illustrates how Western observers have failed to acknowledge the entanglement of legally codified compulsory heterosexuality with white racial capitalism: first as a tool of British colonial surveillance, and in more recent years as a vehicle for expansion by US evangelist churches.[[46]](#endnote-47) Neither do Western media narratives acknowledge the work of queer activism and scholarship in Uganda, including the extensive efforts of Sylvia Tamale to resist the notion that queerness is an un-African colonial import by identifying and theorizing its presence in the everyday of Uganda’s past and present.[[47]](#endnote-48) They have failed, too, to understand the complex and expansive nature of anti-gay sentiment and policymaking in the present, such as the position of homophobic laws in relation to the emergence or revival of others that aim to ‘re-organize and discipline the public and private life of intimacy’, including anti-sex work campaigns like those described above,[[48]](#endnote-49) or the Ugandan popular belief, alluded to by Tamale, that those who speak publicly in support of homosexuality are doing so for their own financial gain.[[49]](#endnote-50)

 This latter phenomenon is the subject of Joanna Sadgrove et al’s ethnography of anti-gay sentiment in Uganda, which identifies a correlation between Ugandan popular anxiety towards homosexuality and ‘profound economic insecurity and fears for the future’, and cites the country’s HIV pandemic as a significant contributor to that anxiety.[[50]](#endnote-51) The study does not attempt to deconstruct this confluence of hopes and fears, or the political exploitation thereof. Yet its presence is felt both throughout the codification of anti-gay discourse and in the propaganda upholding it. On the very first page of the ‘Anti-Homosexuality Bill’, the private member’s bill that in 2009 sought to strengthen Uganda’s existing anti-gay laws,[[51]](#endnote-52) the ‘protect[ion of] the traditional family’ and the ‘need to protect children and youths […] who are made vulnerable to sexual abuse and deviation’ are invoked as justification for the proposed measures.[[52]](#endnote-53) Future security is thus staked in the enforcement and regulation of heterosexuality, with homosexuality cast as a contagious threat to an implicitly pure, homogeneous and immutable ‘Ugandan culture’. This latent semantic connection to health is reinforced by the bill’s ‘aggravated homosexuality’ clause, which recommends the death penalty in cases of ‘homosexual activity’ where the ‘offender’ is HIV-positive or the ‘victim’ is a ‘person with a disability’.[[53]](#endnote-54) The definition of ‘homosexual activity’ used by the proposal, however, is so wide-reaching that it could extend to fully-clothed embracing (or indeed, as Macharia notes, ‘touching a friend’s sex toy’), and the definition of ‘disability’ is likewise left so vague that it could apply to any impairment or chronic illness – including HIV.[[54]](#endnote-55) It is this nebulousness and lack of coherence, coupled with its frequent references to both children and disease, that speak to the bill’s exploitation of individual and collective affect: its subtle channelling of a broad range of anxieties around futurity, illness and disability into a lurid projected image of gay intimacy. At the same time, the bill’s ‘failure to disclose’ clause, which criminalizes anyone in a position of authority who fails to report ‘homosexual activity’, creates of these indefinite acts a very definite, and very unyielding, civic obligation.

 The ill-defined and manipulable interrelation of futurity and health shown in the 2009 bill is reflected in Uganda’s state-allied national daily *New Vision*. In article after article, blurred lines are drawn between ill health, homosexuality and threats to an imagined national future. While religion does feature, it is secondary to a more amorphous Ugandan or African ‘culture’, portrayed as under threat from an equally indefinite Western equivalent whose neocolonial encroachment through aid agencies and popular media is cast as the driving force behind the normalization of homosexuality. To draw on a few examples among many: we see an MP warn young people to ‘keep away from homosexuality because they could contract sexually transmitted diseases’.[[55]](#endnote-56) We see president Yoweri Museveni affirming that ‘the purpose of life is to have a family for propagation of the human race’, and that Ugandans should therefore be commended for ‘rejecting homosexuality’. He lauds the Church of Uganda for cutting ties with the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, over his relative tolerance of homosexuality in the Anglican Church, and warns his subjects to continue to ‘distance themselves from negative foreign cultures’.[[56]](#endnote-57) Another MP, decrying pro-gay Africans as ‘slaves living under neocolonialism’, states that gay sex puts ‘organisms in unexpected places’, causing rare cancers and, ‘worse still after sometime […] a leaking anus’, and will thus place strain on the public health system, as (she notes) is already the case in North America.[[57]](#endnote-58) The Ethics and Integrity Minister, James Nsaba Buturo, affirms that homosexuality, an ‘abnormal, unhealthy, unnatural as well as illegal lifestyle’, happens ‘at the expense of heterosexual sex as a means to maintain human production’, making it ‘a threat to human civilisation’.[[58]](#endnote-59)

