

interests, the “profound divergences” of national and international public opinion on the subject, as well as the small number of children available to be adopted in France.

As for same-sex couples, their legal inability to adopt lies in the fact that the Civil Code only allows adoption by married couples (that is to say, given the current status regarding gay marriage, heterosexual married couples). This legal language is nothing short of **discrimination** specifically targeted against gays and lesbians. Nevertheless, there is also an official will to explicitly maintain this form of discrimination. For example, in France in 1996, to guard against the possibility of allowing homosexuals to adopt, adoption rights were also refused to common-law couples. Moreover, during the 1999 debates on PaCS (Pacte civil de solidarité [Civil solidarity pact]), which would recognize civil unions between couples, whether gay or straight), the Minister of Justice repeatedly said: “The government will not propose to modify the legislation to allow two individuals of the same sex to jointly adopt a child.” Further, she claimed that children need a “mental, social, and relational identity,” which was only possible when the child had, “during his childhood and adolescence, a father and a mother.” Previously invoked by psychoanalysts, anthropologists, and sociologists, the argument of the necessity of a masculine/feminine dynamic in children’s lives was now being taken up by jurists.

Fundamentally, this definition of what makes a good parent puts into question the legitimacy of single-parent families, who are nevertheless protected by French law in the same manner as other families. Further, the definition contradicts the evolution of family law in France since the end of the 1960s, which has been characterized by a decreased importance placed on masculine or feminine parental roles. The view may be changing, however; in 2006, the Court of Cassation (the court of last resort) ruled that parental rights over one partner’s biological child can be granted to partners in a same-sex relationship. In Denmark, Germany, Israel, and Norway, same-sex partners also may adopt their partner’s child. Elsewhere, as of 2007, Andorra, Belgium, Guam, Iceland, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom permit same-sex couples to adopt children. On the other side of the Atlantic, numerous states in the US also recognize this right of same-sex partners to adopt the other partner’s child, whether biological or adopted; and some states

also recognize the right of joint adoption by homosexuals. As for Canada, eight of ten provinces now allow adoption by same-sex couples. Despite these recent strides, however, many countries still do not allow gays and lesbians to adopt at all.

—*Daniel Borrillo and Thomas Formond*

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—*Discrimination; European Law; Family; Jurisprudence; Marriage; Parenting.*

**AFRICA.** *See Africa, Central & Eastern; Africa, Southern; Africa, Western*

## AFRICA, CENTRAL & EASTERN

Because they were colonized by a variety of nations, the countries that make up Central and East Africa do not all have homophobic legislation. It is significant to note that, as a remnant of France’s influence, many former French colonies do not have sodomy laws; homophobia may be quite strong in these countries, but it is social rather than legal. Such is the case in the Central African Republic, the Gabonese Republic, the Republic of Chad, and the Democratic Republic

of the Congo (DRC) (but even though homosexual relations are not illegal in the DRC, its diplomats continue to profess that “the practice of homosexuality does not exist” in their country). Elsewhere in the region, the law criminalizes homosexuality, with varying degrees of severity.

As is common in the rest of the continent, homophobia in Central Africa is often linked to the idea that homosexuality is not part of the history of its societies. More recently, the taboo has been lifted, and ethnologists have remarked that while homosexuality as a permanent way of life was very rare in African societies—as a result of the condemnation of a sexual practice which does not lead to reproduction—instances of homosexual activity among young people were by contrast relatively frequent; for example, among the Tutsi and Hutu populations and notably in the royal court, where women were excluded. The Azande, who live primarily in the DRC but also make up about forty-five percent of the Central African Republic’s population, even had forms of homosexual marriage among warriors. Among the Lango of Uganda, there was a small class of men known as *jo apele* (“the impotents”) who could marry men, dress as women, and simulate female menstruation. It was believed that men who behaved in this manner were inhabited by the spirits of the ancients, and in this respect, they were considered useful to the community. More markedly, the issue of the Uganda Martyrs (a group of Ugandan Christians murdered by Mwangi II, the king between 1885 and 1887 of what was then Buganda) provides insight into the breadth of homosexuality in certain precolonial African courts and the acute crisis engendered by the homophobia of British missionaries: Mwangi II, who passionately loved young men, slept with his pages, but was outraged and had them massacred when they vehemently refused his advances after they converted to Christianity.

