

# ***Boy-Wives and Female Husbands***

edited by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe

*" . . . will likely become regarded as a groundbreaking and vital addition to several fields of study. It soundly refutes the notion of homosexuality as 'un-African' and forces readers to rethink many of the basic Western concepts they take for granted."*

**—J. S. Hall, *Bay Windows***

*" . . . a superb collection of primary research articles and literature review essays on the organizations of homosexuality and the complexities of same-sex patterns."*

**—Peter M. Nardi, *American Journal of Sociology***

## **African Terms for Same-Sex Patterns\***

*kimbanda, diviners; esenge (pl. omasenge), man possessed by female spirit; eshengi (pl. ovashengi), "he who is approached from behind"*

**-Ambo/Ovambo (Wanyama)**

*wändarwäräd, "male-female"; wändawände, "mannish women"*

**-Amhara (Amharic)**

## **FROM THE INTRODUCTION . . .**

In leading the exploration and colonization of Africa, the Portuguese became the first Europeans to realize that African sexuality and gender diverged in surprising and, to them, shocking ways from their own. In the early seventeenth century their efforts to conquer the Ndongo kingdom of the Mbundu (Umbundu) tribe (whom they called the Ngolas, which was actually the title of their king) were stymied by the inspired leadership of a warrior woman named Nzinga (c. 1581-1663). Nzinga had become *ngola* by succeeding her brother, which was not unusual in a matrilineal society like the Mbundu's. Less typical was the fact that she had ordered her own nephew's death to prevent him from claiming his father's title. Nzinga proceeded to organize a guerilla army and personally lead her warriors into battle. She successfully out-manuevered the Portuguese for nearly four decades (Sweetman 1971, 1984: 39-47).

*jigele ketön, reciprocal anal intercourse*

**-Bafia (Fia)**

*mzili (pl., inzili); buyazi*  
**-Bagishu/Bageshu, Gisu**

*kitesha (pl. bitesha), male and female*

**-Bala/Basongye/Ba-songe/Songe**

*mokobo, tongo, sterile men*  
**-Bambala/Mbala**

*akho'si, lagredis, court eunuch; gaglgo, homo-sexuality*

**-Dahomey (Fon)**

*m'uzonj'ame katumua, male lover; m'ndumbi, "podicator"*

**-Gangella/Ovigangella**

*onek, active male*

**-Gikuyu/Kikuyu**

*'dan daudu (pl. 'yan daudu); k'wazo/baja, older/younger men; kifi, lesbianism*

**-Hausa**

*okutunduka vanena, anal intercourse; epanga, lover; oupanga, erotic friendship (male or female)*

**-Herero (Damara)**

*mwaami, "prophet"*

**-Ila**

*sagoda*

**-Konso**

*londo, nonmasculine males*

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**Krongo/Korongo/Kurungo**

*mudoko dako*

**-Lango**

*ashtime*

**-Maale/Male/Maalia**

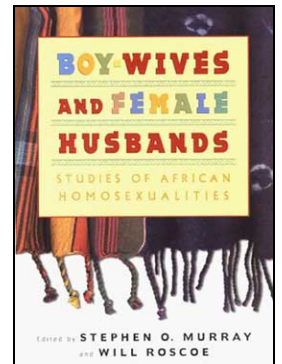
*kiziri*

**-Maragoli/Logooli**

In the late 1640s, a Dutch military attaché observed firsthand what must have struck him as the strange organization of her court. As *ngola*, Nzinga was not "queen" but "king" of her people. She ruled dressed as a man, surrounded by a harem of young men who dressed as women and were her "wives." Wherever she appeared, her subjects fell to their knees and kissed the ground (Dapper 1670: 238). Nzinga managed to preserve Ndongo independence for a generation—indeed, it was not until the early twentieth century that the Portuguese finally broke Mbundu resistance.

Other early reports from Angola, discussed later in this volume, make it clear that Nzinga's behavior was not some personal idiosyncrasy, but based on beliefs that recognized gender as situational and symbolic as much as a personal, innate characteristic of the individual. A result of these beliefs was the presence of an alternative gender role among the tribes of the Kongo and Ndonga kingdoms. According to Andrew Battel, an English prisoner of the Portuguese in the 1580s, natives of the Dombe area were "bestly in their living, for they have men in women's apparell, whom they keep among their wives" (Purchas 1625, Vol. 2, Book VII, Chap. 3, Sec. 2, p. 973).

The reports from Angola set the tone for what followed. When natives, like E. E. Evans-Pritchard's Zande informants, told Europeans that men had sex with boys "just because they like them," Europeans were shocked, surprised, and confused. They recorded but did not understand sexual and gender practices that epitomized for them how black Africans were different from (and inferior to) them. . . .



This book is organized geographically according to four broad regions of sub-Saharan Africa—the Sudan, Horn of Africa, and East Africa; West Africa (including coastal West Africa and the interior sudanic region); Central Africa (from the tropical rainforests of the equatorial region to the Congo basin and east to present-day Tanzania); and southern Africa (from Mozambique and Zambia to South Africa and Namibia). Each of the four regional sections begins with a survey of historical and anthropological reports of same-sex patterns by the editors. The volume concludes with a review of the literature on woman-woman marriages, a general conclusion, and an appendix in which correlations between same-sex patterns and other features

*mugawe*

**-Meru**

*tubele, nonmasculine males*

**-Mesakin (Ngile)**

*mke-si-mume, "woman, not man," male and female homosexuals; mashoga*

*(sing. shoga), male; basha (pl. mabasha), partner of mashoga; msagaji, msago (pl. wasagaji, misago), "grinders," lesbians*

**-Mombasa (Swahili)**

*soronés, pages*

**-Mossi (More)**

*tinkonkana, boy wives*

**-Mpondo/Pondo (Pana)**

*koetsire, sexually receptive males; soregus, friendship bond; ôa-/huru, /huru, mutual masturbation; /goe-ugu, "tribadie"*

**-Naman/Hottentot/Kaf-fir**

*agyale, "friendship marriages" (sex denied)*

**-Nzema**

*eshenga, gender-mixing*

of African societies are analyzed. . . .

