

Homosexuality in “Traditional” Sub-Saharan Africa and Contemporary South Africa*

An overview by Stephen O. Murray

Super-Saharan Africa provides a well-documented site of age-defined homosexuality. Despite the recent excesses of a Shi’a “Islamic Revolution” in one country with pre-Islamic proscription of homosexuality, the social structure of North Africa almost guarantees male and female homosexualities. Segregation of the sexes is nearly total, and, historically, women have been monopolized in harems, where, rarely visited, albeit closely watched by eunuchs, they almost certainly turned to each other. Being neither literate nor of much interest to those who were, there are few traces of what harem life was like for women.

Although I do not think any serious scholar has attempted to deny pederastic practices in North African cultures, recurrent attempts have been made in English to deny any indigenous homosexuality in sub-Saharan Africa.¹ For instance, Hrdy (1987:1113) categorically asserted, “Homosexuality is not part of traditional societies in Africa” and, after asking some chiefs and headmen about it, Gelfand (1979:201) wrote that “the traditional Shona [of Zimbabwe] have none of the problems associated with homosexuality [so] obviously they must have a valuable method of bringing up children, especially with regards to normal sex relations, thus avoiding this anomaly so frequent in Western society.”

Dynes (1983) traced the myth of exclusive heterosexuality in indigenous Africa to the 94th chapter of Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1781). Gibbon wrote, “I believe and hope that the negroes in their own country were exempt from this moral pestilence.” Obviously, Gibbon’s hope was not based on even casual travel or inquiry. Sir Richard Burton, who a century later “inadvertently helped to

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¹ See Murray (1995, 1997a, c) on the determination to ignore ubiquitous homosexuality. There is not sufficient time depth in writings about central Africa to refute the claim that Arab slave-traders introduced sodomy (Kagwa 1934: 98 makes such a claim). **Non-Indo-European** lexemes for homosexual roles reported early in the histories of European contact make it unlikely that homosexual behavior was unknown before European conquest and “protection.” On African-American misrepresentations of the alienness to Africa of homosexuality see Nero (1991), Simmons (1991), and Smith (1991)--none of whom were particularly informed about the earlier literature discussed here.

reinforce the myth of African sexual exceptionalism by drawing the boundaries of his 'sodatic Zone' where homosexuality was widely practiced and accepted to exclude sub-Saharan Africa" (Dynes 1983: 20), was personally familiar with male homosexuality in Islamic societies within his zone, but had not researched the topic in central or southern Africa -- where there were "primitive" hunter/gatherer societies and quite complex state formations before European conquest.

Especially where Western influences (notably Christian and Marxist) have been pervasive, there is now a belief that homosexuality is a decadent, bourgeois Western innovation forced upon colonial Africa by white men, or, alternately by Islamic slave-traders.² Around the world, people view homosexuality as a vice of some other people.³ Thus, the recurrent British claim Norman conquerors introduced homosexuality to the British Isles. Various French accounts view homosexuality as Italian, Bulgarian, or North African. Italians accept only the latter two homelands. Bulgarians attribute greater popularity and/or the origins of homosexuality to Albanians, and Albanians in turn to Turks. Similarly eastern Bantu claimed that pederasty was imported by the Nubians (Schneider 1885:295-6), Sudanese blame Turkish marauders (Weine 1848:120), etc. Such views tell us something about perceived ethnic boundaries, but nothing about the origins or the historical transmission of cultural traits. The belief by many Africans that homosexuality is exogenous to the history of their people is a belief with genuine social consequences -- in particular stigmatization for those of their people engaged in homosexual behavior or grappling with gay identities. These beliefs are not, however, based on serious inquiry, historical or otherwise.

Without indigenous writing systems prior to the end of the 19th century, there are no analyses of the social structures of African societies prior to alien contact.⁴ What is inscribed of "traditional" African cultures was written by some of the Northerners who disrupted not the timeless stasis of this or that "traditional" African culture, but, rather, who disrupted little-known-because-unwritten histories of African cultures (see Wolf 1982, J. Burton 1988). In many cases the observers inscribing "traditional African culture" did not understand that their presence as observers was in-itself a product of history and domination, as those now increasingly denied a privileged role of observer are keenly aware. As Talal Asad (1973:17) put it, "The colonial power structure made the object of anthropological study accessible and safe -- because of it sustained physical proximity between the observing Europeans and the living non-Europeans

² Recalling the difficulty he experienced coming out as a teenager in South Africa in the late 1970s, Simon Nkoli said, "They still think it's something that only happens in prison. My mother said, 'I knew I should not have sent you to that white school'" (Bull 1990:45; also see Nkoli's [1995:250-2] account of his mother taking him to a series of *sangomas* [native healers] to probe the origin and curability of his homosexuality). This is an example of an ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny view, i.e., the original corruption of innocent black boys sometime in the past being repeated (in a still-white-dominated society in this instance). A more recent and especially vivid example of white corruption of black innocence was the defense in Winnie Mandela's trial (see Holmes 1995).

³ An exception is China, where the legendary culture hero known as the Yellow Emperor is credited with inventing homosexuality along with many other innovations.

⁴ Arabic sources about what was found in the way of sexual practices in various societies as trade and Islam descended along the coasts of Africa deserve scrutiny. European incursions were, of course, much later.

became a practical possibility." Granting that the observing Europeans were not so invisible and without effects on what they observed as they thought or pretended, they are the only source of data on homosexuality in Africa before the most recent few decades. Although memories and oral history may still be salvaged in some places, most of what can be read about African societies was inscribed in the last decade of the 19th century or later.

Within this literature there are reported of native conceptions and native practices of male homosexuality in many societies. The itinerary through a very uneven corpus of reported will proceed from Ethiopia through the Sudan to the Kenyan coast, then fly to the West Coast. Finally leaving Islam behind, this account will move west to east through central Africa, and then resume the southward course. With fewer stops the journey is repeated in the literature on female homosexuality. Again, there are extended stops in the Sudan, Mombasa, and South Africa. A discussion of woman-woman marriage on "the Slave Coast" (between the Benin and Volta rivers) forms a later chapter in this volume. With so many men working elsewhere, it would be unusual for central African women not to turn to each other, as south African women in the "homelands" do, but no one seems to have looked at or for such a parallel. Very little has been published about female homosexuality in the labor reserves of central Africa. Indeed, very little has been published about female or male homosexuality in post-colonial Africa. Absence of evidence, particularly an absence proclaimed in official ideology, should not be taken as evidence of absence, but rather as absence of research in contemporary, urban Africa.

The literature that can be reviewed is out-of-date, but still of interest in showing that various homosexualities existed at the time of European colonization.

Table One relates the tribal names mentioned below to language families. The language families are mapped in Figure One.

Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudan

In Ethiopia Bieber (1909) "encountered Uranism" among the Semitic Harari people and noted that "sodomy is not foreign to the Harari. Albeit not as commonly, it also occurs among the Galla [Oromo] and Somal[i]." (nearby peoples speaking Cushitic languages). He also noted mutual masturbation by both sexes and all ages for all three peoples, and specified that among the Harari, Uranism was practiced as often between men as between men and boys.

More recently, Gamst (1969: 106) reported homosexual relations among shepherd boys of the Cushitic-speaking Qemant (Kemant) of central Ethiopia. Among Amhara peasants, Messing (1957:550) found (better-accepted) male transvestites, who they view as "god's mistakes." *Wändarwäräd* ("literally male-female") with visible male sexual characteristics, but whose structure is popularly believed to be defective,

live as individuals, not forming a society of their own, for they are tolerated. Only their kinfolk are ashamed of them, so they to to live in another province. Women tolerate a transvestite “like a brother”; men are not jealous of him even when he spends all his time with the womenfolk. Often the transvestite is an unusually sensitive person, quick to anger, but intense in his personal likings, sensitive to cultural diffusions from the outside world, especially those carried by Arab traders; and Muslim Arab traders are often the only male contacts he tolerates (p. 551).

In his fieldwork during the mid-1960s in the walled towns of the Konso in the highlands at the southern edge of Ethiopia, C. R. Hallpike found a complex of beliefs about the dangerousness to men of being weakened by contact with vaginas along with restrictions of when and how often marital intercourse are permissible that matches the most extreme Melanesian prototypes of sexual antagonism [cf. Herdt 1984]. Konso men believe that “women have an emotionally as well as physically deleterious influence on men” (1972:153) and one told Hallpike “Some girls’ vaginas are so strong that they can snap off a man’s penis” (p. 152).

The Konso have “two words each for penis, vagina, and sexual intercourse, but no less than four for ‘effeminate man’” (p. 150). *Sagoda*, the one Hallpike elaborated upon, includes men who never marry, weak men, and men who wear skirts.

Men who actually wear skirts are very few, and those who do are clearly incapable of acting as men. I knew one in Gaho, who earned his living curing skins, a female occupation. He was very effeminate in voice and manner. . . . I was told that *sagoda* liked to play the passive role in sodomy, and the description I was given of the manner in which a *sagoda* would induce a man to perform this upon him in the night was so detailed that it could not have been invented. The question is whether normal men only practice sodomy with *sagoda* or among themselves. I am strongly inclined to think it is not confined to relations with *sagoda*. (p. 151)

Konso men “were generally very reluctant to talk about sexual matters with” Hallpike, but he heard “coarse remarks on occasion.” These included jokes about taking a man reputed to be something of a *sagoda* out into the fields to rape him. Hallpike concluded, “This sort of occasion, the conduct of transvestites, and the sexual strains put on men by society, lead one to suppose that they seek relief among themselves on occasion. But this is not to say it is approved of” (1972:151).

Among the Maale of southern Ethiopia, “a small minority [of men] crossed over to feminine roles. Called *ashtime*, these (biological) males dressed like women, performed female tasks, cared for their own houses, and apparently had sexual relations with men,” according to Donald Donham (1990:92), who wrote, “In 1975 I was aware of only one ashtime in Maaleland, although informants asserted that more had existed in the 19th century. Indeed, part of the Maale kin’s traditional installation had consisted of a ritual ordination of an ashtime.” Nonetheless, by 1975, the Maale considered ashtime “abnormal.” The one whom Donham knew gave a clear statement of third gender conception: “The Divinity created me *wobo*, crooked. If I had been a man, I could have

taken a wife and begotten children. If I had been a woman, I could have married and borne children. But I am wobo; I can do neither.”⁵

Donham suggested that there was a continuous gradation of maleness from the ritual kings to subchiefs on down, rather than absolutely discrete gender categories. The ritual king “was the male principle incarnate” (p. 112). No woman of childbearing age could enter the king’s compound, so domestic labor generally done by women was done by ashtime who traditionally were gathered and protected by the kings. Also, on the night before any royal ritual the king could not have sexual relations with women, whereas, “lying with an ashtime was not interdicted.” Thus, ashtime constituted “part of the generativity of maleness in Maale” (p. 113).

Paolo Ambrogetti was one of a number of late-19th-century and early-20th-century writers who tried to argue away same-sex sex among “nature peoples” as situational (in this instance, lucrative) with few (when any) “inclined” that way (i.e., to long-term commitment to homosexual eros or to congenital inversion)⁶. He wrote of relations in Eritrea with *diavoletti* (“little devils” in Italian) that were openly pursued. Regarded as being no more than a mild fault, involvement in such relations were tolerated as a source of income by the boys’ fathers. After puberty, the boys generally began intercourse with women, but those especially attached to their patrons continued their relationships until the age twenty. An unusual case was a chief aged 25 and married, who continued to pursue receptive intercourse with men *senza lucro* (not for payment). Ambrogetti noted that many apparently effeminate male adults were not “sexual inverts” (1900:16).⁷

Reports from indigenous African societies of age-stratified homosexuality are sparse. Clearly, gender-defined homosexuality existed from Nubia to Zululand on the East Coast of Africa⁸ (and offshore on Zanzibar and Madagascar, as well),⁹ often

⁵ Donhama (1990:92). Males are *atinke*, females *lali* in the Maale trichotomy of gender roles.

⁶ See Bleys (1995:185-92).

⁷ See Bleys (1995:185-92).

⁸ Although homosexuality is not mentioned in the sketchy accounts of Western Bantu cults in Taylor’s (1962) survey, the resemblances of Toro *mbandwa*, Tkiga *mandwa*, Hausa *bori*, and Haya *Baharambwa* ceremonies (in particular) to Afro-Caribbean possession cults which provide a homosexual niche are remarkable. In discussing phallic signs “in Oro, Egbo, Nimm, Katahwiriba, Orisha, and other societies,” Captain Butt-Thompson (1929:175) mentioned that “there are pictures in some of the council houses of old pederastical practices” in West Africa (his major focus being on Sierra Leone). I interpret “pederastical” here as male-male rather than as specifically man-boy.

⁹ See Ngubane (1977: 142), Kohler (1941), Lee (1958:266, 1969:143-4) on the Zulu; Besmer (1983:18-28) discussed below from the west coast; Baumann (1899); Burton (1872:419), Haberlandt (1899:668-70), Russell (1935:342), Prins (1961: 99), and Shepherd (1987) on Zanzibar. On age-defined and gender-crossing homosexuality on Madagascar see Dapper (1670:41) Legueval (1840:97-98), Lasnet (1899:494-5), Roux (1905); Laurent (1911), and Linton (1933: 298-9), discussed in a chapter below.

related to possession cults in which women have prominent roles and male participants tend to transvestitic homosexuality.¹⁰

Cross-gender homosexuality not tied to possession cults has been reported in a number of East African societies. Needham (1973:109-27) described a religious leadership role called *mugawe* among the Meru of Kenya which includes wearing women's clothes and hairstyle. *Mugawe* are frequently homosexual, and sometimes are married to a man. Bryk (1939[1928]:151, 1964:228) reported active (i.e., insertive) Kikuyu pederasts called *onek*. and also mentioned "homoerotic bachelors" among the pastoralist Nandi¹¹ and Maragoli (Wanga).

Among the Bagishu Bryk (1939[1928]:151, 1964:228) claimed that hermaphrodites

are quite numerous and are called *inzili*; among the Maragoli *kiziri*. A seventeen year old boy told me, without being at all embarrassed, the he had such a *mzili* in the posterior. The passive fellow called him and gave him ten shillings for this. While he was with him, the pederast had his flabby penis tied to his stomach.

The boy told him that he had rejected many other offers of *inzili* posteriors. Among the Mandari of the Sudan, Buxton (1963: 103) reported,

Homosexuality is viewed as a ludicrous and non-productive act. Thus while all perverts are not necessarily thought witches, since the latter know the aberrant or harmful nature of those habits, they exploit them designedly, in accordance with their wish to obstruct normal development (also see Buxton 1973:209).

Folk fear of witches is widespread in Islamic cultures, although a link between witchcraft and pederasty is unusual in existing ethnographic reported of Islamic cultures.

Nadel (1955) did not mention any such link in contrasting two other Sudanese peoples: the Heiban in which there is "no expected corollary of homosexual acts" (i.e., no homosexual role, and particularly no connection to occupational specialization as healers), and the Otoro who recognize(d) a special transvestitic role in which men dress and live as women, but also are not especially likely to be healers (p. 677).¹² Nadel (1947: 242) also mentioned transvestitic homosexuality among the Moro, Nyima and

¹⁰ Lewis (1973:434) suggests that Somalis suspect the masculinity of orthodox (Sufi) religious virtuosi, not just men involved in possession cults. There is a categorical distinction which Somalis make between two kinds of men: *waranleh* (warriors) and *waddado* (men of God). The latter have a kind of imperfectly realized manhood in Somali eyes. They are ideally, if not often so in reality, 'weak' (*masakiin*) in physical and martial strength, and correspondingly endowed with mystical power.

Boddy (1989:210n4) suggests that the sex of the possessing deity is important in distinguishing cross-dressed male mediums of female deities in Kahartoum and Omdurman from male mediums of male deities in the Hofriyat area of the northern Sudan where she worked.

¹¹ Bryk (1933:152) also mentions a Nandi boy whose affair with a white farmer continued even after the Nandi married, so that he "shared his bed between wife and master." Hollis (1909:52-56) reported on circumcision festivals in which Nandi boys wore women's clothes for about eight weeks. Hollis (1905:298) earlier had published Maasai texts in which the Maasai initiates "Sipolio like to appear as women and wear the surutya earrings and garments reaching to the ground. They also paint their faces with chalk. When they have all recovered they are shaved again and. . . discard the long garments and wear warrior's skins and ornaments."

¹² Nadel stressed that there is no segregation by sex of Otoro youth.