 This visceral conflation of queerness, disease and future disability as existential threat to both the Ugandan nation and the ‘human race’ *per se* reveals, in lucid terms, the endurance of what Mbembe refers to as colonialism’s ‘racial syntax’ even within rhetoric that is explicitly anticolonial.[[59]](#endnote-60) The elimination of disability and disease through a rigid regulation of sexuality as a precondition of futurity converged with the colonial biologization of race at its very root, such that even where whiteness is putatively displaced its logics remain in the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality and the broader surveillance of intimacy it entails.[[60]](#endnote-61) Like the hinging of Mozambican post-liberation futurity on production and reproduction, and the Zimbabwean forestalling of futurity as a means to sovereignty, the predication of Ugandan futurity on the elimination of queerness attests to the continued presence of the logics of whiteness in the perpetuation of that convergence.

Jennifer Makumbi explicitly engages with the colonial origins of compulsory heterosexuality in Uganda in *Kintu*, which narrates the history of Uganda from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, tracing successive generations of the eponymous family through to the 2010s: in the first part of the text, set in the Buganda Kingdom prior to colonization, warrior Ssentalo’s superior manliness is attributed in part to his ability to ‘[make] both men and women groan beneath him’ (*K*, p. 53). While this brief early moment does not foreshadow a consistent queer theme in the novel, we can see an implicit invocation of the colonial suppression of this sexual multiplicity in its final narrative thread, centred on Isaac Kintu. We first see Isaac preparing for the funeral of his wife, victim to what is assumed to be AIDS (*K*, p. 249). The narrator leads us through various scenes from Isaac’s traumatic past: the profound neglect he suffered as an unwanted child, conceived by rape; his mother’s abandonment of him, leaving him to be raised by his grandmother; his passing through episodes of the psychosis he shares with his ancestors; and the death of his grandmother during the reign of Idi Amin, leaving him consumed by isolation and anxiety. After witnessing the death of his friend Sasa – a name meaning ‘now’ in Swahili – from an AIDS-related illness, the fear of contracting HIV begins to dominate his life. Following the death of his wife, that terror becomes an obsessive focus. He is plagued by intrusive thoughts about his son, Kizza, and the possibility that he might have infected him. Such is the intensity of Isaac’s anxiety that he refuses to allow blood tests for either Kizza or himself, preferring to inhabit uncertainty. As he puts it to a frustrated friend, ‘I don’t want this certainty that you want. In my mind, I am certain that I have it, but in my mind I am also certain that I don’t. Don’t take my doubt away’ (*K*, p. 271). Eventually, after Kizza falls momentarily ill, he submits to blood tests, but refuses to read the results, instead placing the unopened envelopes in the glove compartment of his car. A few weeks later, the results still unread, his dread of the future reaches its peak. Consumed by anxiety and intrusive thoughts, he plans to take his own life by driving his car into the path of a truck, killing his son at the same time.

 If Khosa’s portrayal of João Chaúque’s impotent inertia follows Frelimo’s conflation of productivity and reproductivity through to its absurd conclusion, and Bulawayo’s presentation of Tshaka Zulu literalizes in hyperbolic fashion the Mugabe regime’s relentless invocation of the past, then Isaac’s decision to kill both himself and his own child due to fear of future disease and disability exposes the devastating implications of the Ugandan state’s instrumentalization of ableism and futurity in service of compulsory heterosexuality. The signifiers of surveillance, control, futurity, intimacy and genealogy saturate Isaac’s narrative to produce an implicit critique of state homophobia even though it is never mentioned outright. For Isaac, disability is very literally a fate worse than death, such that he is willing to kill and be killed to avoid a future that includes it. In so doing, he would end the lineage that coheres the novel, and which Makumbi makes inextricable from the story of Uganda itself, in a violently queer negation of the heteronormative monoliths of patrilineality and nation. This excessive performance of eugenic logic brings into relief, once again, the persistence of white supremacy long after whiteness is displaced. The planned suicide-filicide, however, is also an act of complex dislocation beyond these concerns. It is a final claim to agency and autonomy, to control, that leaves its agent utterly without power. It is an expression of absolute defiance in the face of futurity, disavowing the imperatives of productivity, reproductivity, health and capital even as it obliterates defiance forever. In the grip of the act, Isaac would disidentify from time in its totality, at the precise moment that his subjectivity was destroyed and the Kintu lineage ended. This moment, however, remains conditional, because Isaac and his son survive the crash, as we discover in the novel’s final pages. Moreover, as Isaac learns in hospital, neither he nor his son have HIV. The future both gains and loses certainty, in a fragmentation and divergence of time that is resistant in its multiplicity.