Laws are more homophobic in East Africa. As can be seen by looking at the map drawn by aforl News, the African news agency, homosexuality is currently illegal in almost every state of the region (Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Tanzania). It would seem that Christian (Ethiopia and Kenya) and Muslim influences account for part of the reason for this (Islamist thought is increasing throughout the region, as proven by Sudan and Somalia’s recent history). The question of the degree to which **Islam** influences African homophobia is unclear: for one thing, it appears that

Muslims in Zanzibar—the principal leaders of East Africa’s economy prior to European colonization during the nineteenth century (they were particularly formidable slave traders)—actually contributed to the spreading of homosexual activity between older men and adolescents. With regard to the rest of the region, there is a linguistic term for the male couple in Swahili, the region’s dominant language: *basha/msenge* (erastes/eromenos). It is even said that in present-day Tanzania, coastal Muslim populations are more tolerant of homosexuality than Christians or Animists in the interior. That being said, in Africa as elsewhere, homosexuality remains a taboo according to Islam. It may be easy enough to engage in homosexual relations, but it is understood that one does not discuss them, let alone make them the subject of demands; and the taboo is even greater with regard to lesbianism.

#### *Sudan*

Even though the various peoples of Sudan (notably the Nubas and the Azandes) have rich homosexual traditions, including forms of marriage between males, the country is one of the world’s most homophobic states, as exemplified by the particulars of its penal code and the actions of its representatives on international matters.

Subject to radical Islamism since a coup in 1989 brought the National Islamic Front to power, and long exhausted by the effects of a protracted civil war that preceded it (between the Islamist authorities in the north and the rebel forces of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in the south), Sudan does not meet the legal standards of a democratic state, as revealed by its harsh penal code. Article 316 of the 1983 code that was based on *sharia* (the body of Islamic religious law) provides for the death penalty for married men who commit any act of sodomy (and 100 lashes for those who are unmarried). Even though it appears that the death penalty is actually not carried out for this crime, Sudanese homosexuals are nonetheless condemned to the spiral of silence (the fact that asserts that a person is less likely to be vocal on a subject for fear of reprisal or isolation from the majority) that often prevails in Islamic countries. Further, in Sudan, the most obscurantist homophobia is accompanied by other dubious practices, such as a rather widespread **tolerance** of pedophilic violence, an active slave trade, and the ongoing sexual mutilation of young girls through female circumcision.

On the international front, in 2006, Sudan, as a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, voted to deny UN consultative status to two gay rights organizations, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), based in Brussels, and the Danish National Association for Gays and Lesbians of Denmark. Joining Sudan in voting “no” were such countries as Iran and the United States (Sudan voted the same way when the ILGA applied four years earlier, in 2002).

#### *Ethiopia*

Ethiopia is doubly unique: it is both a very old Christian state (with a Muslim minority) and a region that was only belatedly and to a small degree colonized (by Fascist Italy). It was its indigenous Christian influence that resulted in Article 629 of the Ethiopian penal code that prohibits homosexual acts, male or female. Such acts are punishable by up to ten years in prison, particularly if the victim was subjected to acts of cruelty or was under the age of fifteen.

Ethiopia, like Sudan, also voted against granting the ILGA consultative status on the UN Economic and Social Council in 2002.

#### *Somalia*

In Somalia, where the majority of the population is Muslim, Article 409 of the penal code of 1973 makes all homosexual relations punishable by three months’ to three years’ imprisonment. Additionally, Article 410 provides for, among other things, “security measures” (i.e. police surveillance) against those who have been convicted for the crime of homosexuality “to ensure that [they do] not engage in these activities again.”

Somalia’s political instability over the past twenty years, instigated by the start of the Somali Civil War beginning in 1986, has worsened the situation for homosexuals. In February 2001, the press in Somalia’s capital Mogadishu reported that an Islamist tribunal in Bosaso (in the autonomous northeast region of Puntland) had condemned a lesbian couple to death by stoning. Under strong international pressure, Puntland authorities claimed that the media had fabricated the entire story in order to discredit the newly autonomous region. It is difficult to ascertain the exact fate of homosexuals in the various parts of the country, but every indication leads one to believe that it is far from favorable.