Tira,¹³ and reported that Korongo [Krongo] *londo* and Mesakin *tubele* could marry a male for the brideprice of one goat (1947: 285). The generally young husband in these marriages might also obtain female wives:

‘Wife’ and ‘husband’ lie together and keep a common household. The ‘marriages’ rarely last long: the ‘husband’ is as a rule a young man who will outgrow his homosexual learnings, or who had been induced to play this part by the promise of an easy life. He would soon tire of the unnatural life and abandon his male ‘wife’. The fact that he had lived in this homosexual union does not disqualify him for marriage in the eyes of the women. In fact, I heard of two Mesakin men who had each for a time lived with two ‘wives’, one male and one female. (285)

Nadel did not specify whether *londo* and *tubele* were older than their husbands although marking the latter as “young” implies this. In these groups with “widespread homosexuality and transvestiticism” Nadel (1947: 300) reported a fear of heterosexual intercourse as sapping virility and a common reluctance to abandon the pleasures of all-male camp life for the fetters of permanent settlement: “I have even met men of forty and fifty who spent most of their nights with the young folk in the cattle camps instead of at home in the village.” It should be noted that in these pervasively homosocial societies, the men who were wives were left at home with the women, i.e., were not in the all-male camps.

In traditional, monarchical Zande culture,¹⁴ before the pacification which made it safe for ethnographers like Nadel and Evans-Pritchard to work in the Sudan and central Africa,

homosexuality is indigenous. Azande do not regard it as at all improper, indeed as very sensible for a man to sleep with boys when women are not available or are taboo. . . In the past this was a regular practice at court. Some princes may even have preferred boys to women, when both were available. This is not a question I can enter into further here beyond saying I was told that some princes sleep with boys before consulting poison oracles, women being then taboo, and also that they sometimes do so on other occasions, just because they like them. (Evans-Pritchard 1971: 183)

In fact, his informant Kuagbiaru told him that “men used to have sexual relations with boys as they did with wives. A man paid compensation to another if he had relations with his boy. People asked for the hand of a boy with a spear, just as they asked for the hand of a maiden of her parents. All those young warriors who were at court, all had boys” (quoted by Evans-Pritchard 1970:1430), and added that when a boy (between the ages of twelve and twenty) appealed to a prince, the prince would summon the boy

¹³ Steinmetz (1903:111) had already attested it among the Kadis of Kreis Niuro.

¹⁴ The Zande are an Islam-influenced “forest people,” living where tsetse flies preclude stock-raising in what is now southwestern Sudan, the Central African Republic, and northeastern Congo. “Unlike the other peoples of the clearings--whom they resemble in that secret associations are very important in their culture--the Zande built up a monarchical-type state with the support of a nobility that supplied the district chiefs. Although the society as a whole recognized patrilineal descent, the ruling families gave preference to the maternal line” (Maquet 1972:173-4).

as a page. Later, the prince “provided bridewealth for his pages when they grew up,” although “when a prince dies they do not let his pages escape; they kill them after the prince is dead, for they have eaten the prince’s oil. People call them ‘the prince’s old barkcloth’, for, because he used to summon them all the time, they are like his old barkcloth” (p. 185). In addition to pages to princes,

many of the young warriors married boys, and a commander might have more than one boy-wife. When a warrior married a boy he paid spears [brideprice], though only a few, to the boy’s parents, as he would have done had he married their daughter. The warrior in other ways acted towards the parents as though he had married their daughter. . . He addressed the parents as *gbiore* and *negbiore*, ‘my father-in-law’ and ‘my mother-in-law.’ He gave the boy himself pretty ornaments; and he and the boy addressed one another as *badiare*, ‘my love’ and ‘my lover’.¹⁵ The boy fetched water for his husband, collected firewood and kindled his fire, bore his shield when traveling....¹⁶ The two slept together at nights, the husband satisfying his desires between the boy’s thighs. When the boy grew up he joined the company and took a boy-wife in his turn. It was the duty of the husband to give his boy-wife a spear and a shield when he became a warrior. He then took a new boy-wife. Thus, Kuagbiaru, a member and later a commander of one of Prince Gangura’s companies, married three boys in succession. (Evans-Pritchard 1971:199-200)

Another commander, Ganga, told Evans-Pritchard (1970:1431) that “there were some men who although they had female wives, still married boys. When a war broke out, they took their boys with them,” although they were left in camp, as befitted their wifely status, not their future status as fellow warriors. The warrior paid bridewealth (five or more spears) to the parents of the boys and performed services for them as he would have done had he married their daughter. If another man had relations with his boy, the husband could sue the interloper in court for adultery” (p. 1429).

Evans-Pritchard maintained that “it was on account of the difficulties of getting satisfaction in heterosexual relationships that boy marriage was recognized,” because with easier (and earlier) marriage between men and women, “boy-marriage has in post-European times entirely disappeared” along with the cultural contexts. That is, the military companies and the royal court, also disappeared. Even after the custom and much else of the culture had been disrupted, “I have never heard anyone speak of sleeping with a boy with distaste” (p. 1429).

R. P. Graer (1929:362) did not consider any homosexual preferences, instead attributing unnatural vices among young men to the monopoly of women by the rich and powerful. Similarly, French colonial administrator Adolphe Cureau (1904:644-5) attributed warrior pederasty among the Sandeh to the monopolization of women in the vast harems (*bodimoh*) of Sandeh (Zande) royalty.¹⁷ Vassals, soldiers, and servants had to make do with what the rulers left. Boy *nsanga* (*servants d’armes*) took the place of

¹⁵ Evans-Pritchard (1970:1430) wrote that the boy addressed his husband as *kumbami* (my husband) and was addressed as *diare* (my wife). I have no idea why these contradictory reports of address terms were published a year apart, four decades after they were elicited. The two publications include different long quotations about the custom from Kuagbiaru.

¹⁶ They did not cook porridge for their husbands. Rather they fetched it from their natal household (Evans-Pritchard 1970: 1430). Generally, the boys were with their husbands only at night.

¹⁷ He blamed the origins of substituting boys for women on the Turks, the continuing function on the monopolization of women.

women. Wearing their hair artfully parted, with arms and necks loaded with decorations, a woolen skirt around the hips, and their bodies oiled and glistening, the boys were at the disposals of soldiers. These *ndongo-techi-la* followed the soldiers on their marches, carrying their husbands' rifle, hammock, and a little bag with pipe, firestick, and some millet. In the camps they cooked and managed household finances.

Among the Mossi in what is now Burkina Faso, *soronés* (pages), chosen from among the most beautiful boys aged seven to fifteen, were dressed and had the other attributes (including *le rôle*) of women in relation to chiefs, for whom sexual intercourse with women was denied on Fridays. I do not read Tauxier's (1912: 569-70) report as indicating sexual unavailability the rest of the week. He did stress that only the chiefs were forbidden women on Fridays and that the *soronés* who proved their discretion were entrusted with state secrets.

While serving as a *soroné*, there were annual tests to make sure that the boy had not been sexually intimate with any woman. After the boy reaches maturity the chief gave him a wife. The first child born to such couples belonged to the chief. A boy would be taken into service as his father had as a *soroné*, a girl would be given in marriage by the chief (as her mother had).

Among the Bantu-speaking Pahouin slash-and-burn farmers (Bene, Bulu, Fang, Jaunde, Mokuk, Mwele, Ntum, Pangwe), who live in the rainforest north of the Congo River (in present-day Gabon and Cameroon), homosexual intercourse was *bian nkû'ma*, a medicine for wealth, which could be transmitted from bottom to top in anal intercourse, according to German ethnographer Günther Tessman (1904:23), who also mentioned that

it is frequently "heard of" that young people carry on homosexual relations with each other and even of older people who take boys, who as is well known "have neither understanding nor shame" and readily console them by saying *biabo pfi'nga* (we are having fun, playing a game).... Adults are excused with the corresponding assertion: *a bele nnem e bango* = he has the heart (that is, the aspirations) of boys" Such men were said to have a heart for boys: *bian nkû'ma*.(1904:131; HRAF translation).¹⁸

Even more remarkable than Pangwe belief in the medical benefits of anal intercourse is Gustave Hulstaert's (1938a:86-7) report that among the Nkundu (of the then-Belgian Congo) the younger partner penetrated the older one, a pattern quite contrary to the usual pattern of age-graded homosexuality. His conventional Christian rhetoric of unnatural vice (and benighted savages) makes it unlikely Hulstaert had any personal sympathy for homosexuality, e.g., he wrote of "the game of *gembankango* in which boys, imitating monkeys chase each other through the trees and creepers can -- and does -- result in reprehensible scenes" (p. 73).

¹⁸

In a Pangwe tale Tessman related, "The Four Suitors," (included in this volume) one suitor is preferred by the girl (and they elope), another by the mother (who is killed by her favorite), another by the father, and another by the brother of the girl. The father and brother pair off with the suitors they prefer, one pair dying of yaws and the other leprosy, not the happiest of endings! On Tessman's erotic attraction to black men and the high psychic costs of resistance to acting upon it, see Bleys (1995:221, based on Klockmann 1986).. Tessman (1921, 1934:261) found greater acceptance of same-sex sex (specifically, adolescent males' reciprocal anal intercourse) in Cameroon, among the Bafia

Based on her fieldwork in Khartoum from 1970-2, Fluehr-Lobban (1977:134) stated that “if a man dares to gain some sexual experience before marriage, he must do it in the prostitutes’ quarter or through temporary homosexual liaisons that are tolerated before marriage.” She did not indicate whether involvement in homosexual activity is temporary for both partners, or what they actually do with each other sexually.

Among the Muslim riverian peoples of the northern Sudan, Constantinides (1977:63) mentioned male participation in a healing cult called *zaar* that is mostly the domain of women (in a society with a marked sexual division of labor and sexual segregation):¹⁹ “Some men are regular participants at cult rituals, and a few become cult group leaders. Of this male minority some are overt homosexuals, while others may initially have symptoms, such as bleeding from the anus or penis, which tend symbolically to classify them with women.”

Although “men who attend *zaar* rituals regularly are suspected by both men and women of being homosexual,” there is also suspicion that some men may “dishonourably [be] gaining access to women by feigning illness”(Constantinides 1977:63). Similar suspicions arise about the *'yan daudu* in the bori cult among the Hausa. The bori cult is similarly a refuge from hyper-patriarchal Islam for females and effeminate males, as is discussed below.

Mabasha and Their Mashoga in Mombasa

Among Swahili-speakers on the Kenya coast, Shepherd (1978a: 133) reported, “In Mombasa, both male and female homosexuality is relatively common among Muslims; involving perhaps one in twenty-five adults.” Shepherd (1987: 240) with no data nor discussion of the basis for either the earlier estimate or its revision, raised the estimated rate to one in ten. In the first report emphasized, male homosexuality was confined to prostitution:

Mombasa’s *mashoga* are passive male homosexuals offering their persons for money. They advertise themselves in bright tight male attire in public places, usually, but may, when mingling with women at weddings, don women’s *leso* cloths, make-up and jasmine posies.

Mashoga have all the liberties of men and are also welcome in many²⁰ contexts otherwise exclusive to women. (Shepherd 1978a: 133; emphasis added).

Shepherd (1978b: 644) asserted that “though there are long-lasting relationships between homosexuals in Mombasa, most homosexual acts are fleeting, paid for in cash.” In a more recent analysis, Shepherd (1987:250) explained

¹⁹ On the zar or *zaar* cult, also see Messing’s (1959:327) discussion of the preponderance of women in what Cerulli (1923:2) contends is a marginalized residue of the ancient Cushitic religion displaced by Christianity and Islam (with their patriarchal leaders).

²⁰ In a subsequent communique, Shepherd (1978b: 664) noted the atypicality of weddings and reported that “when the mood is less playful -- at a prayer-time, for instance, or at a funeral -- the *shoga* must attend with men or not attend at all.” Shepherd (1987:253) reiterates that “weddings are light-hearted occasions” and that [*m*]ashoga gather with men on other occasions, concluding, “It would be quite wrong to suggest that homosexuals ought always to be in the company of women in situations where there is formal segregation.”

The Swahili [word] for a male homosexual is *shoga*, a word also used between women to mean ‘friend’. Homosexual relations in Mombasa are almost without exception between a younger, poorer partner and an older, richer one, whether their connection is for a brief act of prostitution or a more lengthy relationship. In the former case, there are fixed rates of payment, and in the latter, presents and perhaps full financial support for a while. But financial considerations are always involved and it is generally only the person who is paid who is called *shoga*. The older partner may have been a *shoga* himself in his youth, but is very likely to be successfully married to a woman as well as maintaining an interest in boys. Only if he is not married and has an apparently exclusive interest in homosexual contacts will he perhaps still be referred to as a *shoga*. The paid partner usually takes the passive role during intercourse, but I think it is true to say that his inferiority derives from the fact that he is paid to provide what is asked for, rather than for the [sexual] role he adopts.... The paying partner is usually known as the *basha* -- the Pasha, the local term for the king in packs of playing cards.²¹

The main thesis of Shepherd (1978a, 1987) is that rank is more important than gender in Mombasa, and in Mombasan conception of homosexuality. Indeed, according to Shepherd (1987:255), trading sexual complaisance (specifically, providing a site for penetration) for money (or or help) is only “patron-client relations given a sexual dimension.” The primacy of wealth to sexual behavior is stressed in the passage quoted above. Startlingly, it is followed by a discussion of a folk view recognizing (pre-cognizing) which boys will engage in homosexuality on the basis not just of relative wealth, but also effeminacy (“prettiness”):

People say that they can predict who will be a homosexual, even with boys as young as 5 or 6 years old at times. They seem to base their prediction upon prettiness and family circumstances; boys reared in all-female households by a divorced mother and several sisters are likely to become homosexuals, they say, and the prediction is self-fulfilling since these are the boys whom men are certain to approach . ‘If he’s not a homosexual yet, he will be’, say women of teenage boys from such households. (Shepherd 1987:250-51)

To me, this suggests that more than economics is involved, even if Shepherd were right that it is primary in differentiating the *basha* from the *shoga*.

Although Shepherd (1978a,b) strenuously objected to Wikan’s (1977) suggestion of a “transsexual” or “third gender” conception,²² Shepherd (1987: 259-60) acknowledged some gender variance in dress and asserted that *shoga* “tend to employ the gait and voice which are the international signals of homosexuality. These seem to be imitated

²¹ Although Mary Porter (11 November 1996) rejected the hypothesis of top being superior to bottom in the Mombasan view (“The only top and bottom would be the social hierarchies, which are much more subtle and graded than simple top and bottom”) in her comments after Amory (1996) a few weeks later she called attention to a local view of the colonial Arabic/Persian-derived tops (*mabasha*) “exploiting an indigenous class of innocent Africans,” denoted with the Bantu-derived term *shoga*. Amory (1996) stressed that the terms she recurrently heard in her 1995 fieldwork were *gay*, *boyfriend*, and *girlfriend* loanwords from English.

²² Shepherd (1978b) closed by making the *shoga* (and, by Shepherd’s ready extrapolation, the Omani *khanith*) age- rather than gender-defined homosexuality. Wikan (1978:669) justly labeled the departure from Shepherd’s vehement emphasis on poverty (class-conditioned homosexual prostitution) “startling.” Her stress that “many passive homosexuals, far from viewing their activity as joyless, are brought to orgasm by it” (1978b:664) does not fit well with her explanation of dire economic necessity. It also reduces “sexual pleasure” to ejaculation (see Carrier 1980).

from other homosexuals, not from women, and the modest and quietness of ideal Swahili womanhood are quite absent in homosexual behaviour.”²³

Godfrey Wilson (1957:1) earlier reported that in Lamu, a Swahili town north of Mombasa, boys dressed as women, performed a striptease and then paired off with older men from the audience (Shepherd 1987:269 note 9). The first Swahili-English dictionary (Krapf 1882:891) included *hánithi* (clearly cognate to what Wikan romanized as *xanith*)²⁴ for “catamite,” as well as *mumémke* (*mume*=man, *mke*=woman). Moreover, as Bleys (1995:168) noted, Baumann (1899) attested Swahili labels for sexually receptive men--*mkesimune* and *mzebe*, not just the Arabic *hanisi*.²⁵

Shepherd argued convincingly that *shoga* are not classified as “women,” the “second sex.” For instance, they are not given women’s tasks to do, but are rather used as junior male kin are” (1987:253). There is no evidence in any of Shepherd’s publications, however, which bear on whether *shoga* departures from the expectations of masculine deportment, dress, and financial independence are considered a third sex or gender.²⁶

Also on the Kenyan coast, Duran (1993:186) notes that “the picturesque townships of Malindi has been turned into a German sex colony frequented by single men and homosexuals” in quest of black phalluses and reported an Islamicist backlash against what is viewed as foreign corruption of impecunious young males.

Interpreting Absence of Evidence and Assertions of Absence

On the peripheries of Islam, as in those further south, any confidence that lack of mention of homosexuality in the ethnographic literature for other groups indicates the absence of the phenomenon should be undermined by Evans-Pritchard’s (1970, 1971) deathbed reported that the Zande warriors about whom he had written extensively decades before paid brideprice for the young boys who served them as temporary wives.²⁷ The denial of homosexual behavior in a culture with a (gender-defined) role

²³ Roscoe (1988:28) cautioned against a widespread failure in writing about what Whitam calls “transvestitic homosexuals” to distinguish female behavior from the stereotyping and exaggerations of flamboyant male performances of “femininity.”