In this article, I have sought to demonstrate the critical value of reading colonialism, heteronormativity and ableism as reciprocal and inextricable systems. The coincidence of settler colonial extractivism, Darwinism and eugenics in the latter part of the nineteenth century meant that biologized productions of race were couched *a priori* in eliminationist attitudes to – and policies around – disability, enforced through the strict regulation of sexuality, all of which served to produce an imagined futurity figured through whiteness, health and reproductive heterosexuality. For this reason, it is in the uneven triangulations of able-bodiedness, heterosexuality and futurity in post-independence Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Ugandan political cultures – manifest in the meanings ascribed to futurity, and **just** which bodies are permitted (or required) to bear it – that the logics of white racial capitalism stand revealed, even where whiteness itself is displaced and its supremacy disavowed. In channelling queer-disabled existence in order to deconstruct national uses and abuses of time and futurity, then, authors are able to haul these unspoken latencies to the surface.

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1. NOTES

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3. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Achille Mbembe, *A Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Panashe Chigumadzi, ‘Why I’m no longer talking to Nigerians about race: On writers, empathy and (black) solidarity politics’, *Africa is a Country*, 7 April 2019, <<https://africasacountry.com/2019/04/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-nigerians-about-race>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. Where possible, online sources in this article have been archived by the author. In case of dead links, enter the URL into the Internet Archive’s ‘WayBack Machine’, available at <<https://archive.org/web/>>. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
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9. Carrie Sandahl, ‘Queering the crip or cripping the queer? Intersections of queer and crip identities in solo autobiographical performance’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 9.1-2 (2003), 25–56 (p. 26). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
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12. See, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Combahee River Collective, ‘A Black Feminist Statement’, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 42.3 –4 (1979), 271–80; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and* Class (New York: Random House, 1981); bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1981); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984); *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour*, ed. byCherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. For a more detailed explication of the relationship between ‘disabled’ and ‘crip’ see Carrie Sandahl, ‘Queering the crip or cripping the queer? Intersections of queer and crip identities in solo autobiographical performance’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 9.1–2 (2003), 25–56. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
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19. Ibid., p. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
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21. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), p. 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
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26. Frelimo stands for *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* [Mozambican Liberation Front]. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
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29. See, for example, Fátima Albuquerque, ‘Leite da mãe é o ideal para o bebé: Amamentar é garantir saúde das crianças’, *Tempo*, 18 December 1983, pp. 9–11; Fátima Albuquerque, ‘Crianças mais sadias com leite materno’, *Tempo*, 25 December 1983, pp. 20–23;Samora Machel, *Revolução: Transformação profunda das estruturas, transformação profunda da nossa vida* (Lourenço Marques [Maputo]: Imprensa Nacional, 1975); Fernando Manuel, ‘Leite e derivados: Vem longe a fartura’, *Tempo*, 13 November 1983, pp. 18–23; António Marmelo, ‘Fracturas que a revolução vai cimentar’, *Tempo*, 31 May 1981, pp. 18–24; ‘Nutrição e sub-nutrição’, *Tempo*, 29 February 1976, pp. 30–39. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