#### *Kenya*

In Kenya, homosexuality is criminalized according to Sections 162 to 165 of the penal code, and punishable by five to fourteen years’ imprisonment. Homophobia is strong, reinforced by politicians (notably Daniel Arap Moi, Kenya’s president from 1978 to 2002) and the churches (which have often conveyed the **heterosexism** and the taboos of Kenya’s former colonizer, Britain). Homosexuals are commonly ridiculed, harassed, and beaten; violence against them is high in the capital Nairobi and slightly rarer on the Mombasa coast. It must be noted, however, that Kenya’s indigenous homosexual tradition is relatively rich, in part due to the Arab-Muslim influence, as suggested in the book on the history of homosexuality in Africa, *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands* (edited by Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray).

In the twentieth century, Kenya played an important role in the construction of a homophobic African identity: As early as 1938, Jomo Kenyatta, the future first president of an independent Kenya, affirmed in his book *Facing Mount Kenya* (the first ethnographic work written by an African, with a preface by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski) that homosexuality was unknown among the Kikuyu, Kenya’s most populous ethnic group. He based this theory on the (erroneous) belief that there was no word for homosexuality in any African language. Further, the practice of mutual masturbation between men was common in precolonial African societies, a fact which Kenyatta went to great lengths to disassociate from homosexuality. The acclaim accorded to Kenyatta’s book contributed to the establishment of postcolonial stereotypes, presently embraced by a number of Africans and African-Americans, which associate black cultures with a certain sexual purity, manifested by their “exclusive” heterosexuality untainted by the perversions of European cultures.

#### *Uganda*

In Uganda, any person who has “carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature” is a criminal under Articles 140, 141, and 143 of the penal code. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment for an “active” homosexual, but only seven years’ imprisonment for a “passive” homosexual. Also, homosexual fondling (considered a gross indecency) can be punished by up to five years in prison.

Public opinion in Uganda is very hostile toward gays

and lesbians: those who are known to be homosexual are driven away by their families and lose their friends, jobs, homes, and right to an education (in 1999, twenty-five students were expelled from a high school in Ntare for being gay; later that same year, four students were expelled from a university for the same reason). According to some, Ugandans are generally in favor of punishing homosexuals by stoning.

Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda since 1986, is very homophobic: on September 27, 1999, he declared that homosexuality is foreign to Ugandan culture and threatened the gay population with widespread arrest, imprisonment, and fines (and he asked the Ugandan Secret Service to be prepared to make such arrests). President Museveni's homophobic declaration aroused a strong international reaction: a month later, the US State Department issued a statement to the Ugandan government expressing "deep concern and consternation" over his anti-gay stance. But a wave of repression still followed Museveni's provocative statement: at the end of the same year, five gay and lesbian activists who were members of the newly formed homosexual group Right Companion were arrested, beaten, and subject to extortion. In 2000, a gay activist from another group, Lesgabix, was assassinated in Kampala.

On the religious front, homosexuality has also caused rifts among various Christian factions in the country. In May 2001, Christopher Ssenyonjo, a former bishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda, took up the defense of homosexuals (he is also active with the gay Anglican organization Integrity Uganda). His former colleagues, choked with indignation, accused him of "betraying his faith for thirty pieces of silver" and serving the interest and neocolonialist culture of gay America. (In 2006, Ssenyonjo, excommunicated from the Anglican Church of Uganda, formed the new Charismatic Church of Uganda.) Also, the Catholic Church, through Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala, condemns homosexuality at the same level as corruption, abortion, and "all forms of behavior that are contrary to the laws of God and our own culture."

#### *Tanzania*

Male homosexuality has been illegal in Tanzania since colonial times (Tanzania was a German colony from 1884 until World War I, then a British colony until independence was declared in 1961). Articles 154 to 157 of Tanzania's penal code render all homosexual rela-

tions between men punishable by fourteen years' imprisonment (there is no mention of women).