²⁴ Madan (1902:92) spelled it *hanisi*, which he glossed as “effeminate.” Sacleux (1891:95) attested *kaumu lut’i* for “sodomite.” The usual etymology for *luti* in Arabic is “Lot’s people” (see Murray 1995:624, 1997c). Madan (1902:376) added *watu wa Sodom* (men of Sodom) .

²⁵ There is also *asiewesa ku kuéa mke* glossed laconically as “catamite” (Krapf 1882:266).

²⁶ Wikan (1977) vacillated between an “intermediate” gender and a distinct “third sex” in Sohar (the controversy following her article, including some perplexing claims by Shepherd, is discussed in Murray 1996b), Oman (not an African society, but long involved in trade with and domination of both Zanzibar and Mombasa). On Zanzibar Haberlandt (1899:670) reported that “homosexuals of both sex are called *mke-si-mume* (woman, not man) in Swahili.” See his full text translated elsewhere in this volume..

²⁷ Except insofar as he told his teacher about boy wives brought along to military camps (Seligman and Seligman 1932: 506-7) and an obscure 1957 article. In his classic book Evans-Pritchard (1937:56) wrote briefly about relations between women, but not about male homosexuality. Chiefs’ use of boys free of diseases was earlier mentioned by Larken (1926: 24) and Czekanowski (1924: 56) rejected

(*kitesha*), discussed below, or the contrast below between Edel (1957) and La Fontaine (1959) similarly should caution against acceptance of claimed that there is no homosexuality in a culture on the basis of lack of mention in any particular ethnography. Even native denial of the possibility of homosexuality must be treated skeptically, as MacDermot's experiences among the pastoralist Sudanese Nuer showed. Sexual behavior between men did not occur, he was told (MacDermot 1972:99). Then, one day, he observed "a crazy old man... accepted by everyone in the village... [who] either tended the cattle or at other times helped the women harvesting corn or carrying burdens." Seeing the man heading off to work with the women prompted Doering, MacDermot's primary Nuer informant,

to tell me a story which completely contradicted all I had thought and learnt so far about Nuer homosexual relations. It had always been stressed by the tribesmen that homosexuality between men was impossible, for if discovered amongst them it could be punishable by death. Doering now told me about a crazy man he had once known who lived near Nasir in the Sudan and who frequently dressed as a woman. This was different Doering explained, because "the man had actually become a woman"; the prophet of Deng had been consulted and had agreed to his change of status. The prophet had decided to call on the spirits and after consultation had declared that indeed the man was a woman. Therefore, he could dress in women's clothes and behave as a woman. From that time onward it was agreed that 'he' should be called 'she', and 'she' was allowed to marry a husband. All very confusing, and so totally against what the Nuer had been telling me, that I questioned Doering carefully, but he failed to produce further explanation (MacDermot 1972:119).

That is, in the Nuer conception sex was not occurring between two men. One was socially recognized as a woman, a not uncommon way of regendering those accidentally born with male sexual organs.²⁸

An early, much praised ethnography (Driberg 1923:210) uncritically passed on the dubious folk explanation that impotence is the basis for assuming the gender-crossing role among the Lango of Uganda (cf. Herskovits 1937: 117). This is reminiscent of the frequent confusion about the biological basis of the "berdache" role in native North America. Under the protection of the folk explanation, the *mudoko dako* [transformed man] is treated as a woman, and may live as a legitimate wife to a man. According to Driberg, such persons were rare among the Lango (50 out of 17,000 people), but Lango informants told him that such conduct was very common among neighboring groups to the east, specifically the Iteso and Karamojan (Karimojong).

One early-noted exception to "the negro race [being] mostly untainted by sodomy or tribadism" in Burton's "Terminal Essay" is that "Joan dos Sanctos found in Cacongo of West Africa 'Chubidu, which are men attyred like women and behave themselves womanly, ashamed to be called men; are also married to men and esteem that vnnaturale damnation an honor'" (Burton 1930 [1886]: 87-88 citing "Aethiopia Orientalis, Purchas ii 1558").

European residents' claims that there was no indigenous function of alien Arabic pederasty. Evans-Pritchard also did not mention homosexuality in his classic 1940 book *The Nuer*, consigning brief mention to a later, less central book (Evans-Pritchard 1951:108-9).

²⁸ I do not mean to imply that the primary motivation for taking on a berdache role (among the Nuer or other peoples) is sexual desire. Gender may well be primary. Indeed, sex is socially reassigned to fit with the gender role. Sexual behavior is consistent with gender role in these instances (see Watts 1992 on Polynesian analogs).

Spiritual Vocations in Western Africa

Among the Dagara of southern Burkina Faso, Malidoma Somé explained,

gender has very little to do with anatomy.... The Earth is looked at, from my tribal perspective, as a very, very delicate machine or consciousness, with high vibrational points, which certain people must be guardians of in order for the tribe to keep its continuity with the gods and with the spirits that dwell there--spirits of this world and spirits of the other world. Any person who is this link between this world and the other world experiences a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher, and far different, from the one that a normal person would experience. This is what makes a gay person gay. This kind of function is not one that society votes for certain people to fulfill. It is one that people are said to decide on prior to being born. You decide that you will be a gatekeeper before you are born. And it is that decision that provides you with the equipment that you bring into this world. So when you arrive here, you begin to vibrate in a way that Elders can detect as meaning that you are connected with a gateway somewhere.²⁹

Somé's 1994 book *Of Water and the Spirits* relates some of his own experiences during (a belated) initiation. After years of study in the West (earning doctorates from the Sorbonne and from Brandeis), he returned to his village. He began to wonder wonder about Dagara "who feel the way that certain people feel in this culture that has led to them being referred to as 'gay.'" When he asked one of them, "who had taken me to the threshold of the Otherworld [as one of the elders supervising his initiation cohort], whether he feels sexual attraction towards another man, he jumped back and said, 'How do you know that?' He said, 'This is our business as gatekeepers'" (1993:7).³⁰

He noted that "the gay person is very well integrated into the community" and that this particular man had a wife and children. Dagara, including Somé (1993:8), believe that the survival of the cosmos (not just of the earth) depends on such gatekeepers:

Unless there is somebody who constantly monitors the mechanism that opens the door from this world to the Otherworld, what happens is that something can happen to one of the doors and it closes up. When all the doors are closed, this Earth runs out of its own orbit and the solar system collapses into itself. And because this system is linked to other systems, they too start to fall into a whirlpool.

He also noted that among the Dogon, "a tribe that knows astrology like no other tribe that I have encountered, the great astrologers of the Dogon are gay" and generalized

²⁹ Somé (1993:7). Permission from Bert Hoff' to quote passages from his interview (©1993) of Malidoma Somé is gratefully acknowledged.

³⁰ Somé (1994:17, 264, 287) records a general Dagara dispreference for asking questions as a means of attaining knowledge and for providing indirect answers to questions that are asked. E.g., "Grandfather never tackled a question directly. He had the habit of introducing an answer by way of a whole bunch of stories that often placed the question being asked into a wider context. Your answer would arrive when you were least expecting it, nestled into the middle of a litany of fascinating narrations" (p. 29)..

that outside Christendom, "everywhere else in the world gay people are a blessing" (p. 8).³¹ While claiming religious justification for homosexual desire (not exclusive of heterosexual functioning), Somé does not claim that any sexual relations with the gatekeepers conveys spiritual benefits.

Reverting from an all-too-rare native representation to typically hostile alien/Christian notices as this survey wends southeastward, we find that Talbot (1926,III:766) alluded to "unnatural rites performed during the ceremonies and sympathetic magic practiced in order to secure fruitfulness for human being, animals and fishes" in a secret society variously called Obukele, Obukere or Oweu among the Ibo and Abuan peoples of Nigeria, adding that "the chief celebration takes places when the Niger and the adjoining rivers are full" (p. 767), but provided no details of the rites or the roles within the cult (there or in Talbot 1927).

Hausa Roles

Fremont Besmer (1983) discussed in greater detail a possession "cult" among the (generally Islamic and urban) Hausa that is strikingly similar to New World possession cults among those of West Africa descent, and is "generally regarded as the displaced religious tradition of the pre-Islamic Hausa."³² As in Haitian voodoo(n),³³ the metaphor for those possessed by spirits is horses "ridden" by the spirit. Homosexual transvestites in the Hausa *bori* cult are called 'Yan Daudu, son of Daudu. *Daudu* is a praise name for any *Galadima* (a ranked title), but specifically refers to the *bori* spirit Dan Galadima (literally, son of Galadima; the Prince), who is said to be "a handsome young man, popular with women, a spendthrift, and a gambler" (Besmer 1983:30n4).

Joseph Greenberg (1941:56) noted that "the group of Hausa spirits known as 'Yan Dawa, 'children of the forest' have their counterpart in the Dahomey *aziza*, the Bambara (of Mali) *kokolo*,³⁴ and the Yoruba divinity Arnoi." According to Besmer (1983:18) 'Yan Daudu are not possessed by Dan Galadima, and are not possessed by other spirits when he is present. Instead, they make and sell "luxury snacks" -- i.e., more expensive, more prestigious food such as fried chicken," (Pittin 1983:297).³⁵ 'Yan

³¹ Calame-Griaule (1986:409) mentioned that some adolescent Dogon males engaged in homosexual relations, though these were socially condemned.

³² J. Greenberg (1941), echoed by Lewis (1966:324, 1986:38). It is notable that Besmer writes about an urban cult, especially in contrast to (mistaken) claims that *voodoo(n)* in the New World is confined to the countryside. Also see Smith (1954). Lewis (1966:317, 1986:35) noted that the *bori* cult had spread northward into Tunisia, Syria, Egypt, and even to Mecca.

³³

³⁴ Torday and Joyce (1905:420) noted "sterile" *mokobo*, and mentioned castrated *tongo* (p. 424). among the Bambara.

³⁵ As in many other cultures, men doing "women's work" use more prestigious raw materials and/or serve more elite customers/patrons. I believe that this access reflects some residual male status rather than indicating that men doing "women's work" do it better than women, although males may also suppose that anything men--even men of dubious masculinity--do, they will do better..

Daudu also operate as intermediaries between (female) prostitutes and prospective clients.

In his ethnography of Hausa possession religion, Fremont Besmer (1983:18) wrote: "Women provide the bulk of membership for the cult and are stereotyped as prostitutes" (also see Smith 1954:64, Hill 1967:233). Pittin reported

The economic enterprises of the 'Yan Daudu are centered on three related activities: procuring, cooking, and prostitution. Procuring, the mobilisation of women for illicit sexual purposes, clearly demands close ties between the procurer and the women. The 'dan daudu [sing.], in his combination of male and female roles, can and does mediate between men and women in this context. (1983:296)

Living among women in the strangers' quarters of Hausa towns provides "a cover for men seeking homosexual services. The 'dan daudu and his sexual partners can carry out their assignations with greater discretion than would be possible if the 'yan daudu lived together, or on their own outside the gidan mata," where visitors would be marked as seeking sex with she-males (Pittin 1983:297).

In patriarchal Hausa society, the *bori* cult provides a niche³⁶ for various sorts of low status persons:

Women in general and prostitutes in particular.... Jurally-deprived categories of men, including both deviants (homosexuals) and despised or lowly-ranked categories (butchers, night-soil workers, poor farmers, and musicians) constitute the central group of possessed or participating males" plus "an element of psychologically disturbed individuals which cuts across social distinctions." (p. 19).

Besmer's account leaves problematic how Hausa individuals come to be defined by themselves or by others as homosexual or transvestitic.³⁷ In the terms of labeling theory, joining the *bori* cult is "secondary deviance."

One whose status identity is somewhat ambiguous, arising from some personal characteristic, specific social condition, or regularly recurring condition associated with the life cycle, can seek either to have his social identity changed or his social status regularized and defined through participation in *bori* rituals. Marked by 'abnormality' and accepted as a candidate for membership in the cult through an identification of *iskoki* as the cause of the problem, a person's behavior becomes explainable, and simultaneously earns a degree of acceptability, after the completion of the *bori* initiation. Symbolic transformation from a suffering outsider -- outside both the society and the cult -- to one whose status includes the description "horse of the gods." (pp. 122-3)

³⁶ In a 23 February 1995 e-mail Rudolf Gaudio cautioned against inferring theological or official/institutional approval of homosexuality from a concentration of gender- or sex- variant priests in cults. The seemingly disproportionate number of Roman Catholic priests who are homosexually inclined is not officially approved or based on any Catholic theology or doctrines valorizing homosexuality, even though (at least in Latin America, and, I think in Mediterranean Europe as well), not particularly masculine boys and/or those not showing signs of being sexually interested in females are channeled to the priesthood. Thus, there *is* a social view of the priesthood as a niche. Moreover, for many men in Latin cultures, the manhood of priests is suspect. Respect for them is frequently low; jokes about their "dresses" and lack of *cojones* (testicles properly bursting with semen that must out) are commonplace.

³⁷ Moses Meyer (1993 notes) asserted that the "'Yan Daudu are not the same as homosexuals. There is a distinct homosexual identity in Nigeria that is different from the 'Yan Daudu. They overlap socially because both communities practice same-sex sex."

Although the *bori* cult provides a niche with an alternative [to the larger society's] prestige hierarchy, the cult itself remains marginal. As Besmer noted:

Status ambiguity is not completely eliminated through involvement in the *bori* cult. While an initiated individual achieves a specific, formal status within the cult since possession is institutionalized, it is not possible for him to escape the general social assessment of his behavior as deviant. (p. 21).

Nonetheless, there are at least indications of “tertiary deviance,” which is to say rejection of the stigma of the cult and its adepts (p. 18), although Besmer did not attempt to discover the degree to which adepts accept the disvaluation of their “kinds of people” in the dominant Islamic Hausa culture.

From Bayero University (in Kano, Nigeria), Kleis and Abdullahi (1983; building on Salisu Abdullahi's interviews of 140 'yan daudu) presented a functionalist analysis of a wholly secular 'dan daudu role. In their view, prostitutes provide a “safety valve” in a Hausa society in which female seclusion has been increasing since the early 19th century. Rather than being prostitutes (like the Omani *khanith* described by Wikan 1977), the 'dan daudu procures females for males, recruiting runaway women and “socializing them in the seductive arts” and on a routine basis, “soliciting suitors, arranging contacts, extolling and advertising her charms, and managing relations with the authorities” for these female prostitutes, who live and work literally outside the walled city core (*birni*). The 'dan daudu is paid for his services both by customers and prostitutes, and these commissions “constitutes the bulk of his daily income” (Kleis and Abdullahi 1983:45). Kleis and Abdullahi argue that the economic rewards are “sufficient to account for recruitment without assuming a personality predisposition” (p. 52) to dress and behave like a woman. In explaining why they undertook the 'dan daudu role, 56 percent attributed economic reasons. Only seven percent explained being a 'dan daudu as due to “nature.”³⁸ Kleis and Abdullahi consider the role as an economic niche for poor emigrants (not all of whom are Hausa) from the countryside, not especially a refuge for males seeking sex with males: They note that “many 'yan daudu are assumed also to be homosexuals, although this does not seem to be the major feature of their social status, which hinges more on their self-identification as females” (p. 44). They suggest that “a male with masculine gender identity and pronounced heterosexual interests would be less suitable as a broker because he might well find it difficult to separate his personal and professional involvements with the prostitute and would risk becoming a rival of her customers” (p. 46). They do not consider that a “homosexual” 'dan daudu might become a rival for female prostitutes' **customers**, and do not appear to have inquired on who are the sexual partners of 'yan daudu.

They note that there is no Hausa or Sohari role for women acting like men, and stress that both Omani *khanith* and the Hausa 'dan daudu are conceived as kinds of males. Indeed, “they occupy these positions precisely because they are anatomical males.”³⁹ That is, 'dan daudu is a role some males take--and sometimes abandon. Like

³⁸ Kleis and Abdullahi 1983:53n10, based on Abdullahi 1984:71). Another 22 percent cited the influence of friends and associates.

³⁹ Kleis and Abdullahi add a functionalist explanation premised on the necessity for consistency in culture: “If they were fully recognized as social females, anatomy would be irrelevant, but the premise

the *khanith*, the *'dan daudu* “can temporarily, alternately, or permanently switch back and take up conventional male roles--a course definitely unavailable to anatomical females” (p. 49).