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37. For more on the affective impact of hyperinflation in Zimbabwe, see Rudo Mudiwa, ‘Crisis and the meaning of money in Zimbabwe’, *Africa is a Country*, 18 November 2016, <<https://www.africasacountry.com/2016/11/crisis-and-the-meaning-of-money-in-zimbabwe>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. The Shona word ‘Gukurahundi’ refers to both a strategy espoused by ZANU – the ‘violent and physical elimination of enemies and opponents’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni) – and to a specific series of state-sanctioned atrocities committed primarily against Ndebele people in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions of Zimbabwe. See Ruth Murambadoro, ‘“We cannot reconcile until the past has been acknowledged”: Perspectives on *Gukurahundi* from Matabeleland, Zimbabwe’, *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 15.1 (2015), 33–57; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘Rethinking *Chimurenga* and *Gukurahundi* in Zimbabwe: A critique of partisan national history’, *African Studies Review*, 55.3 (2012), 1–26. For a recent, fictionalized account of the devastation of Gukurahundi, see Novuyo Rosa Tshuma, *House of Stone* (London: Atlantic Books, 2018). Operation Murambatsvina, launched in 2005, had as its ostensible aim a crackdown on the informal economy; in reality, it entailed the forcible clearing and bulldozing of slums, one of the key voting bases for the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change. Operation Murambatsvina, which translates roughly from Shona as ‘Operation Drive Out Rubbish’, left millions of Zimbabweans homeless or jobless. See Michael Bratton and Eldred Masunungure, ‘Popular reactions to state oppression: Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe’, *African Affairs*, 106.422 (2007), 21–45; *The Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe*, ed. by Maurice Vambe (Harare: Weaver Press, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Mudiwa, ‘Crisis and the meaning of money in Zimbabwe’. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
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43. Chigumadzi, *These Bones Will Rise Again*, p. 94. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
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51. Under the existing penal code, same-sex sexual acts between men can be punished with life imprisonment, and between women with seven years in prison. See ‘145: Unnatural offences’ and ‘148: Indecent practices’, *Uganda: The Penal Code Act*, 15 June 1950, <<http://www.upf.go.ug/download/resources/Penal_Code_Act_1950.pdf>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
52. ‘Anti-Homosexuality Bill’, supplement to the *Uganda Gazette*, 47, 25 September 2009, p. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
53. ‘Anti-Homosexuality Bill’, p. 6. Life imprisonment was substituted for the death penalty in the final version of the bill, which was signed into law in 2014 but ultimately invalidated on technical grounds by the Constitutional Court of Uganda several months later. Museveni declined to rush through a new version, citing cuts to aid from the US and Europe in response to the bill. At the time of writing, no new bill had been moved, but pressure remained both within parliament and from the media to enact one; homosexuality remains punishable via prison sentence, however. See Ndinawe Byekwaso, ‘Technicality has defeated the people on homosexuality’, *New Vision*, 5 August 2014, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1306196/technicality-defeated-people-homosexuality>> [accessed 26 June 2019]; Henry Sekanjako and Moses Walubiri, ‘Gay Bill: Museveni warns MPs’, *New Vision*, 12 August 2014, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1306786/gay-museveni-warns-mps>> [accessed 26 June 2019]; Nicholas Wassajja and Henry Sekanjako, ‘MPs renew call for anti-homosexual law’, *New Vision*, 17 April 2018, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1475795/mps-renew-anti-homosexual-law>> [accessed 26 June 2019]; Okoth Josue, ‘Sexuality education in schools: is it a spiritual or a physical issue?’, *New Vision*, 17 March 2019, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1496301/sexuality-education-schools-spiritual-physical-issue>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
54. Macharia, ‘Intimate Uganda’. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
55. Anon., ‘Youth advised against homosexuality’, *New Vision*, 10 September 2009, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1205893/youth-advised-homosexuality>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
56. Raymond Baguma, ‘Museveni lauds Ugandans on anti gay stand’, *New Vision*, 14 July 2008, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1185501/museveni-lauds-ugandans-anti-gay-stand>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
57. Margaret Muhanga,’Neo colonialism fuels homosexuality in Africa’, *New Vision*, 26 October 2009, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1233779/neo-colonialism-fuels-homosexuality-africa>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
58. Milton Olupot, and Cyprian Musoke, ‘UNICEF, Amnesty promote homos’, *New Vision*, 15 April 2009, <<https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1245936/unicef-amnesty-promote-homos>> [accessed 26 June 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
59. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
60. For more on the surveillance of intimacy in Ugandan state homophobia, see Macharia, ‘Intimate Uganda’, and Kizito, ‘Bequeathed legacies’.

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