Having said this, the law does not seem to be regularly applied, or if so, only erratically. In 1998, a British citizen was expelled from Tanzania for homosexuality; however, it appears that the fact he was a successful businessman in the country was the bigger offense. And there is a burgeoning gay movement in the country; Community Peer Support Services (CPSS), an association for the defense of gays and lesbians, has been in existence since 1997 and currently has 334 members whom it trains to become activists. According to CPSS, the situation of gays and lesbians is better in Tanzania than in all its neighboring countries.

#### *Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire, Congo-Kinshasa, Belgian Congo)*

It is believed that male homosexuality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (a separate country than its neighbor to the west, the Republic of the Congo) is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, but in fact, the legal status of homosexuals in the DRC is unclear: Articles 168, 169, and 172 of the penal code make sexual assault a crime, not sexual relations between consenting adults. The same vague legislation can be found in neighboring Rwanda.

Nonetheless, hostility toward homosexuals in this former Belgian colony is strong, marked by the proselytism of Christian missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the population is seventy-five percent Catholic, twenty percent Protestant). In 1992, the most virulent anti-gay delegate at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church was Reverend Kasongo Muza from the DRC, who declared: "We do not want our culture to be contaminated by a disease." But homosexuality was not imported into Congolese culture; there is evidence that it is indigenous. In certain Mbo tribes, for example, it is traditional for a homosexual to play a part in the initiation rites of boys.

#### *Cameroon*

According to Article 347 of Cameroon's penal code, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by six months' to five years' imprisonment, and the punishment is doubled if one of the participants is under the age of twenty-one. It is often said in Cameroon, as in much of the rest of Africa, that homosexuality was imported from elsewhere, in this case introduced by German,

then French colonizers; this is not true, however. As early as 1914, German ethnographer Günther Tessman discovered evidence of sodomy as a tradition among the Fang culture; these relations were supposed to bring material benefits to the dominant participant.

The reality of life for Cameroon's homosexuals is poorly documented, but the evidence that exists suggests that it is very bad. Cameroon is in fact one of the countries where legal and judicial corruption is the most common; and of the hundreds of individuals each year who are arrested, tortured, and even executed without a fair trial by paramilitary units, it is highly likely that a disproportionate number are homosexual. However, despite these odds, a handful of courageous gay activists from Cameroon participated in the ILGA's 1999 world conference.

—Pierre Albertini

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—Africa, Southern; Africa, Western; Anthropology; Islam; Maghreb.

## AFRICA, SOUTHERN

While individuals who were exclusively homosexual were rare in precolonial times, it appears that homosexual practices have existed in the region of Southern Africa since ancient times. Ethnologists have determined that "homosexual marriage" existed among Zulu warriors (which was supposed to give them a sense of solidarity with one another) as well as in societies where the male-to-female ratio was unbalanced (in particular as a result of polygamy among the elite), as was the case with the Kololo-Lozi of western Zambia. Moreover, in Angola, transvestite "sodomites" were endowed with positive magical powers by neighboring societies. Starting in the fifteenth century, such behavior was considered scandalous by the region's European colonizers, be they Portuguese, Dutch, or British. It was also discovered that some slaves from the region maintained these behaviors when they were transported overseas; they were among those condemned to be burned at the stake during the Spanish and Portuguese **Inquisitions** in Latin America. In the nineteenth century, the reinforcement of colonization in Southern Africa, as well as the prevalence of missionary activities in the area, underlined the colonizers' homophobia and their consideration of homosexuality as taboo, at the price of often-noted paradoxes: firstly, many colonizers (among them Cecil Rhodes) were themselves homosexual; and secondly, the mining industry developed by British colonizers in the region resulted in large concentrations of male workers, thereby fostering homosexual practices among the black populations.

This period of the homosexual taboo in Southern Africa has only recently ended. It was during the mid-1990s that the homosexual question became a very important political theme, due to the policy of recognizing gay and lesbian rights adopted by the country of South Africa at the end of the apartheid era. South Africa's progressive advances at this time created tension among neighboring states, as well as outbursts of sometimes extremely violent homophobia. But these advances also launched a continent-wide debate on homosexuality and homophobia, and its commensurate relationship to democracy (or lack thereof). These

discussions initiated a new way of thinking on the subject as a result. Sheila Lapinsky, a well-known lesbian activist and African National Congress (ANC) member in South Africa, was the first to demand the acknowledgment that the homophobia of the Rwandan bishops not be separated from their terrible compromise during the genocide.