Like Kleis and Abdullahi, Gaudio discounts the connection between possession cults and *'dan daudu* in Hausa society. He focuses more than they did on (homo)sexual relations involving *'yan daudu* and other Hausa men.. Talking to members of what he calls “Kano’s gay male community” about a 1994 Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Hausa newspaper Gaudio observed

challenges to the newspaper’s characterization of homosexual marriages as a Western practice alien to Hausa Muslim culture. Few of the self-described Hausa homosexuals I met were even aware of Western gay life.... My conversations with Hausa gay men suggest that they perceive homosexuality and homosexual marriage as practices that are indigenous to Hausa Muslim culture [even] as they are marginal within it. (1996a abstract)

Gaudio (1996b:123) argues that “gay” is appropriate in that these Hausa men “are conscious of themselves as men who have sex with men and who consider themselves to be socially distinct from men who do not have this kind of sex.” One term for those who do not is *mahaho*, “blind man” (p. 127).⁴⁰ Those Hausa men whom Gaudio calls *gay* “refer to themselves as *masu barka* ‘those who do the business,’ often abbreviated to *masu yi*, ‘those who do (it)’” (p. 135n7) and do not see homosexuality as

incompatible with heterosexuality, marriage or parenthood, which constitute strong normative values in Muslim Hausa society: at some point in their lives most of the men I am calling ‘gay’--including those who identify as womanlike--marry women and have children, even as they maintain their covert identity as men who have sex with men. . . . Most Hausa people do not see marriage as a choice but rather as a moral and social obligation [to sire children]. . . . My Hausa acquaintances did not see a necessary connection between marriage and heterosexual desire. (pp. 125-6)

While they seem to regard their homosexual desires as real and as intrinsic to their nature, they also regard their generative status as real,⁴¹ and ultimately more important (in contrast to *wasa*, “play” (p. 129).

In addition to the gendered idiom for the homosexuality of effeminate *'yan daudu* and their patrons, is another for men who are not notably effeminate in self-presentation who have sex with younger men. The older, wealthier man is call *k'wazo* (a masculine noun meaning hard-working in other contexts), the younger man who is sexually penetrated and receives presents like female sexual partners do is called *baja*, a feminine noun meaning “merchandise” (p. 130). Grammatical gender here maintains a

‘anatomy is destiny’ is too critical to the maintenance of the social order to be so easily compromised” (p. 49).

⁴⁰ There also terms for the male patrons of *'yan daudu*: *fararenbula* (“civilians”), *miji* (“husband”), *saurayi* (“boyfriend”), and *'yan aras*, which has no other or literal meaning (pp.127, 128, 136n13).. The masculine partner is expected to be sexually insertive and regularly to provide presents (money, clothes, travel) as to a female sexual partner (p. 129)

⁴¹ Indeed, as Muslims,. they regard their sex as God-given and do not conceive of excising their male genitals. Gaudio (1996:136n19) notes, “I never heard any *'yan daudu* discuss transsexualism as an option they would like to have available to them” and that even the most effeminate *'dan daudu* is understood by all Hausas to be male.

social gender contrast between same-sex sexual partners,⁴² although Gaudio notes that there are also instances of “successful pursuit of a younger man by a *'dan daudu*” (p. 131), so that age, wealth, and masculinity are not always neatly bundled. Feminine-identified males sometimes have sex with each other, calling it *kifi*: “lesbianism” (p. 132), a term also extended to sex between two masculine-identified males--who may *ti canji* “do an exchange.” Gaudio comments that labeling non-role-bound sex between males as “‘lesbian’ and therefore ‘feminine,’ reveals the normative strength of the idea that a valid sexual encounter involving a ‘real’ man must entail a distinct power asymmetry” and notes that “many gay Hausa men--including *'yan daudu* --deride or condemn ‘lesbian’ sexual relations between *'yan daudu* as absurd or immoral” (p. 132), although sex between two masculine-identified men is not condemned (p. 133). Apparently, real sex requires at least one masculine person, but need not include a feminine one.

Yoruba Exceptionalism: Antagonistic Acculturation?

Among the neighboring (to the southwest in Nigeria and Dahomey), Yoruba, non-Islamic savanana agriculturalists who have long been intensely hostile-to-Hausa, a psychiatric team in the early 1960s surveyed villagers around Abeokuta, Nigeria about symptoms thought by the Yoruba to indicate or constitute mental and emotional illness. “Homosexuality was not mentioned; and when we asked about it, we were told it was extremely rare, probably found only in changing parts of urban centers” (Leighton et al. 1963:111). The failure to mention homosexuality when questioned about *illness* is not the firmest basis for drawing conclusions about incidence. It might instead suggest that rural Yoruba did not consider homosexuality an “illness.”⁴³

As among many other African peoples, among the Yoruba spirit possession (*òrìsà gígún*), is primarily associated with women. Most Sango priests are female, and those who are not dress in women’s clothing, cosmetics, jewelry and sport women’s coiffures when they are going to be possessed (Matory 1994:6-7, also see 183-215; Baumann 1955:33-5; Matory 1986:51). About the cross-dressed (cross-coiffed) priests (*elegun*, literally “mounts”) possessed by *Sàngó*, Matory wrote, “They regularly have multiple wives and children, and no one seems to wonder if they engage in sex with other men” (1994:208). The Yoruba verb for possession *gun* (“to mount”)

often implies suddenness, violence, and utter loss of self-control.... Sango will “mount” the initiand bride, an act whose sexual implications are clear. Not only do gods “mount” priests, but male animals “mount” females in the sex act....It does not normally apply to human beings. Applied to human beings it suggests rape. Hence, its application suggests metaphorically the violence and absolute domination implicit in Sango’s command. (pp. 175, 198, 270n16),

And initiates of both sexes are called a “bride” (*iyawo*) of the god (p. 179)

⁴² Moreover, the passivity of the label for role in sex *ana cinsa* (“he gets fucked”) is easily further effeminized by transformation into *ana cinta* (“she gets fucked”), which might be considered an insult by a *baja*.

⁴³ Patron (1995:24) reported the establishment of a Metropolitan Community Church in the Nigerian state of Imo in the late 1970s (“hiding nothing of MCC’s mission to welcome all peoples--including homosexuals”) and the subsequent founding of more than 20 MCC churches in Nigeria. Whether there are identified “homosexuals” for these Nigerian churches to accept is not clear.

For the Yoruba--in marked contrast to their religious and political antagonists, the Hausa, and to the would-be Yoruba emulators, Bahian possession cultists, and to many other peoples--the priests who are mounted by gods are not regarded as being mounted by men. Of the *elegun* Matory wrote, "They regularly have multiple wives and children, and no one seems to wonder if they engage in sex with other men" (1994:208). Matory assured me that he had broached the subject--so that in this instance lack of evidence is not a function of absence of inquiry. In Afro-Brazilian possession religion, which is also has studied,

there is an extensive public discourse suggesting that males who are possessed by spirits tend also to be the type of men (i.e., *bichas*) who habitually get penetrated sexually by other men. By contrast, my point about the Nigerian possession religions is that they and their [non-believing] neighbors present no public discourse suggesting this link. To me the absence of such a discourse does not by itself mean that no Sango priest is penetrated by other men. It just means that few people, if any at all, in this socio-cultural context recognize penetrated men as a type of social personality and that sexual penetration is not the aspect of the sacred marriage that Oyo-Yoruba royalists highlight in the construction of god-priest relations or, incredible as it may sound, husband-wife relations.... I do not mean to infer that these men never have sex with other men [although] I doubt that they do, based upon my limited but deliberate investigation of the possibility. (personal communication, 12 April 1996)

I accept that there is no Yoruba role in which homosexuality is an expected feature.⁴⁴ It seems to me that Yoruba (Christian and "traditional") "natural sex" is contrasted to the corruption of Islamicized Hausa in the same way highland (mostly Christian) Kenyans Kikuyu view their sexuality as evidence of their moral superiority to coastal (Islamicized) perceived acceptance of transvestitic homosexuality, and that this difference has over time increasingly become a "marker" in ethnic-religious conflict in colonial and post-colonial multiethnic states (in invidious contrast to English as well as against Muslim rivals). While contrasting most Hausas' ready acknowledgment that homosexuality (including gossip about the involvement of "big men") exists in Hausaland with many Yorubas' denial that there is any Yoruba conception or practice, Rudolf Gaudio

categorically reject[s] the idea that there is no homosexual self-identity in contemporary Yoruba communities. I met at least two Yoruba self-identified 'gay' men in Kano, neither of whom had ever lived abroad, who told me about the many other 'gays' they knew in such cities as Ilorin, Ibadan, and, of course, Lagos where there is a 'Gentleman's Alliance' with pan-Southern membership. My Kano Yoruba contacts told me that GA members have private parties at each other's homes, and that there is a division of Yoruba gay male social circles into 'kings' and 'queens. . . When I asked one of these Yoruba 'queens' whether there was any Yoruba equivalent to the Hausa 'yan daudu, he said that no, Yoruba queens had more 'respect' than the 'yan daudu, insofar as Yoruba queens keep their outrageous, feminine behaviors a secret from other people. (personal communication, 13 March 1997)⁴⁵

⁴⁴ In addition to the patient explanation of what underlay "no one seems to wonder," by Lorand Matory, Yoruba linguistic anthropologist Niyi Akinnaso has told me of growing up in Yorubaland not knowing males could have sex with males and knowing of no indigenous homosexual roles. Both mention rumored occurrence in cities, especially the capital. (And I would add that in extensive discussion of homosexual phenomena in various cultures with each of them, neither of these distinguished Yorubaists seems to me to be even remotely homophobic.)

⁴⁵ In regard to claims made by some Edos that "there's no such thing as homosexuality or 'yan daudu in our place [in southern Nigeria, adjacent to Yorubaland] because such a man would be physically

Tade Akin Aina, a sociologist at the University of Lagos, wrote about male concubines and male prostitutes (many of whom double as pimps for female prostitutes) in contemporary cities such as Lagos and Kano. Patrons often "operate plural relationships with a retinue of young men," who may use the resources they derive from their homosexual liaisons to pursue heterosexual sex: "They are often identifiable as big spenders and playboy socialites" (1991:88). Male prostitutes he interviewed in Kano and Lagos

still believe that there are magical and witchcraft effects associated with male homosexual intercourse. They also believe that if the dominant partner is a businessman, such associations confer spiritual benefits to his business. This, they state, affects the price they place on their services. Also it is felt that homosexuality conveys some unique advantages on its practitioners; for instance, they feel that homosexuals tend to be rich and successful men.... {They] feel that they are at risk of becoming impotent (the "eunuch effect") or permanently incapable of conventional heterosexual relations once any of their clients exploit the relationship for ritual or witchcraft purposes.... Among the Nigerian prostitutes spoken to, modern risks such as AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases did not carry weight as sources of fear. (p. 88)

A Sometimes Lifelong “Adolescent Phase”

Herskovits (1938) reported the view of the Fon, the predominant people in Dahomey (now Benin), that homosexuality was an adolescent phase:

[When] the games between boys and girls are stopped, the boys no longer have the opportunity for companionship with the girls, and the sex drive finds satisfaction in close friendship between boys in the same group.... A boy may take the other ‘as a woman’ this being called *gaglgo*, homosexuality. Sometimes an affair of this sort persists during the entire life of the pair.

The last statement shows the insufficiency either of the native model or of Herskovits’s understanding of it (or ignorance of an additional model of another role). That the native model is prescriptive rather than descriptive is demonstrated by the need to carefully conceal homosexual relationships which continue beyond adolescence (p. 289). (Herskovits adds, “Homosexuality is found among women as well as men; by some it is claimed that it exists among women to a greater extent” (p. 289). Suspicion of what women are up to among themselves and a strong need for the shelter from male competition/hostility/suspicion in an emotionally-intense best friend relationship are especially strong in West Africa.⁴⁶

Much earlier, Norris (1789:422) mentioned seeing castrated men in his journeying through Dahomey. Captain Sir Richard F. Burton (1924[1865]:123) mentioned that “it is difficult to obtain information in Dahome concerning eunuchs, who are special slaves of the kind, and bear the dignified title of royal wives”: *akho’si* (from *Akoshu*=king, ‘*si*=wife) (His observations of troops of the king’s women soldiers are discussed below.)

attacked,” Gaudio wondered “how ‘unimaginable’ can a phenomenon be if people can vividly report or imagine the cruel fate of men accused of such a thing?” (Ibid.).

⁴⁶ Hambly (1937:500) wrote that “homosexuality is reported” in the Grand Porro of Liberia and Sierra Leone, but did not specify by whom it was reported.

Langle (1876:243) described a privileged effeminized role at the court in Ouidah. The *lagredis* of the Dahomey rule were chosen from among the sons of the country's best families. In their youth they were forced to drink potions that stifled their passions. They had unlimited powers, and their headman played an important part at court and in the king's council. Two lagredi accompanied any emissary of the king's, monitored his negotiations, and reported what they observed directly back to the king.

Bastian (1879, vol 3:305) suggested that the king's monopolization of women made pederasty inevitable. Gorer (1962 [1935]: 141) also opined that women were so monopolized by Dahomean royalty that "sexual perversion and neurotic curiosity were developed to an almost European extent."

Among the nearby Fanti (of Ghana) there are gender-crossing roles for men and for women (Christensen 1954: 92-3, 143). Those with heavy souls (*sunsum*), whatever their biological sex will desire women, while those with light souls will desire men, in this worldview. David Greenberg (1988:87) reported interviewing Eva Meyerowitz about her observations among Ashanti and other Akan peoples in what was the British Gold Coast colony between the 1920s and 1940s:

At that time men who dressed as women and engaged in homosexual relations with other men were not stigmatized, but accepted. There were good reasons for Akan men to become women, she commented -- the status of women among the matrilineal Akan was exceptionally high. The situation may have changed later, she thought, as a result of missionary activity.⁴⁷

Hutchinson (1861:129-30) mentioned male slaves, who were treated as lovers, wore pearl necklaces with gold pendants. They were killed when their Ashanti masters died.

Signorini (1971) reported that, in contemporary Ghana, Nzema men (who traditionally are forest cultivators around the mouth of the Tano River) marry attractive young men for "social, not sexual consumption." They speak frankly about attraction to the physical beauty, character, and oratorical skills of their partners. They "fall in love," contract relationships, and share beds, but persistently denied (to Signorini) that they committed "sodomy." The husband pays bridewealth to the male wife's parents, as he would for a female bride, and celebrates with a wedding banquet, regardless of the sex of the wife. The same incest taboos that restrict availability of female wives apply for contracting male-male marriages. Divorce requirements are also the same for male-male couples as for male-female ones. The male wives are younger than the husband, though the disparity seems to be less than trans-generational (e.g., a thirty-year-old husband marrying a twenty-year-old male) and no gender anomalies are involved.⁴⁸ Grottanelli (1988:210) also noted age disparities in Nzema "Agyale or 'friendship marriage,' usually between a man and a male teenager, more rarely between two women,

⁴⁷ Greenberg (personal communication, 1 Nov. 1994) added that Meyerowitz told him that "there was no change of gender, that age differences were minimal and did not play a role in these interactions, nor did differences of status or rank. nothing she said indicated that she herself had participated in these group sex sessions, so I am assuming her remarks were based on what women told her about them."

⁴⁸ I have relied on the summary of Nzema male-male marriage in Brain (1976:62-4). He also reports non-sexual friendships between males and females "to have the pleasure of their companionship." These friends become "like brother and sister" and may sleep together (53-54, quoting from Signorini)..

in which preliminaries similar to those of real marriage are performed, partners cohabit for short periods, exchange presents, and share the same bed or mat.”

Gender-Stratified Homosexuality in and around Senegal

In another West African culture, Senegal (then Saint Louis), Corre (1894:80n1) encountered black men of feminine dress and demeanor, who, he was told, made their living from prostitution. In Boké (Guinea), he saw a prince’s dancer miming his sexually receptive role. Some decades later, Gorer (1962 [1935]: 36) reported that in Senegal, the matrilineal Wolof

pathics are a common sight. They are called in Wolof men-women, *gor-digen*, and do their best to deserve the epithet by their mannerisms, their dress and their make-up; some even dress their hair like women. They do not suffer in any way socially, though the Mohammedans refuse them religious burial.

This report was echoed two and a half decades later by Crowder, who saw young males waiting to be picked up in the Place Prôtet, the main square in Dakar (renamed Place de l’Indépendance) and recorded a Wolof word for homosexual: “*Gor-Digen*. The elders and faithful Muslims condemn men for this, but it is typical of African tolerance that they are left very much alone by the rest of the people” (1959: 68). Gamble (1957: 80) added his opinion that homosexuality was rare in the countryside but well-established in large towns.⁴⁹ Davidson (1988[1970]:167-8) recounted the acceptance a transvestite male prostitute received in a Dakar bar in 1958 and (in a section reprinted in this volume) his visit to boy brothels outside Dakar that were patronized entirely by Senegalese.⁵⁰ while 17.6 percent of the males and 44.4 percent of the females in an opportunistic sample by Schenkel (1971:343) reported having engaged in homosexuality.

