

"(Un-)Sexing the Soul? Contestations over Homosexuality in Post-apartheid South African Christianity

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During the past 15 years, sexual politics has become a core arena in which the relationships between competing notions of human rights, political liberation, identity, and cultural emancipation have been negotiated in post-apartheid South Africa. The refractions of these contestations, often subsumed under dichotomous constructions of "African traditionalist" v. "Modernist" or "Western(ized)" approached, have become particularly salient in the Christian domain where they meet with equally opposing ideas over rights-based v. biblically based concerns.

This paper discusses discourses around homosexuality and responses to the introduction of same-sex marriage with a variety of Christian denominations in South Africa. It looks at specific challenges (conducting same-sex nuptials, positions towards homophobic violence etc.) and typical strategies of linking "culture" with ideas of liberation and sexual politics. The paper is based on field research in Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2006 and 2010 and emerges from a broader project on sexual politics (abortion, homosexuality, prostitution, customary marriage), Christianity and the secular state in South Africa.