### *South Africa*

Apartheid provided a great example of the ties that exist between homophobia and racism. If Afrikaners in South Africa were generally more racist than the British (who abolished slavery between 1833 and 1834), both shared the same good old homophobic sensibilities that were Protestant in origin. Afrikaner legislation condemned male homosexuality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, followed by British legislation in the nineteenth century. It is known that the British victory in the Boer War (1899–1902) led, paradoxically, to further empowering the Afrikaners, who during the twentieth century dominated the Union of South Africa since its creation in 1910. South Africa officially adopted the apartheid system in 1948 when it enacted a number of harsh segregationist laws (including making interracial marriage illegal); in 1957, it adopted homophobic legislation in the form of the Sexual Offences Act, forbidding sodomy, homosexual intercrural coitus, mutual masturbation, and all homosexual acts in public places or “private areas where there are more than two people.” Until the 1980s, South African police often raided reputedly “gay” private parties in order to uphold the Act; in 1966, one party in particular with some 350 guests received a great deal of media coverage. In 1967, and again in 1985, there were movements to criminalize all forms of homosexuality, private or otherwise, including lesbianism (which was never illegal, even if it was often clandestine). Regardless, the legislation of 1957 was rigorously applied well into the final years of apartheid. The apogee of legal proceedings against male homosexuals occurred in 1991, when 476 proceedings resulted in 324 convictions. As for the South African **army**, it subjected soldiers accused of homosexuality to various types of aversion therapy, which could include electrical shocks and chemical castration, until the 1980s.

Afrikaner homophobia had very deep religious roots: for the Boers, apartheid was founded on the Biblical “Curse of Ham,” in which blacks are “cursed” to be servants; similarly, the forbidding of homosexuality was

based on an ancient source, specifically the Biblical condemnation of **Sodom** as well as the writings of St **Paul**. It was also linked to the Boer population’s Anglophobia, as Britain was viewed as a country of decadent morals. It also shared some similarities with homophobia as it was expressed by the Nazis: for example, both considered homosexuality not only a sign of biological **degeneracy** (a serious pathology that compromised the survival of a threatened, dominant race), but also a gravely asocial attitude in that it had little regard for the barriers and separations erected by the state; the fact that certain white homosexuals were more apt to associate with non-whites made them even more **criminal**. In order to staunch any political or legal progress either by homosexuals or non-Afrikaners, the platform of the National Party, which dominated the political scene in South Africa at the time, was based on Afrikaner populism, which was hostile to the mixing of social classes, urban culture, and intellectuals, and played up the confusion between homosexuality and **pedophilia**. It also encouraged political splits within the newly forming gay community. For example, the Gay Association of South Africa, the first South African gay association founded in 1982, was almost exclusively composed of whites and claimed to be “apolitical,” meaning it refused to condemn apartheid. It was not until 1988 that an anti-apartheid homosexual association formed: the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), a multiracial and political association hostile to all forms of **discrimination**.

From that moment, a radically new political context emerged in South Africa, marked by the liberation of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, the abolition of apartheid laws in 1991, and finally the election of Mandela to the Presidency of the Republic in 1994. Concurrent to these political strides, progress was also made by the country’s gay and lesbian community. The first ever Gay Pride in South Africa, and in fact on the whole African continent, was organized by GLOW in 1990. Gay and lesbian visibility increased, as did the number of areas where they could congregate; suddenly it was possible for groups like LILACS (Lesbians in Love and Compromising Situations) to flourish. The gay community, more and more conscious of itself, began to demand equal rights, based on the model that black ANC militants had honed over the decades. It is thus that the 1996 South African Constitution affirmed (the first in the world to do so)