In the exceptionally vague-about-geography generalizations of their experiences at some unspecified time in Senegal and Burkina Faso,⁵¹ Potman and Ruijgrok referred to “militant transvestites and other uninhibited types in bigger cities” and noted

One of us took part in a ceremony where two male couples married in front of their friends. Each of the friends delivered a speech and rings were exchanged. The married couples, however, did not have the means to live together in the same house. Only a few rich urban men have the opportunity to live together. (1993:169)

They also noted that there are men who “will never consider or identify themselves as homosexuals, even if they have sex with other men regularly” and others who “clearly

⁴⁹ On urban boy prostitution in 1958 see Davidson in this volume. Schenkel (1971:379) also commented on the greater visibility (at least) of homosexuality in Dakar.

⁵⁰ X 1893:258=1989, vol. 2:165-6) mentioned a pair of young Bambara archers who took turns with each other while enslaved, and even after being freed (until they were able to share a wife of an absent fellow archer).

⁵¹ I recognize that they overcame their reluctance to write a chapter after failing to get West African friends to write one (p. 170), but still think that they could have been more specific about where and when -- and which one.

prefer homosexual contacts” but “will never label themselves publicly as homosexual because of the consequences.⁵² They therefore hide both their identity and activities” (p. 169). Within their relationships, “traditional male/female casting plays an important part. Partners characterize themselves as ‘the man’ or ‘the woman’; this choice of social role is reflected also in sexual intercourse, with an active and a passive partner.”

This strong role dichotomization has continued, as Teunis’s observations of a Dakar bar in 1990 show. The men he met there refer to themselves as *homoseuèles* in French (the language of conversations with him) and *gordjiguène* in Wolof. The latter is obviously the same word as in the earlier reported. Teunis (1996:161) glosses it as “manwoman,” although it encompasses both insertors (*yauss*) and insertees (*oubi*, which literally means “open”), according to an informant. “When two men have sex, the one who acts as inserter is the one who pays money or gives gifts to the other” (p. 161), as men give the women whom they penetrate more than their semen and the stimulation attendant to its ejaculation. However, the sexually receptive males “were able to support themselves and were often wealthier. . . [and therefore] not economically dependent on the *yauss*” (p. 161).

Teunis also reported that one *oubi* may “play” sexually with another *oubi*. The Senegalese who hung out in this bar distinguished such play from “sex” (i.e., anal penetration), but (not least by refusing to participate in it) Teunis did not learn how roles or sexual acts between *oubi* are negotiated.

A particularly interesting aspect of his article is his claim that physical appearance is the sole basis for assigning a male to the role of *yauss* or that of *oubi*. The evidence for his categorical claim, however, is slender and equivocal. He knew one big, strong *yauss*, whom he calls Babacar, who told Teunis of “his desire for lightskinned (not white) men with big chests and huge muscles, like Rambo” (p. 164). It is less obvious to me than it was to Teunis that this must mean wanting to be topped by a light brown Rambo rather than topping one. Babacar’s sexual partners were boys aged around seventeen who were not part of the bar subculture and who were paid to be sexually receptive by Babacar. Thus, his visible gender and sexual behavior were consistent, while his role in sex with his fantasy object was unspecified.

Teunis’s other basis for concluding that role assignment is immediate and unshakable is that without any indication of his desired role he (Teunis) was typed as an *oubi*. Even while maintaining his chastity as he did, he might have tried to claim that he was a *yauss* (or that he was a European gay man and thereby neither or both) to test the unshakability of initial judgement of his womanliness/penetrability that was made by the hustler/pimp who led him to the bar and by its denizens. In that some of Babacar’s boys offered to be anally penetrated by him (p. 164) he was seen by some Senegalese insertees as a possible inserter. I have argued elsewhere that intercultural sexual relations provide an uncertain basis for reaching conclusions about what “natives” generally do with each other, and am not criticizing Teunis for failing to take

⁵² These are social pressures, rather than fear of legal penalties: “We never met homosexuals who mentioned legal oppression as a constraint to their sexual life” (p. 168), and “despite clearly defined religious guidelines for human conduct, we seriously doubt whether religion has a great influence on the sexual lives of West Africans.”

up invitations for either “sex” or “play,” but he does not seem to have inquired about departures from the neat cultural scenario either.⁵³

Leaving Dakar and the present, there are some other reported of feminized boys being sexually used by adult male West Africans. What the Anyi (of the Ivory Coast) do and think are only dimly visible through the nearly opaque a priori Freudian theory of Parin et al. (1980), but they asserted that “in every village there are some men who, for neurotic reasons, do not have sexual relations with women. A number of them are known to practice occasional reciprocal masturbation with boys.” As in Dahomey, “bisexual development may be even more common in women” (p. 204). In one case study (pp. 289-95) the approaches of a gift-giving sorcerer to the male analysand is ambivalently recounted to/by the psychoanalysts. Hammer (1909:198) reported mutual masturbation among young male Duala in the Cameroons, Torday and Joyce (1906:48) of the Ba-Yaka farmers of the middle Congo River. Wilhelm Hammer noted that homosexual relations were not rare among Liberian Kru youths (1909:198), whose domestic services to men of other groups included being sodomized, according to Hellwald (1886,4: 591).

Tessman (1921:124-8) described generally accepted, male-male sex among adolescent Bafia (in the Cameroons), involving penetration of younger boys by older boys and reciprocal anal intercourse (*jigele ketön*) which he reported was common among friends judged too young to have intercourse with females. They were expected to give up same-sex sex when they reached the *ntu* age-grade and could have sex with females, and certainly to have outgrown it by the time they became fathers (the *mbang* age-grade). Tessman believed that not all did, but did not know of any specific instances.

The Kitesha Role Among the Mbala

Among the Mbala (sometimes referred to as the Basangye in older literature) in Kasai Oriental Province of the Congo, Merriam (1971: 93-4) reported denial of any homosexual behavior in one sentence and in the next reported that Mbalan men believe the *kitesha* “is a homosexual.” Clearly, *kitesha* is a Mbala role, a role at variance with the conventional male role in that culture (particularly patterns of dress and of subsistence activity), and comes with concomitant expectations of unconventional sexual behavior. But while Merriam’s three informants (one *kitesha*, two not) agreed that *bitesha* (the plural form of *kitesha*) do not like to work and, improperly for men, go about bare-chested (p. 97), there was no accord in their views of what deviant sexual behavior went with the role: homosexuality, exhibitionistic heterosexuality or asexuality.

⁵³

See Murray 1996b. My experiences and observations of the considerable flexibility in practice contrasting with a normative absolute dichotomization of *activo* and *pasivo* roles in Mesoamerican cultural scenarios cannot be extrapolated automatically, but reports of masculine customers eager to be penetrated by effeminate male prostitutes in North and South America and West Africa prompt at least curiosity about whether normative role dichotomization in Senegal is sufficient to predict sexual behavior.

The one self-acknowledged *kitesha* in the village Merriam studied “is married and says that he likes his wife and likes to have intercourse with her,” and was quoted as saying, “I like women; I don’t want to be without them” (p.95). One non-*kitesha* informant, however, opined,

Bitesha like to expose their genitals in public, but they do not have homosexual relationships. They are not interested in women, and as for masturbation, who can tell? In a desperate situation, a *kitesha* may have public intercourse with a female *kitesha*. This is terribly shameful: no one would ever look at such a thing on purpose, but people cannot help seeing. Then they know he is a *kitesha* and they leave him alone. He does not have to work in the fields (pp. 94-5).

While this statement indicates social tolerance for dropping out of the male role (as something some must do) it does not much clarify *kitesha* involvement in heterosexual coitus. It also makes one wonder what female *kitesha* do other than have intercourse with male *kitesha*.

Merriam’s other informant was reportedly “at no loss” to speak of “males who act like women,” reeling off this list of traits:

He doesn’t want to work. He doesn’t want to be with other men. He doesn’t even have a concubine. He eats everywhere except at his own house. He doesn’t do the things other men do. He never keeps a job. He has good luck. He acts like a woman, that is, rushes about hither and yon and wiggles his hips when he walks. He wears women’s clothing, but not kerchiefs. (p. 94).

The one already-quoted *kitesha* “says stoutly that it is not shameful for him to be a *kitesha* but that he knows other men think it is shameful” (p. 97) , while denying both that *bitesha* commit homosexual acts and that anyone else thinks they do. Although Merriam did not observe the man’s sexual activities, he noted that “others in the village swear to having been eyewitnesses” of Mulenda having intercourse with a female *kitesha*“ (pp. 96-7).

In his 1974 book, Merriam repeated the discordant social view of the role and Mulenda’s self-report of liking women and adds Mulenda’s assertion that

female *bitesha* do not like men, prefer the company of women, but most of all wish to be with male *bitesha*. They like to have sexual relations with men, particularly male *bitesha*, and they do not like to wear men’s clothing. They do not like to cook or to do other female tasks save to gather wood “because that is the easiest work (p. 321).

Merriam did not encounter any female *bitesha*, so this statement about female *bitesha* may be another assertion by Mulenda of his own heterosexuality against the general view of *bitesha*, acknowledging only the component of laziness.

Although it seems that *kitesha* is a gender-crossing role (especially in rejecting the work allocated to one’s sex in Basongye society), rather than a primarily homosexual one, a possible reconciliation of the seemingly contradictory views that there is not homosexual behavior among Mbala men and that *bitesha* are homosexuals is that the Mbala do not consider *bitesha* to be men, so that the Mbala afford another example of

heterogender relations that is not conceived as involving two men but, rather one who is socially male and another who is socially female.⁵⁴

Other Central African Reports

In an earlier report on another Kongo people, the Bangala, Weeks (1909: 448-9) reported that mutual masturbation was common and that sodomy was “very common, and is regarded with little or no shame. It generally takes place when men are visiting strange towns or during the time they are fishing at camps away from their women.” Herman Soyaux (1879, vol. 2:59) also attributed boy-love to the lengthy business trips made by Bangala men, unaccompanied by their wives. As Karsch-Haack (1911) noted, this explanation begs the question of why the Bangala travelers do not strike up acquaintances with women as well as with boys, and inferred that although many Mabara make good business profits from their marriages, their real passion is for boys. Although pressing considerably beyond the circumscribed ethnographic record and eager to find such alternative valuations, Karsch-Haack’s inference is not without plausibility.

From north of the Congo River, Karsch-Haack also elicited from Günther Tessman the assertion that the Loanga were known to other groups as major poisoners and pederasts. Tessman had observed male favorites being free of burdens when even the chief carried loads.

In a much earlier report, Labat (1732: vol. 2, 195-9) wrote of a venerated office of first sacrificer in the Nquti (Kongo) Kingdom. In Labat’s view the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda was “a bare-faced, insolent, obscene, extremely villanous, disreputable scoundrel.” Usually wearing women’s clothes, he was referred to as “Great Mother.” Able to “perpetrate every villainy without fear of being punished with death, the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda committed the foulest crimes.” Funeral rites were so indecent and shameful “that the paper dirtied with its description would blush.” The condemnations are obviously Labat’s, not the Nquti’s. That the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda had sacred functions made such “deviltry” worse in the pious Christian view.⁵⁵

Trevisan (1986:55) excavated the following interpretation of ways of advertising availability back where the Bahian slaves originated from *Denunciations of Bahia, 1591-1593*:

Francisco Manicongo, a cobbler’s apprentice known among the slaves as a sodomite for “performing the duty [being penetrated] of a female” and for “refusing to wear the men’s clothes which the master gave him.” Francisco’s accuser added that “in Angola and the Congo in which he had wandered much and of which he had much experience, it is customary among the pagan negros to wear a loincloth with the ends in front which leaves an opening in the rear. . . this custom being adopted by those sodomitic negros who serve as passive women in the abominable sin. These passives are called *jimbanda* in the language of Angola and the Congo, which means passive sodomite. The accuser claimed to have seen Francisco

⁵⁴ Bentley’s (1887:746) San Salvador Kongo dictionary lists *uzeze/zeze* for “effeminate man.”

⁵⁵ Bleys (1995:57n101) questions the homosexual referent of “foulest crimes,” but reads another section (Labat 1732: vol, 2:55-6.as “signs of incidental, disguised homoeroticism” (p. 33).

Manicongo “wearing a loincloth such as passive sodomites wear in his land of the Congo and immediately rebuked him.” (ellipsis in Trevisan)

Although the closeted anthropological popularizer Colin Turnbull (1965:122; 1986:118) wrote that in Mbuti (pygmie) hunting bands, who live in the Ituri forest at the heart of the Congo basin male homosexuality is rare and regarded derisively, he wrote to David Greenberg (1988:87) “that when men sleep huddled together, sometimes one ejaculates, but he then ridicules himself for this ‘accident.’⁵⁶ He added that he did not see the Mbuti as rejecting homosexuality so much as favoring procreation very strongly.”

As mentioned earlier (Driberg 1923:210) passed on Lango assertions that homosexual conduct was very common among neighboring groups, specifically the Iteso and Karamojan. Similarly, further south (in southwestern Uganda) Mushanga (1973:181) reported that Nkole informants told him that the Bahima (but not any Nkole) practice homosexuality.

In the old kingdom of Rwanda, Maquet (1961: 77-8) reported that male homosexuality was common among Hutu and Tutsi youth, especially among young Tutsi being trained at court, i.e., they were made sexually available to guests at court. Johnson (1986:29) wrote

Mutabaruka, a 19-year-old [Tutsi] college student told me that, traditionally, in his tribe there was an extended period during which boys lived apart from the rest of the village while they are training to be warriors, during which very emotional, and often sexual, relationships were struck up... “Sometimes these relationships lasted beyond adolescence into adulthood,” he told me. Watusi still have a reputation for bisexuality in the cities of East Africa.

Umuswezi and *umukonotsi*, two Kirundi (Burundi) words for “sodomite” and at least five Urundi words for male-male sexuality (*kuswerana nk’imbwa*, *kunonoka*, *kwitomba*, *kuranana inyuma*, *ku’nyo*) in Burgt’s dictionary belie sodomy being unknown by them. Karsch-Haack (1911) and Bleys (1995:169) also interpreted Burgt (1904:20, 107) as unknowingly revealing Mirundi gender-crossing priests *ikihindu* and *ikimaze* (mislabeled by the missionary “hermaphrodite,” a very imprecise label at that time).

An early, highly-regarded ethnography (Driberg 1923:210) uncritically passed on the dubious folk explanation that impotence is the basis for assuming the gender-crossing role among the central African (now Ugandan) Lango (cf. Herskovits 1937: 117). This is reminiscent of the frequent confusion about the biological basis of the “berdache” role in native North America. Under the protection of the folk explanation, the *mudoko dako* [transformed man] is treated as a woman, and may live as a legitimate wife to a man. According to Driberg, such persons were rare among the Lango (50 out of 17,000 people), but they told him that such conduct was very common among neighboring groups, specifically the Iteso and Karamojan. Similarly, further south (in southwestern Uganda) Mushanga (1973:181) reported that the Nkole told him that the Bahima (but not any Nkole) practice homosexuality.

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The ability of anthropologists not to see homoeroticism in same-sex sexual behavior is astounding. See Murray (1987a, 1997a).

Faupel (1962: 9-10, 68, 82-3) reported that Uganda's King Mwanga's 1886 persecution of Christian pages was largely motivated by their rejection of his sexual advances. He found it increasingly difficult to staff his harem of pageboys and supposedly was enraged when Mwafu, his favorite, refused any longer to submit to anal penetration by the king.⁵⁷

Half a century later, Bryk (1939:151, 1964:229) reported that

in Uganda I saw two boys, a Mgisho and a Baganda, lying in bed together, whereupon another boy sneered at them with the words, "They love each other like husband and wife." When one of the embarrassed boys objected, the boys deriding them answered quite rightly, "A man does not sleep with another boy in broad daylight."

More recently, Southwold (1973:170) reported that Baganda knew that sodomy was practiced, attributed its introduction to Arabs, and "tend to regard it primarily as foolish: why fool around with a man when women are freely available?" Bryk (1933:150) attested the Arabic *hanisi* as being used by Baganda for natal males "whose penises had died."

Laurance (1957: 107) asserted that among the Iteso, people of hermaphroditic instincts are very numerous.... The men are impotent and have the instincts of women and become women to all intents and purposes; their voices are feminine and their manner of walking and of speech is feminine. They shave their heads like a woman and wear women's ornaments and clothing. They do women's work and take women's names," adding that "I myself know of no cases in which they live with men as a 'wife,'" but noting that in Serere prison one was kept with the women because "the male prisoners would assault him were he imprisoned in the men's cell." He also included a song "The fellow who pinches a hermaphrodite is a fool" (pp. 160-). Karp and Karp (1973:392) noted group masturbation among young Iteso males in Uganda and Kenya, but had no information on its frequency. Bauman (1899:668) noted an effeminate Wganda "totally given to passive pederasty." La Fontaine (1959:60-1) reported that the Gisu of Uganda "scorned but did not regard with revulsion transvestite [transsexual in that they denied being men] *buyazi*." He added that the three men and one woman he encountered cross-dressing in the early 1950s were "not mentally disordered" and were not believed to have any special magical powers. "It is said that today [1950s] transvestism is associated with homosexuality, whereas formerly it was not." In contrast, in another Uganda Bantu group, the Nyoro, Needham (1973:316) suggested a relationship between "sexual reversal (by homosexuality, feminine accoutrements, putative child-bearing, or by other less dramatic means)" and the power of diviners [*embandwa* with a the root *nda* being a term for womb]: "At the ceremony of initiation into the Cwezi cult the novice is given to believe that he must demonstrate his genuine possession by the spirits by becoming a woman."