## FROM THE CONCLUSION. . .

The contributions to this volume unequivocally refute claims that African societies lacked homosexual patterns and had no words for those who desire their own sex. Evidence of same-sex patterns has been reported or reviewed here for some fifty African societies, all of which had words—many words, with many meanings—for them. These societies are found within every region of the continent, and they represent every language family, social and kinship organization, and subsistence pattern. There is substantial evidence that same-sex practices and patterns were "traditional" and "indigenous." While contact between Africans and non-Africans has sometimes influence both groups' sexual patterns, there is no evidence that one group ever "introduced" homosexuality where it had not existed before. Since anthropologists and other observers have rarely inquired systematically into the presence of homosexuality in Africa (or elsewhere), absence of evidence can never be assumed to be evidence of absence. Considering that this collection represents the first serious study of the subject, undoubtedly future research will identify many other groups with distinct patterns of homosexuality. . . .

male shamans

**-Ondonga (Ndonga)**

*a bele nnem e bango, "he has the heart [aspirations] of boys"*

**-Pangwe/Pahouian (Fang)**

*umuswezi, umukonotsi, "sodomite"; kuswerana nk'imbwa, kunonoka, kwitomba, kuranana inyuma, ku'nyo, male homosexuality; ikihindu and ikimaze (Mirundi), "hermaphrodite" priests*

**-Rwanda/Ruanda (spoken by Hutus and Tutsis)**

*nkhonsthana, tinkonkana, nkonkana boy wife; nima, husband*

**-Tsonga (Thonga)**

*chibadi, chibanda, chibados, jimbandaa, kibamba, quimbanda*

**-Umbundu/Mbunda/Ovimbundu**

*omututa, (male) homosexuals; eponji, "lovers"*

**-Wawihé/Viye**

*gor-digen, men-women; yauss, insertors; oubi, "open," insertees*

**-Wolof/Woloff**

*ndongo-techi-la, boy-wives*

**-Zande/Azande/Sandeh**

*inkosi ygbatfazi, "chief of the women" (diviners); amankotshane, izinkotshane, inkotshane, boy-wife; skesana, cross-gender males; iqgenge, masculine partners*

**-Zulu**

*\*The names of most African groups in the historical and*

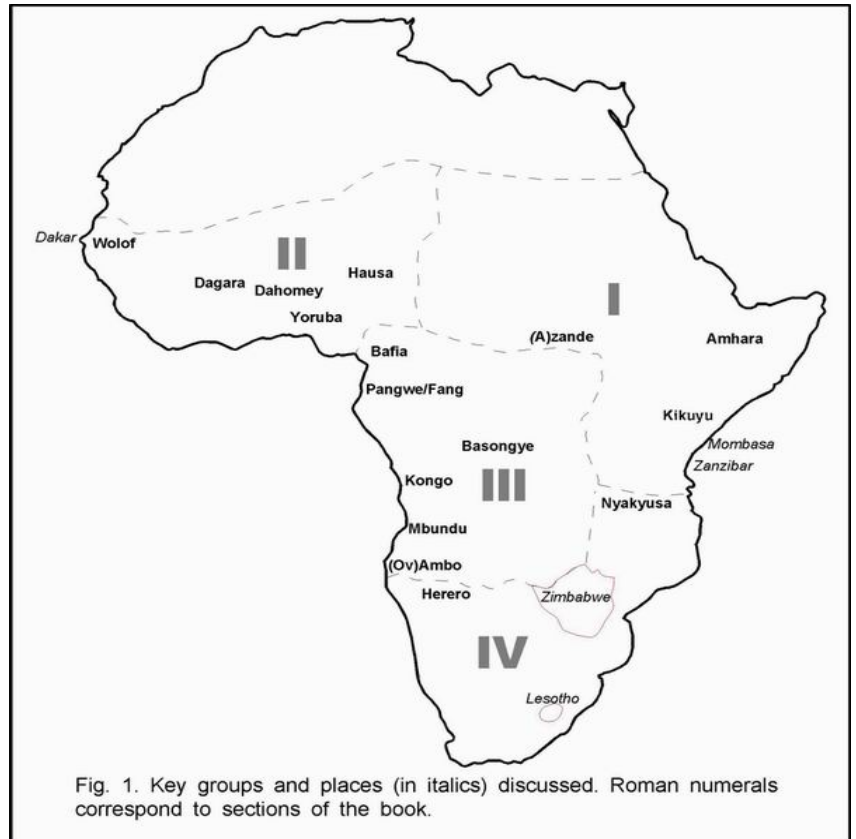


Fig. 1. Key groups and places (in italics) discussed. Roman numerals correspond to sections of the book.

*ethnographic literature are language names. Language appears in parentheses in the case of groups whose names are not language names. Variants of group names are separate by slashes.*

[[Publications](#) | [Main page](#)]