the equality of all of its citizens, “regardless of their race, sexual identity, gender, **family** situation, social or ethnic origins, skin color, sexual orientation, age, eventual handicaps, religion, beliefs, culture, language and birth” (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Bill of Rights, Law Number 108 of 1996). This document is of capital importance because it takes precedence over all other laws as a last resort: for example, the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality refers to it when lobbying for the repeal of older laws. The Constitution is also invoked in order to obtain certain other legal advances for gays and lesbians, notably relating to non-discrimination, **employment** law, and matrimonial law. In 2006, same-sex **marriage** became legal in South Africa when the Civil Unions Bill was enacted, becoming the first country in Africa to do so. Due to progressive legislation such as this, morale among gays and lesbians in South Africa is high, as a black participant of Pride of Johannesburg noted in 1994: “I’m nothing more than a little drag queen; but you know what? Since I’ve heard speak of this constitution, I feel free inside.”

Such constitutional protection does not, however, signify the end of homophobia in South Africa; it survives among white conservatives and Christian and Muslim lobbyists who did everything possible to prevent the introduction of the equality clause in the 1996 Constitution. Homophobia can also be found among certain black South Africans sensitive to the “pseudo-ethnic” idea that homosexuality is an element of “non-African” culture imported by colonizers. This is what friends and defenders of Winnie Mandela affirmed in 1991, when she was tried for having kidnapped and murdered a fourteen-year-old adolescent whom she claimed she was “saving” from the homosexual advances of a white clergyman: outside her trial, a banner read “Homosex is not in black culture.” And when Barney Pitso, Chair of the South African Human Rights Commission, was confronted by the idea that “the freedom of sexual orientation is not African,” he responded: “If you are correct, then the repression of minorities, corruption, and the violation of human rights are fundamentally African.” Finally, despite legal advances, gays and lesbians are not immune to the high level of violence that continues to plague South African society. (customs not being as advanced as the law).

### *Zimbabwe*

As is often the case, one of the effects of colonization

in what was Rhodesia (a British colony from 1895 to 1920), along with widespread Christian **proselytism**, was the consideration of conjugal, monogamous heterosexuality as the only legitimate means of sexual relations. The territory endured the harshness of homophobic Anglo-Saxon laws even beyond its independence in 1965 and its later decolonization when it was renamed Zimbabwe in 1980. It should be noted, however, that British colonization itself, through its development of a mining industry populated almost exclusively by male workers, created conditions ripe for homosexual behavior, in which “marriages” took place between older workers and younger ones who were referred to as “the wife”; the same appears to have existed among the women left in the villages, in “mother-baby” partnerships. (The same phenomenon occurred in South Africa.)

Since its independence, Zimbabwe has not changed its harsh laws regarding homosexuality, a crime which can result in prison sentences of up to ten years. In 1989, a gay and lesbian group called Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) was established, composed of both whites and blacks, and it was not long before it clashed with Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe, who, during the 1990s, revealed himself to be one of the most homophobic heads of state in the world. His anti-gay stance has many origins: Christian catechism learned from missionaries as a youth; the influence of Kenyan leader and ethnologist Jomo Kenyatta who, as early as 1938, affirmed that homosexuality was completely unknown to African populations; and an open hostility towards South Africa’s recent political and social evolution and, more precisely, Nelson Mandela who, at Mugabe’s expense, became the biggest political personality in the region of Southern Africa as a result of the end of apartheid. In 1995, not satisfied with refusing GALZ to have a booth at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair in Harare, Mugabe felt it appropriate to explain his position in the following way: “Lesbians and gays are inferior to dogs and pigs; they deserve no rights. They represent a form of Western **decadence** that has no real ties to authentic Zimbabwean culture.” This statement, which aroused considerable emotion around the world, expresses rather well the mental state in which homophobes find themselves, in this case confusing the natural with the historical and native traditions with missionary practices. While Cecil Rhodes’ sexual orientation is of no doubt, we know today that homosexual-like

relations existed in the Shoa and Ndebele populations before the arrival of colonizers. Historian Marc Epprecht uncovered evidence that, since the beginning of Rhodesian colonization, simple villagers who had never had contact with Westerners were condemned for homosexuality; and research by psychologist Marc Carlson revealed that homosexuality as a tradition is present in 122 tribes in Zimbabwe.