In a chapter based on observation of a Ugandan prison Tanner (1969:301) wrote that the "majority could understand but not tolerate homosexuality in others, and they constantly referred to the practice in admonitory terms" (in earshot of colonialists).

⁵⁷ Also see Rowse 1964; Hyam 1990:186-9. The Ganda kingdom was founded in the early sixteenth century by Luo herder-warriors. It grew and prospered in subsequent centuries (Maquet 1972:152)

Tanner (1969:302) elaborated a typology nearly as opaque as the understand/tolerate dichotomy:

A few made quasi-normal adjustments by adapting homosexual practices while in prison in order to get material advantages. A few entered the prison with homosexual traits already in existence and provided service for the previous group [?]; they were mainly Arabs or Somali. They were not usually identifiable by ways of dressing or mannerisms. The majority of all fights were over what prisoners call their 'wives.'

Southern Africa

Angola

Much earlier, the Portuguese priests Gaspar Azevedo and Antonius Sequerius, in Luanda, the capital of Angola met many men called *chibados*, who should have but were not ashamed to dress, sit, and speak like women, and who married men just as if they were women in order "to unite in wrongful male lust with them." Even more shocking to them was that such marriage were honored and even prized (Jarric 1616:482).

Frederick Christian Damberger recounted being propositioned and assaulted by the son-in-law of the chief of the Muhotians in the vicinity of the Lorenzo River. When he complained to the chief, "the chief laughed and seemed to consider in nothing uncommon. This made me more attentive, and I now discovered that the contention at my first arrival at the kraal arose from every one's wishing to obtain possession of me for the same abominable purpose; and indeed, other attempts were afterwards made to seduce me" (1801:158). Damberger further averred that the Muhotians fought Kamtorians to their northeast, both groups seeking to use the other for the "gratification of their diabolical lusts" (p. 159).

The Dongo queen Anna Xinga maintained fifty-to-sixty cross-dressed men, while herself dressing as a man and calling herself (and her cross-dressed courtiers) male, according to Dapper (1670:617).

Speaking generally, Cardonegawrote:

Sodomy is rampant among the people of Angola. They pursue their impudent and filthy practices dressed as women. Their own [language's] name for those who have carnal relations with each other [of the same sex] is *quimbanda*. Some *quimbandas* are powerful wizards, who are much esteemed by most Angolans. (1680:86, my translation)

Also in Angola, Hambly's (1937:426; 1934a: 181) main Mbunda informant Ngonga told of transvestitic medicine men, and related the case of a boy who persisted in dressing in women's clothes and beating corn (women's work), despite punishment. David Livingstone (1857:452) also mentioned (without hazarding any opinion of their sexual predilections) many Temba "dandies" whose bodies were adorned all over with decorations and whose hair was so heavily greased that their shoulders were coated with it.

The Kalahari Desert

Kolb (1719:362) mentioned Khoi-Khoi males, called *koetsire*, who were sexually receptive to other males. Long-time resident of German South-West Africa (what is now Namibia) Kurt Falk (1920) reported homosexuality among the Wawihé, Ovivangella and Nginé of Angola. Falk (1925) maintained that homosexuality among speakers of Khoisan languages

is fairly common among both men and women, and especially among young married women. There exists among the Naman a practice whereby two individuals, either of the same or of opposite sex, will enter into a specially intimate bond of association, *soregus*, with each other. This is initiated by one of the parties drinking from a bowl of water (or nowadays often coffee), and then handing the rest of the liquid to the other to drink.... As a rule the relationship thus entered upon primarily implies deep friendship and mutual assistance, especially in economic matters. But, according to Falk, it is also used as a means of establishing a homosexual relationship, especially by boys, who jealously watch over each other. The customary form of homosexual practice is mutual masturbation, among both men and women; pedication (coitus in anum) between men, and the use of an artificial penis between women, are also found, but more rarely. Falk mentions also three cases known to him of men who were confirmed sexual inverts. Unfortunately, he gives no concrete data as to the public attitude either towards such men or towards homosexuality in general, but as far as can be gathered from his short account, homosexual practices are regarded somewhat as a matter of custom. (Schapera 1930:242-3; also see Falk in this volume; Schultze 1907:319).

In an extremely hostile characterization, the missionary Johann Irle (1906:58-59) depicted the the nomadic pastoralist Herero people (of what is now Namibia) as liars and thieves who devote themselves to sensual pursuits from the age of ten and, when challenged, say that they have grown from childhood in their own natural way. Rather than speak of the unspeakable, Irle invoked St. Paul's antihomosexual Romans I:18-31 (forsaking the natural use of women and burning with desire for each other) as the only indication of what these sensual pursuits were. Falk (1925:205-6), however, specified that Herero special friendships (*omapanga*) included anal sex (*okutunduka vanena*), as well as mutual masturbation.

The Finnish missionary M. Rautanen (1903: 333-4) wrote that both pederasts and men presenting themselves as women (*eshenga*) existed and were detested by the Ondonga. Most of the latter, he wrote, were shaman (*oonganga*).

In the Oshiwambo language spoken by about 600,000 Ovambos in northern Namibia, anally receptive males are called *eshengi* (plural *ovashengi*), "he who is approached from behind." According to University of Namibia historian Wolfram Hartmann, "the *ovashengi* of the Unkwambi, a subgroup of the Ovambo, are respected as healers, or *onganga*. Among another Ovambo subgroup, the Oukwanyama, the *ovashengi* are not treated as well; however, they are the only Oukwanyama members entitled to play the *ekola*, a special music[al] instrument" (in Jones 1996:41).

Among the contemporary Ambo (in southwestern Angola)⁵⁸ Estermann (1976:197) noted that the highest order (called *ovatikili*) of diviner (*kimbanda*) who "recruited

⁵⁸ Like the Mbundu, Ambo raise sorghum and millet as well as cows. Unlike the Mbundu (and most other African pastoralists), Ambo women shared in caring for the cattle and participate in Ambo pastoralist rituals.

exclusively among men [who] are few and feared and their activity is surrounded by profound mystery.” Although Estermann did not say that all *ovatkili* are possessed by female spirits, he wrote that a large number of the owners of *omakola*, a musical instrument translated as “big gourd” were passive homosexuals (*omasenge*), who dressed like women, did women’s work, and ‘contracted marriage’ with other men” who already had female wives. He explained,

In a general way this aberration is to be interpreted by the spiritism or spiritist belief of these people. An *esenge* [singular of *omasenge*] is essentially a man who has been possessed since childhood by a spirit of female sex, which has been drawing out of him, little by little, the taste for everything that is masculine and virile.

Also in Angola, Hambly’s (1937:426; 1934a: 181) main Mbunda informant Ngonga told of transvestitic medicine men, and related the case of a boy who persisted in dressing in women’s clothes and beating corn (women’s work), despite punishment. Livingstone (1857:452) also mentioned (without hazarding any opinion of their sexual predilections) many Temba “dandies” whose bodies were adorned all over with decorations and whose hair was so heavily greased that their shoulders were covered with it.

Southeastern Africa

In Zambia, Poewe (1982:172) mentioned a cross-gender role without any indication of sexual components of the role: “Dual sexuality, if such a designation is appropriate, refers to the fact that a person who is anatomically male, can play a female role. For example, a person’s maternal uncle, specifically his/her maternal uncle, is *nalume*. *Na* means mother of, *lume* means masculine gender.” Hilarity” is her characterization of the people she studied in Luapula “on the rare occasions” that they mention forms of sexuality other than heterosexuality (p. 147).⁵⁹

In his extensive description of Mukande initiation rites in what is now northwestern Zambia, Victor Turner noted that initiates mimed copulation with a senior male’s penis. The Mukande considered this a way to strengthening the novice’s own penises. Earlier, among the matrilineal Balovale savanna-farming peoples (Chokwe, Luchazi, Lucho, Lunda, and Luvale) in the same savanna region, during the first phase of initiation while the initiates are recovering from their circumcisions, they wore no clothes. During that phase, novices played with the penises of the *vilombola* (keeper of the initiation lodge) and *tulombolachika* (initiated assistants of the *vilombola*). White (1953:49) reported that “this is considered to hasten healing; the novices also hope that by so doing, their own penes will grow large and strong. The same is done to visitors to the lodge.”

In what is now southwestern Zimbabwe, Livingstone (1865:284) asserted that elderly chiefs’ monopolization of women was responsible for the “immorality” of younger men. Smith and Dale (1920, II: 74) mentioned one Ila-speaking man who dressed as a woman, did women’s work, lived and slept among, but not with, women. The Ila label *mwaami* they translated as “prophet.” They also mentioned that

⁵⁹ She vents some of her own hostility to Western male homosexuality on p. 211, while claiming “tolerance” for it.

“pederasty was not rare,”but was considered dangerous because of the risk that the boy will become pregnant (p. 436),.

Although the current official history of (male) homosexuality in Zimbabwe is that it diffused from South Africa during the 1950s, Epprecht’s (1996) review of 250 court cases from 1892 to 1923 found cases from the beginnings of the records. The five 1892 cases all involved black Africans. A defense offered was that “sodomy” was part of local “custom.” In one case a chief was summoned to testify about customary penalties and reported that the penalty was a fine of one cow, which was less than the penalty for adultery. Over the entire period, Epprecht found the balance of black and white defendants proportional to that in the population.⁶⁰ Of course, as he notes, what came to the attention of the courts was far from a random sample of sexual behavior in the colony, most consensual relations in private not provoking notice by the courts. Some cases were brought by partners who had been dropped or who had not received promised compensation from their former sexual partner. And although the norm was for the younger male to lie supine and not show any enjoyment, let alone expect any sexual mutuality, Epprecht found a case in which a pair of black males had stopped their sexual relationship out of fear of pregnancy, but one wanted to resume mounting and loving each other, i.e., taking turns anally penetrating each other.

Monica Wilson’s 1951 book (based on fieldwork during the mid-1930s) of Bantu-speaking Nykakyusa northwest of Lake Nyasa (on both sides of the Tanzania/Zimbabwe border) is a classic account of extreme age-grading. The inhabitants of each village contained only one generation (spanning five to eight years; p. 32) of males.⁶¹ For unmarried male contemporaries to dwell together for awhile in temporary villages or in mens’ houses (especially during initiation) was common in “traditional” (tribal) Africa.

The peculiarity of the Nyakyusa consists in the fact that contemporaries live together permanently through life, not merely as bachelors.... The Nyakusa themselves associate living in age-villages with decency in sex life--the separation of the sex activities of successive generations, and the avoidance of incest.... The emphasis on the separation of parents and children is matched by the value laid on good fellowship (*ukwangala*) between contemporaries... The value of good fellowship with equals is constantly talked about by the Nyakyusa, and it is dinned into boys from childhood that enjoyment and morality alike consist in eating and drinking, in talking and learning, in the company of contemporaries. (p. 159, 162-3)

Nykakyusa derided heterosociality, and feared sharing of food and beer between fathers and sons. “To force a fellow to have homosexual intercourse against his will was a serious offence, comparable to witchcraft” (p. 88) or is witchcraft (p. 196). An “exceptionally reliable informant” told Wilson that a man “never dreams of making love to another man” and that “not many cases of grown men having intercourse together come to light, but only of boys together or of a man and a boy.” He elaborated:

⁶⁰ Whites convicted of sodomy or indecent assault were generally imprisoned for more than a year, blacks for less than a year.

⁶¹ Wives come from multiple villages and most women are inherited at least once. Because men inherit wives older than themselves and continue to marry younger brided, the women in a village vary more in age than the men, and do not form an age set.

When a boy sleeps with his friend they sleep together; it is nor forbidden. Everyone thinks it all right. Sometimes when boys sleep together each may have an emission on the other (*bitundanila*).. If they are great friends there is no wrong done.... Boys sometimes agree to dance together (*ukukina*) and work their evil together and that also is no wrong. ⁶² ... Boys do this when they are out herding; then they begin to dance together and to have intercourse together.... To force a fellow this is witchcraft (*bo bulosi*); he is not a woman. But when they have agreed and dance together, then even if people find them, they say it is adolescence (*lukulilo*), all children are like that. And they say that sleeping together and dancing is also adolescence. (p. 196)

He reported that interfemoral intercourse is “what boys mostly do” and also reported anal and oral sex. He was aware of and disapproving of “some, during intercourse, work[ing] in the mouth of their friend, and hav[ing] an orgasm.... That of the mouth people do very rarely when they dance together” (p. 196).

Egalitarian/reciprocal sex between adolescent friends seems to have been most common, although some age-stratification also occurred:

When out herding, some of the older boys do evil [see note 43] with the young ones, the older persuade the little one to lie down with them and to do what is forbidden with them between the legs. Sometimes two older boys who are friends do it together, one gets on top of his fellow, then he gets off and the other one mounts. (pp. 196-7).

Two other informants agreed that homosexuality occurred frequently in boys’ villages: “A boy has intercourse with his fellow, but a grown man? No, never, we’ve never heard of it it. They always want women; only when a man cannot get a women he does this, only in youth. A few men do not marry but they are half-wits who have no kind of intercourse at all” (p. 197).

In addition to gender-crossing Zulu possessed diviners, there appears to have been at least occasional substitution of boys from women in establishing the potency of men seeking recognition as adult warriors (Krige 1965:276-7; Morris 1965:36,52), ⁶³ and men/women not engaged in spirit mediumship: Vilkazi (1962) attested that such men were called *inkosi ygbatfazi*, chief of the women.

Morris (1965:46) Robert (1975:86-7) suggested that the great warrior Shaka, who forged a Zulu kingdom in southern Africa prior to European incursions, was homosexual. He had no wives, sired no children and preferred the company of the uFasimba, a regiment of the youngest bachelors (Morris 1965:36). His soldiers “must not be enervated by matrimony and softened by family ties,” until “the advance of years which, while unfitting him for soldiering, won him permission to marry” (Ferguson 1918:206). Journalist John Gunther (1955:523) contrasted “peoples like the Zulus [who are] sternly upright and moral for the most part and peoples greatly addicted to homosexuality, like the Pondos,” whatever this may mean. ⁶⁴

⁶² If it is not wrong, one has to wonder what was translated as "working evil toget her"!

⁶³ Hirn (1900:347-8) interpreted Fritsch (1872:140) as describing pederastic male initiation rites.

⁶⁴ Earlier, Gunther (1955:66) wrote that “Berbers are seldom homosexual, and despise Arabs for being so widely addicted to this vice,” so addiction was a standard metaphor for him.

Wives of the South African Mines

The 1890s were a time of violent dislocation of black South Africans. One notable group of rebels/bandits south of Johannesburg, called *Umkhosi Wezintaba*, the Regiment of the Hills, by its Zulu refugee *Inkoos Nkulu* (King), ‘Nongoloza’ Mathebula, emulated Shaka’s armies. The Zulu leader who took the name Jan Note and was called by whites the “King of Nineveh,” ordered his (mostly non-Zulu) troops to abstain from all physical contact with females: “Instead, the older men of marriageable status within the regiment--the *ikhela*--were to take younger male initiates in the gang--the *abafana*--and keep them as *izinkotshane*, ‘boy wives’” (van Onselen 1984:15). In 1900 Nongoloza was captured, but his organization extended from townships to mining camps to prisons, in all of which the sex ratio was very skewed and men’s concern was great about venereal disease among such few women as there were. The homosexual relations were not, however, a result of the prison environment. Nongoloza testified that the practice [*hlabonga*] “has always existed. Even when we were free on the hills south of Johannesburg some of us had women and others had young men for sexual purposes” (Director of Prisons Report, quoted by Achmat 1993:99). In castigating social historians (van Onselen in particular) for elliding local understandings (this self-report by the leader of the Ninevites in particular), Achmat, who as a political prisoner in 1978 had personal experience of the enduring Ninevite allocation of young prisoners for sex with Ninevite leaders who then undertook their protection,⁶⁵ stresses that “Nongoloza did not apologise for the fact that some of the Ninevites ‘had young boys for sexual purposes.’ He did not try to justify its existence by referring to venereal disease or tradition. Instead, he justified it in terms of sexual desire” (Achmat 1993:100)

The Swiss Presbyterian missionary Henri Junod vacillated between attributing elaborately organized homosexuality among Tsonga migrant laborers in South African mines to the unavailability of women in labor camps or to a pre-existing, indigenous homosexual preference. The *nkhonsthana*, boy-wife,⁶⁶ “used to satisfy the lust” of the *nima*,⁶⁷ husband, received a wedding feast, and his elder brother received brideprice. Junod mentioned that some of the “boys” were older than 20, and also described a transvestitic dance, *tinkhonsthana*, in which the *nkhonsthana* donned wooden or cloth breasts, which they would only remove when paid to do so by their *nima* (1927: 492-3, 294).

An aged Tsonga named Philemon recalled that wives of the mine (*tinkonkana*) were expected to perform domestic chores for their “husbands”:

⁶⁵ Achmat was allocated to the de facto cell boss for the one night he spent in a group cell. The sex was variegated: “We had sex for hours; he fucked me, kissed me, masturbated me. I wanked him and showed him what a sixty-nine was” (1993:94). That is the dominant male did not ignore the penis of the subordinate one.

⁶⁶ Junod (1927:492) glossed the term as “girlfriend.” It “apparently corresponds to the Xhosa *intombi*, which is used for the junior partner in love affairs, whether biologically female, at home or in town, or male, on the mines” (Moodie 1988:237).

⁶⁷ *Nima* is **not** a lexeme for a male homosexual role, but the unmarked (by sexual orientation) term for husband. *Nkhonsthana* is distinct from *nsati*, wife, although this latter term is also sometimes used for the boy wife.

Each of these *xibonda* [room representatives] would propose a boy for himself, not only for the sake of washing his dishes, because in the evening the boy would have to go and join the *xiobonda* on his bed. In that way he had become a wife. The husband. . . would make love with him. The husband would penetrate his manhood between the boy's thighs (Sibuyi 1993:53).

The grateful husbands bought presents for these wives, including clothes, blankets, and even bicycles. Moodie (1988:231) explained that intercrural intercourse

is typical of a form of sexual play amongst adolescent Nguni boys and girls called *metsha* among Xhosa-speakers and *hlobongo* by the Zulu. These young 'boys' of the miners are not merely sexual partners, but are also 'wives' in other ways, providing domestic services for their 'husbands' in exchange for substantial remuneration," adding that these homosexual dyads occurred "almost exclusively between senior men (men with power in the mine structure) and young boys. There is in fact an entire set of rules, an *mteto*, governing these types of relationships, whose parameters are well-known and enforced by black mine authorities.

Fidelity was expected and jealousy on occasion led to violence.⁶⁸ Philemon was very explicit that "some men enjoyed 'penetrating the thighs' more than they did the real thing [i.e, penetrating vaginas] (p. 54). Moreover, agency was not always a monopoly of the established elder, since he mentioned the consequences "when a boy decided to fall in love with a man. . ." (p. 54) and that male couples "would quarrel just as husbands and wives do. Some quarrels would also lead to divorce" (P. 58). When Sibuyi asked Philemon whether the boys wishes to become someone's wife, he replied, "Yes: for the sake of security, for the acquisition of property and for the fun itself" (p. 62)

The Taberer Report in 1907 noted that

it appears to have become a well-recognized custom among the mine natives recruited from the East Coast to select from the youths and younger men what are termed *amankotshane* or *izinkotshane*. An *inkotshane* may be described as a fag and is utilised for satisfying the passions. Any objections on the part of the youth to becoming an *inkotshane* are apparently without very much difficulty overcome by lavishing money and presents upon him. . . An *inkotshane*'s duty appears to be to fetch water, cook food and do any odd work or run messages for his master and at night time to be available as bedfellow. In return for these services the *inkotshane* is well fed and paid; presents and luxuries are lavished upon him (p. 2, quoted by Moodie 1988:234).

An old Mpondo added that *tinkonkana* "were boys who looked like women -- fat and attractive" (p. 232).

Cross-dressing does not appear to have been a requisite of the wife role, although there are archival reported of parties in which some boy wives donned artificial breasts

⁶⁸ From the German colony of South-West Africa (now Namibia) Bleys (1990:222) reads Falk (1925) as portraying Ovambo "boys from ten to twelve years, who were not only employed as kitchen assistants near the mines, but also served as catamites... sent out by the miners' wives to guarantee their husbands' fidelity while away from home" (Falk contrasted the effeminate *ovashengi* to his virile adult sex partner).

and impersonated women.⁶⁹ Proper wifely behavior did not include ejaculation by the youth, or any kind of sexual reciprocity. Another

The boys would never make the mistake of 'breathing out' [ejaculating] into the hubby. It was taboo. Only the hubby could 'breathe out' into the boy's legs. . . . [Another] thing that a *nkonkana* had to do was either to cover his beard with cloth, or cut it completely off. He was now so-and-so's wife. How would it sound if a couple looked identical? There had to be differences, and for a *nkonkana* to stay clean-shaven was one of them. Once the *nkonkana* became a 'grown-up,' he could then keep his beard to indicate his maturity, which would be demonstrated by him acquiring a boy. . . . When the boy thought he was old enough he would tell the husband that he also wished to get himself a wife, and that would be the end. Therefore the husband would have to get himself another boy. (Philemon, in Sibuyi 1993:58, 57, 55).

As in ancient Greece, a beard indicated that a boy had become a man and was no longer a sex object for other men, but was now a competitor for boys.

Although (like Gill Shepherd) preoccupied with economic aspects of relationships and unwilling to take seriously statements such as "We loved our boys better [than our wives]," Moodie (1988) interpreted the institution of mine marriages as partly a resistance to the proletarianization of those laboring in the mines but committed to traditional life back home, e.g., describing a young man in 1940 who consented to be a *tinkonkana*, because he wanted to accumulate money to buy cattle for brideprice. Thus, in some cases "men became 'wives' on the mines in order to become husbands and therefore full 'men' more rapidly at home" (p. 240). Those playing the wife role could accumulate money (bridewealth and gifts) -- while the husbands not only received domestic and sexual service, but also spent less than they would have in dance halls with women prostitutes.

Although these relationships for the Mpondo seldom extended beyond one contract and were never brought home, and although men preferred to conceal these liaisons from their home fellows, everyone knew that such affairs existed and joked with each other about them... According to Philemon, among the Tsonga 'mine marriages' were accepted, indeed taken for granted by women (including wives) and elders at home, and relationships might extend beyond a single contract. (Moodie 1988:233).

Philemon mentioned that when one partner finished his contract before the other the husband might go to their boy-wives' homes or boy-wives might go to their husband's homes. They would be "warmly welcomed" (p. 57), everyone knowing "that once a man was on the mines, he had a boy or was turned into a wife himself" (56).

At least some of the older men who continued to return to the mines may have preferred young male "wives," though Moodie (1988) and van Onselen (1976) did not consider this.⁷⁰ In recent years the "wife of the mine" role has declined, if not disappeared. Migrant labor has become less common. With the breakdown of rural

⁶⁹ Bryk (1933: 150) reported this for Nandi, Badama, and/or Baganda *hanisi* (the language of the term is not specified), whose penises had died, he was told.

⁷⁰ Gevisser (1995:71-2) summarizes South African critiques of assuming exclusively economic motivations for continuing in the mines, for assuming that every husband found boy wives only an inferior substitute for "the real thing," and for confusing normative restriction to intercrural intercourse with reality (specifically, anal intercourse). Junod (1927) at least considered black agency as a part of the phenomenon (on Junod see Harries 1990, 1993 and Achmat 1993)..

society, wives accompany or follow their husbands and live as squatters near the work sites. Moodie (1988:255) concluded,

It is precisely because mine marriages were isomorphic with marriages at home that they are breaking down as the home system collapses.... The old arrangements represented accommodations to migration and at the same time resistance to proletarianisation.... The contemporary turn to 'town women' and squatter families represents accommodation to the exigencies of stable wage-earning.

Although the “wife of the mine” role developed under conditions of migration to capitalist enterprises owned and operated by white Europeans, there is no evidence of it being imposed or suggested by white Europeans.⁷¹ As an adaptation to the conditions of prolonged sex segregation it drew on conceptions of what a Tsonga wife should be and on behavior (viz. intercrural intercourse) within the existing repertoire of adolescents in the rural society. Sources do not discuss whether the same asymmetry of roles occurred among boys involved in sex play with each other in the home villages, or whether certain individuals specialized in sexual receptivity and were regarded as effeminate. Shangaan workers from Mozambique were reputed to be the most frequent and enthusiastic participants in *bukhontxana* (Harries 1990:327), and some attempts to claim native purity contended that homosexuality was introduced by these “foreigners.”⁷²

The elderly Pondo ex-miner Themba, whom Ndatsehe interviewed in 1982, told her that “most of the miners agreed to be ‘girls of the mines.’”⁷³ Some wanted to pay lobola once they had returned to their homes. . . . He also mentioned that boys always said, ‘Why should we worry since we can’t get pregnant’ (Ndatsehe 1993:51) and stressed the domestic duties of cooking, washing, and cleaning that went with the role.

During the 1950s in “Mkumbani,” a black settlement adjacent to Durban, there were, according to Louw (1996) male-male weddings at the rate of about one a month. Each celebration lasted a whole weekend. Some “brides” wore Zulu dress, some wore Western bridal white (with bridesmaids in attendance). The pair might live together, with the “wife” doing domestic work, or live separately (like many male-female couples). Some of the males involved in these relationships already had female wives (who treated the new one as a junior wife, one who would not complicate life by producing children rivalling her own). Louw suggested that the term for the female-

⁷¹ Bastian (1872:173n1) provided some basis for suspecting that, before the mines developed, at least among the “Basuto” (Lesotho) there were men who did women’s work and adopted all female manners and expression.

⁷² Shangaans lived in the Transvaal as well as in the then-Portuguese colony of Mozambique. And in the mine compounds, “each tribe lives separately to others, and so compounds housed only Pondos, Xhosas, etc. People only mixed at work,” although “boss boys” had greater mobility, according to the Pondo former “boss boy” Daniel interviewed in 1982 (published in Ndatsehe 1993:46; confirmed by Themba, p. 49)..

⁷³ He reported eluding “a boss boy [who] was after him because he was young and fat” (Ndatsehe 1993:49).. He also recalled seeing “men dressed like women, and miners proposed love to them. Most of those people were clerks, but I don’t know which tribe they belonged to” (p. 51).

gendered homosexual men, *skesana* might be cognate to *zenana*.⁷⁴ Their masculine partners were called *iqgenge*.

In other indigenous cultures of black, sub-Saharan Africa I have reviewed instances both of reciprocal adolescent male homosexuality and of roles involving sexual receptivity to men along with other expected aspects of female roles. Discussion of black African homosexuality may be a taboo among Africans sensitized by missionaries and/or Western education to the Christian stigmatization of homosexuality, anxious about the ill repute of black people's hyper-sexuality, and/or resentful of sexual exploitation of boys in mission boarding schools.⁷⁵ This taboo, these anxieties and resentments are products of European domination. Rather than homosexuality having been introduced to Africa by ("corrupt") Europeans, the colonialists carried and transmitted intolerance for homosexuality. There were labels -- often derisive labels -- for gender-crossing roles. As elsewhere in the world,⁷⁶ an innovation of European penetration was pressure to desist from such immorality, or at least to hide and deny there was any.

Relations Between Women

Zande

Among the much-discussed Zande of the Sudan, the Seligmans (1932: 515) reported that sisters who are married/retained by brothers "have a reputation for lesbian practices." Evans-Pritchard (1970:1429, 1431-2) wrote

All Azande I have known well enough to discuss this matter have asserted the female homosexuality was practiced in polygamous homes in the past and still (1930) is sometimes.... One of the many wives of a prince or of an important commoner in the past might not have shared her husband's bed for a month or two, whereas some of the dozens, even hundreds, of wives of a king must have been almost totally deprived of the sex life normal in smaller homes. Adulterous intercourse was very difficult for a wife in such large polygamous families, for the wives were kept in seclusion and carefully watched.... Wives would cut a sweet potato or manioc root in the shape of the male organ, or use a banana for the purpose. Two of them would shut themselves in a hut and one would lie on the bed and play the female role while the other, with the artificial organ tied around her stomach, played the male role. They then reversed roles.

⁷⁴ See Naqvi and Mujtaba (1996). The Durban area had many South Asians. However, I suspect that the term derives from the earlier-attested Tsonga (?) term *nkhonsthana*; the role complement term *iqgenge* might also be related to the earlier-attested *ikhela*.

⁷⁵ Dagara spokesman Malidoma Somé (1994), who recalled having been molested by a priest in a French Catholic boarding school, also noted that (both before and after independence), "older students looked at young newcomers as girls and possible sexual partners. Their friendliness was stimulated by an attraction that could not find real girls to satisfy itself. So it settled on a substitute" (p. 108), and that "others schooled privately as the protégés of white missionaries, arrived there still longing for their white fathers" (p. 100)..

⁷⁶ See Guerra (1971) on Spanish conquerors of "the New World."

In that late article, he reproduced texts from two male informants about special friendship relations (mimicking male blood brotherhood) between women. Two women would break a cob of blood-red corn (*kaima*) and utter a spell over it.

After this they should not call each other by their proper names, but they call each other *bagburu*. The one who is the wife cooks porridge and a fowl and brings them to the one who is the husband. They do this between them many times. They have sexual intercourse between them with sweet potatoes carved in the shape of a circumcised penis, with carved manioc also, and also with bananas. (p. 1432)

This relationship was not approved by Zande men. Evans-Pritchard asserted that “it is a further indication of male dominance that what was encouraged among males was condemned among females. Zande men, princes especially, have a horror of lesbianism, and they regard it as highly dangerous” (Ibid.).

Closer to the time of his field-work he (1937:56) had written that the Zande refer to sex between women with *adandara*, a species of wild cat which is considered female and unlucky: “both are female actions which may cause the death of any man who witnesses them.” With something short of an anthropological attempt to understand behavior as it is understood by the women involved, he wrote,

Zande women, especially in the homesteads of princes, indulge in homosexual relations by means of a phallus fashioned from roots. It is said that in the past a prince did not hesitate to execute a wife whose homosexual activities were discovered, and even today I have known a prince to expel wives from his household for the same reason. Among lesser folk, if a man discovers that his wife has Lesbian relations with other women he flogs her and there is a scandal. The husband’s anger is due to his fear of the unlucky consequences that may ensue from such practices. Azande therefore speak of them as evil in the same way as they speak of witchcraft and cats as evil, and they say, moreover, that homosexual women are the sort who may well give birth to cats and be witches also. In giving birth to cats and in Lesbianism the evil is associated with the sexual functions of women, and it is to be noted that any unusual action of the female genitalia is considered unlucky.

In this passage it is not clear to me whether Evans-Pritchard was arguing that it is not the sexual behavior that is culturally problematic or whether he is rationalizing male fear of women. Lagae (1923:24) did not elaborate on the cosmology of the recurrent sexual relations between wives.

Bieber (1909) mentioned “tribadie” being as frequent as pederasty among among East Horn peoples (Harari, Galla [Oromo], Somal). Among Amhara peasants, Messing (1957:550) found “mannish women” (*wändawände*) suspected of attempting to abrogate male privileges.

Roux (1905) reported sex between women on the Comoro islands (near Madagascar).

Mombasa

In arguing against a third sex or gender conception in Oman or Mombasa, Shepherd (1978a: 133) wrote, “Lesbians [in Mombasa] are known as *wasaga* (grinders)... The dominant partner... is not seen as a man.” She had earlier claimed, on the basis of an unmentioned sample of *wasagas* (Shepherd 1978a:134), that “there is almost always a

dominant and subordinate economic relationship between them.” Shepherd (1987:254) elaborated,

The word in Swahili glossed as ‘lesbian’ is *msagaji* (plural *wasagaji*) - ‘a grinder.’ The verb *kusaga* (to grind) is commonly used for the grinding of grain between two millstones. . . The upper and lower millstones are known as *mwana* and *mama* respectively: child and mother.

Clear status distinctions characterize *msagaji* relationships, with the dominant woman usually being older as well as wealthier. Whether these distinctions affect sexual behavior inside the relationship, Shepherd did not report.

Against any claim of a third-gender role Shepherd (1987:259-60) argued,

Lesbians dress entirely as women. Their wealth enables them to dress in a rich and feminine way, and though dominant lesbians are more assertive in manner and conversation than most other women, they make no attempt to look like men. When they go out they wear the veil (*buibui*) like all other coastal women. . . Dependent lesbian women are expected to behave like ordinary women. Dominant lesbian women display energetic personalities very similar to those of active, intelligent non-lesbian women.

However, Shepherd (1987:260) also reported, “Women who are dominant lesbians do not obey strict seclusion rules. As household heads they welcome male visitors to the house and sit with them in the reception room, and they frequently go out of the house.” Her analyses of homosexuality among women, as among men, are contradicted by the behavior she reported.⁷⁷ *Msagaji* seem to be bidding for some male privilege beyond that of having sex with submissive women. That is, they do not (entirely) conform to Mombasa conceptions of how women should look and act.

As for the *shoga*, Porter (1995:144) stressed gender variance as more salient than sexual behavior for labeling women *misago*: Especially women resisting marriage and interested in education and careers are labeled “*misago* regardless of the erotic preferences of the women. They are being condemned for behaving in ways that are inconsistent with being a woman and for challenging the gender/status system.”⁷⁸ The word *misago* itself is derived “from the same verb root as *msagaliwa*: *kusaga*, a Bantu word meaning to grind. In this instance, however, it refers to the sexual activities of women, as ‘grinders,’ rather than to grinding wood” (p. 142). The etymological primacy of sexuality does not prove that sexuality is more important than gender in the use or native understanding of the word, but more systematic data collection than either Shepherd’s or Porter’s would be necessary to settle the question of primacy of gender or sexuality.

⁷⁷ Strobel (1979: 166) was not clear about sexual aspects of the Mombasa Muslim women’s dance, *lelemama*, that she discussed. See the translation of Haberlandt (1899) in this volume on women using dildoes on other women in Zanzibar.

⁷⁸ I have argued that in Thailand, as in Latin America, effeminate male homosexuals are “taken for granted and no threat to the social order or even to authoritarian military castes. Indeed, in their widely-recognized womanly inferiority, they visibly reinforce gender stratification” (Murray 1992:393-4). In contrast to “craven”, “fallen” men taking women’s socially-devalued roles “uppity” women aspiring to male privileges tend to be seen as threats to the sexual order, rather than as evidencing the rightness of the link between gender and status. It seems that men can lose male privilege, but women cannot legitimately gain it even if they dress and behave like men (and/or take women as sexual partners).

Tanzania

Some Kaguru men (in central Tanzania) mentioned to Beidelman (1973:266) that some Kaguru women practise lesbian activities during female initiation, women taking both the roles of men and of women in demonstrating sexual congress to initiates. Women were unwilling to discuss this in detail with me, but conceded that women did demonstrate with one another how to have proper sexual congress.

West Africa

According to Eva Meyerowitz's fieldwork in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) during the 1940s, "lesbian affairs were virtually universal among unmarried Akan women, sometimes continuing after marriage. Whenever possible, the women purchased extra-large beds to accommodate group sex sessions involving perhaps half-a-dozen women" (D. Greenberg 1989:66; he considered this an instance of egalitarian homosexuality, perhaps from discussion about the relative status of the partners with Meyerowitz, although he published no indication of relative age or status).

In his contribution below, Carrier and I attempt to sort out the literature on woman/woman marriage and purported chastity within the institution in East and West African cultures.⁷⁹ An Efik-Ibibio (Nigerian) woman who grew up during the nineteenth-century (and whose husband had eleven other wives) recalled: "I had a woman friend to whom I revealed my secrets. She was very fond of keeping secrets to herself. We acted as husband and wife. We always moved hand in glove and my husband and hers knew about our relationship. The village nicknamed us twin sister" (in Andreski 1970:131).

Nadel (1942:152, 1954:179) made passing mention of Nupe lesbian behavior in Nigeria. Gaudionotes that there are Hausa lesbians (in Kano of the 1990s), some of whom know of and use the terms for male homosexual roles (discussed above) and that gay Hausa males assert that "lesbians engage in the same types of relationships as they themselves do, i.e., involving the exchange of material gifts and the attribution of [dominant/submissive] roles" (1996:136n17).

Mention by Froelich (1949:115-8) of a separate (longer) initiation rite, called *kpankpankwondi*, for Moba girls in northern Upper Volta (now Togo) who refuse to marry the husbands selected for them is tantalizing.

"Amazon" Troops in 19th-Century Dahomey

In his two-volume account of his 1863-4 mission, Burton (1864:ii, 63-85) devoted a chapter to "the so-called Amazon" troops of King Gelele. In Burton's view, "the origin of the somewhat exceptional organisation" of the women troops that he estimated to

⁷⁹ Argyle (1966:151-2) discussed women paying brideswealth among the Fan of Benin without taking a position on the sexual rights and responsibilities of such relationships. Another desexualized view of (southern) African female husbands was presented by O'Brien (1977).

number about 2500 was “the masculine physique of the women, enabling them to compete with men in enduring toil, hardship and privations” (p. 64), although he also offered a historical explanation -- the early 18th-century king Agaja’s depleted the ranks of male soldiers (p. 65). Noting that Dahomeyan women “endured all the toil and performed all the hard labour” there was to do, Ellis (1965[1890]:183) elaborated on the historical evolution of the Amazon institution:

The female corps, to use the common expression, the Amazons, was raised about the year 1729, when a body of women who had been armed and furnished with banners, merely as a stratagem to make the attacking forces appear larger, behaved with such unexpected gallantry as to lead to a permanent corps of women being embodied [by King Trudo]. Up to the reign of Gezo, who came to the stool in 1811, the Amazon force was composed chiefly of criminals, that is criminals in the Dahomi sense of the word. Wives detected in adultery, and termagants and scolds were drafted into its ranks; and the great majority of the women “given to the king” by the provincial chiefs, that is, sent to him as being worthy of death for misdemeanours or crimes, were, instead of being sacrificed at the Annual Custom, made women soldiers. Gezo, who largely made use of the Amazons to keep his own subjects in check and to promote military rivalry, increased and improved the force. He directed every head of a family to send his daughters to Agbomi for inspection; the most suitable were enlisted, and the corps thus placed on a new footing. This course was also followed by Gelele, his successor, who had every girl brought to him before marriage, and enrolled those who pleased him.

Ellis reported nothing and Burton next to nothing about the sexuality of these “Amazons.” They were distinguished from the king’s (also numerous) wives (p. 64). “Two-thirds are said to be maidens” (p. 68). In his “Terminal Essay” to his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Burton (1930[1886]:88) wrote “At Agbome, capital of Dahome, I found that a troop of women was kept for the use of the ‘Amazons’” referring to p. 73 of the second volume of Burton (1864), but there is nothing there about women reserved for the Amazon troops. There is only an expression of his belief that passion for combat excites rather than substitutes for love: “All the passions are sisters. I believe that bloodshed causes these women to remember, not to forget LOVE.”

Commander Frederick Forbes’s journals of his 1849-50 missions to King Gezo of Dahomey, also did not describe the sexual behavior of the “Amazon” troops, but is even clearer than Burton about (hyper-)masculine gender identification:

The amazons are not supposed to marry, and, by their own statement, they have changed their sex. “We are men,” say they, “not women.” All dress alike, diet alike, and male and female emulate each other: what the males do, the amazons will endeavour to surpass. They all take great care of their arms, polish the barrels, and, except when on duty, keep them in covers. There is no duty at the palace except when the king is in public, then a guard of amazons protect the royal person, and, on review, he is guarded by the males.... The amazons are in

barracks within the palace enclosure, and under the care of eunuchs and the camboodee or treasurer. (1851, I:123-4).⁸⁰

Indeed, in a 13 July 1850 parade, amazon troops sang about the effeminacy of male soldiers they had defeated:

We marched against Attahpahms as against men.

We came and found them women.

What we catch in the bush we never divide (II:108).

After a parade of 2400 amazons pledging to conquer Abeahkeutah (a British ally in Sierra Leone) or to die trying, an amazon chief began her speech by asserting gender transformation: “As the blacksmith takes an iron bar and by fire changes its fashion, so we have changed our nature. We are no longer women, we are men” (II:119).

Central Africa

Hulstaert (1938a:95-6) wrote the following about relationships between Nkundó women (in what was then the Belgian Congo, and now is Zaire):

Nkundó girls play at “husband and wife” and even adult married women engage in this vice. According to my informants, the causes are as follows: first, an intense and very intimate love between two women, second and above all, the fact that wives of polygamists find it difficult to satisfy their passions in a natural way. Often they engage in this practice with co-wives of the same man.

He further noted that “in establishments where girls are too securely kept away from the opposite sex, there has been an increase” in sexual relationships between girls (p. 96). “The latter often engage in sex with co-wives. A woman who presses against another woman is called *yaikya bonsángo*.”

La Fontaine (1959:34, 60-1) mentioned a Gisu (Uganda) woman living as a man, but did not specify the sex of this person’s sexual partners (if there were any).

Southern Africa

Hambly’s (1937:426; 1934a: 181) main Ovimbundu (an Angolan people) informant, Ngonga, told him, “There are men who want men, and women who want women.... A woman has been known to make an artificial penis for use with another woman.” Such practices did not meet with approval, but neither did transvestitic homosexuals of either sex desist (cf. Estermann 1976:197). Indeed, there are early attestations including Andrew Battle, c. 1589, that in Dombe, “They are beastly in their living, for they have men in women’s apparrell, whom they keep among their wives”, and a 1606 Jesuit who found “*Chibadi*, which are Men attyred like Women, and behave themselves womanly,

⁸⁰ Forbes (I:77-9, II:59-60, 106-21, 123-4, 168, 226-7) described parades of bellicose amazon troops, the parallel ranks in male and female troops, and competition for greater glory between them.

ashamed to be called men; are also married to men and esteeme that unnatural damnation an honor” (Purchas 1625:973,1558).⁸¹

Further South, Kidd (1904:209) was not specific about what “indecencies”, “degradations” and “obscenities” Bantu female initiation involved that, he claimed, demoralized their womanhood forever.⁸² Falk (1925:209-10) noted that homosexuality was common, especially among Hottenot (Nama) young married women.⁸³ And to the east, Schapera (1938: 278) reported that among the Tswana (in addition to homosexuality among the men laboring in the mines together), back home, “lesbian practices are apparently fairly common among the older girls and young women, without being regarded in any way reprehensible.” Colson (1958: 139-40) mentioned a possible man-woman and a possible woman-man among the Tsonga of what is now Zimbabwe.

From her research on Nyakyusa age-villages, Monica Wilson (1951:88) reported that “lesbian practices are said to exist, but we have no certain evidence of this.” She went on to speculate that they were “much more likely to be among the older wives of chiefs and other polygynists than among the girls, who have so much attention from young men.” This pattern is her logic, not a Nyakyusa report. She noted that “a case was also quoted of a doctor in Tukuyu who ‘is a woman; she has borne children, now her body has grown the sexual organs of a man and her feelings have changed also; but she keeps it very secret, she is spoken of as a woman.’” (p.197), but did not note to what, if any, use the new male organs were put.

Judith Gay (1985) described what she considered a relatively new (i.e., 1950s onward)⁸⁴ institutionalized friendship relationship among women left behind in Lesotho⁸⁵ by migrant men working in South Africa:

Young girls in the modern schools develop close relationships, called “mummy-baby” with slightly older girls. Sexual intimacy is an important part of these relationships. Mummy-baby relationships not only provide emotional support prior to marriage, but also a network of

⁸¹ Given the many editions, citations of book VII, chapter 3, section 2, and book IX, chapter 12, section 5 of volume two may be more helpful than the page numbers cited in the text.

⁸² “The customs observed when girls enter the period of womanhood vary very much in detail in different tribes; yet in practice the various tribes seem to vie with one another in the matter of obscenity. As Theal has pointed out, the very last traces of decency are stamped from a girl’s mind by the customs she has to go through, and her womanhood is demoralised for ever. In Pondoland the natives seem to have sunk to the lowest possible depths of degradation in these matters, and I have heard Natal Kafirs, who were traveling through that country, express utter astonishment that such practicies should be tolerated” (Kidd 1904:209; he was similarly horrified but vague about male initiation in the preceding two pages).

⁸³ See the Schapera (1930:242-3) quotation above on soregus rituals, which united two women or two men among Khosian-speaking peoples of the Kalahari desert.

⁸⁴ She considers use of the English terms (“mummy” and “baby”) in Sesotho or English sentences evidence of recency, and does not consider that terms may have changed instead of realities (p. 100)

⁸⁵ The patrilineal, patrilocal Lesotho Lovedu were unusual in being ruled by queens who had wives (indeed, a harem: see Krige and Krige 1943:165-75). The Lovedu queens were assisted in their judicial role by “the mothers of the kingdom.” The prestige of the 19th-century Lovedu queen Mujaji I seems to have legitimated queens in the neighboring Khaha, Mamaila, Letswalo (Narene) and Mahlo peoples (Krige and Krige 1943:310-1; Krige 1938), or female rule was a regional specialty in that part of the Bantu world in the 19th century.

support for married and unmarried women in new towns or schools, either replacing or accompanying heterosexual bonds (p. 97)

“Relationships are always initiated voluntarily by one girl who takes a liking to another and simply asks her to be her mummy or her baby, depending on their relative age, “Gay 1985:102) reported. “The most frequently given reason for initiating a particular relationship was that one girl felt attracted to the other by her looks, her clothes, or her actions.”

Although eager to deny that these relations are in any way marriage-like, Gay also wanted to interpret them as preparations for “the dynamics of heterosexual relations”--even “explicit opportunities for initiation into heterosexual relations” (p. 109)--or as substitutes for relations in the absence of men who are working in South African mines. She also provided some hints about marriage resistance (at least delay) and contrasted the autonomy of “mummies” with the constraints on Sesotho wives. She also noted that “in many cases the relations established with other girls are transformed, but do not cease altogether” (pp. 107, 109, 110).

A “mummy” may have more than one “baby,” but Gay claimed that the “baby” can only have one “mummy,” although one female may be a “baby” to one female and a “mummy” to another (p. 108). However, all three of the women who provided her “case studies” had had, over time, more than one “mummy” (nine, six, and two).

Although “Sesotho initiation for girls is no longer practiced in most lowland villages, where about half the nation’s population lives,” (p. 99), girls continue to lengthen their own or each other’s labia minora. They believe that having done this or had it done will later enhance sexual pleasure: “The process of lengthening is done alone or in small groups, but is not directly tied to initiation [now]]. The process is said to heighten *mocheso* (heat) and appears to provide opportunities for autoeroticisms and mutual stimulation between girls” (p. 101). Without alluding to any evidence (or any kind of inquiry), Gay (1985:112) asserted that “the contacts which may be involved in lengthening the labia minora are apparently not regarded as emotionally significant, whereas falling in love with a girl and simply caressing her is” (p.112).

Mueller (1977) also described similar relationships in two Lesotho villages. Blacking (1959) reported fictive kinship relationships among Venda schoolgirls of the Transvaal earlier, and Zulu schoolgirls in 1978. I consider this strong evidence that “age-stratified” is a type of female, not just male, homosexuality. Age differences need not be great, even though the idiom is trans-generational. In the eleven instances in which Gay (1985:114-5) specified the age of both, the mean age differences was 4.8 years, the median age difference was five years (the range was from one to twelve; those playing the “baby” role ranged in age from 8 to 24, “mummies” from 15 to 35).

Deborah Green, an African-American medical student who formed a relationship with a white woman in the Shangaan homeland town of Gazankulu in the northern Transvaal, told Hartman (1992:16).

There are some stories from Venda (a nearby tribe) about lesbian-type people -- I mean, women that lived together and raised families together. But the Shangaan had no concept of a lesbian

relationship, no preconception about it. They just know that I came along and started living with Tessa, and then Tessa was much happier. So they thought it was a good thing.

Whether the reaction to a Shangaan woman becoming involved with either a black or white woman cannot be extrapolated from this, however, even if the optimistic assessment of what others think about Green's relationship is accurate.⁸⁶

Among Cape Bantu, "forms of overt homosexual behavior between women are described by female *isanuses* [chief diviners]." Moreover, homosexuality is widely ascribed to women who are in the process of becoming *isanuses* (Laubscher 1937: 31). Use of artificial penises was attested among the Ila and Naman of South Africa by Smith and Dale (1934:181) and Schapera 1930:243). Some adult Nandi women (in Kenya) "satisfied each other alternately" using wooden dildoes, according to Bryk (1939:149, 1964:227).

Although I would not wish to deny that there are women-identified-women in "traditional" black Africa, nor that age-stratified relationships may be maternal, the fragmentary data available on homosexuality among women in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that the culturally-marked category is a woman who undertakes a sort of husband role and claimed some of the prerogatives of men in these cultures. The major idiom of homosexuality for both men and women is gender. Where there are age disparities, the younger is generally cast in the feminine role. This is true for "boy-wives" and "wives of the mine," for Lesotho "babies" and the wives of women from Benin to Kenya.

Audre Lorde (1984:50) is surely right that sexual contact "has existed for ages in most of the female compounds across the African continent." Not talked about by or to men, female-female sexuality has been little recorded in the "traditional" African countryside (in which women were illiterate even where men were not) or in "modern" (post-independence) African cities, although there is a growing body of retrospective accounts by lesbians about growing up invisible to themselves but not to others in South Africa (e.g., Chan Sam 1993, 1995; Mamaki 1993; Radcliffe 1993; Vimbela 1995).

⁸⁶ In Zimbabwe, Coutinho (1993:64) noted that "some women do manage to connect with the gay male networks; and if they are lucky, they are able to link up with other lesbians in the townships."