In 1996, GALZ challenged Mugabe's Harare Book Fair refusal before Zimbabwe's High Court, which sided with the association. However, this only served to increase the level of intimidation by homophobic students, religious leaders, and Mugabe's henchmen, and, at the last moment, the country's Minister of the Interior published a decree once again prohibiting GALZ from participating in the book fair in order "to take care of the Zimbabwean people's culture's health." Ever since, gays and lesbians in Zimbabwe serve regularly as scapegoats for the nation's myriad frustrations created by its catastrophic economic situation. Police harassment is incessant, taking the form of arbitrary arrests, beatings, and even assassinations. But GALZ's role was revolutionary, as noted by South African researcher Peter Vale: never before had a minority rights group in the region dared to defy the authority of a national leader. Thus, GALZ cleared the way for other groups demanding progressive change, including unions, churches, and human rights organizations. Meanwhile, the protests against Mugabe have become international in scope: one example is British gay activist Peter Tatchell who, inspired by Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's arrest when he landed on British soil, requested the same of the Zimbabwean president while on British soil in October 1999, to no avail; he did the same in 2001 when Mugabe arrived in Brussels, where Tatchell was violently attacked by the president's bodyguards as a result. Mugabe himself, who is also quite anglophobic, once criticized Tony Blair's government as being made up, according to him, of "gay gangsters."

In a twist of fate, Robert Mugabe's presidential predecessor, Methodist pastor Canaan Banana, was himself caught up in a sensitive morality scandal, accused of having committed, during his presidency (1980–87), numerous homosexual rapes of his collaborators and bodyguards. Banana fled to Botswana, and then to South Africa. Despite Mugabe's attempts to silence the scandal, Banana was condemned in absentia to one year in prison in 1998; he returned to his country to serve his sentence and was released in 2001. He died in 2003.

### *Zambia*

Conditions for homosexuals are very poor in Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia), where the nation's sodomy law calls for sentences of up to fourteen years in prison. Zambian President Frederick J. T. Chiluba (from 1991 to 2002) was only slightly less homophobic than Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. His Minister of Justice, Vincent Malambo, once publicly stated that "homosexuality is an abomination as much for Africans as it is for Christians."

Under the progressive influence of South Africa, however, things started to change in Zambia at the end of the 1990s. In July 1998, a young homosexual named Francis Chisambisha came out in an article published in *The Post*, Zambia's leading newspaper. He stated that his sexual identity in no way betrayed his African heritage. A few weeks later, in September 1998, at the instigation of Zambian gay activist Gershom Musonda, the country's first gay organization, LEGATRA (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals & Transgender Persons Association), was formed, with the goal of supplying members with psychological support, legal advice, and health information. LEGATRA works closely with Amnesty International, the Zimbabwean association GALZ, and the Zambian rights organization Zambia Independent Monitoring Team (ZIMT), which specializes in monitoring the nation's elections, and whose courageous president, Alfred Zulu, affirmed that the simple application of Zambia's existing Constitution could be enough to ensure protection of the gay community. LEGATRA has sought to obtain official recognition from the government, but this has been in vain given that the nation's anti-sodomy laws are still in effect; according to the government, such recognition would "encourage the crime." Unfortunately, without this recognition (which would permit legal lobbying), it is unforeseeable that the sodomy law will be repealed.

In 2001, the debates still raged in Zambia between liberals in favor of decriminalizing homosexuality and conservatives who consider that any reform would be damaging to African culture and Christian morality. It should be noted that gay and lesbian activists in Zambia are in a constant state of danger: the president of LEGATRA has been assaulted twice, resulting in permanent damage, at any moment, a homosexual can be arrested for disobeying the law or for conspiring against it. In December 2006, the Zambian government said it will never pass a law to allow gay mar-

riages. Minister of Home Affairs, Ronnie Shikapwasha, indicated that the country must maintain its Christian status and will not allow sinful practices, as homosexual marriages are a sin in the eyes of God.

### *Namibia*

The nation of Namibia, formerly known as South West Africa, was colonized first by the Germans, then placed under British mandate after World War I, but in effect governed by South Africa; it has only known independence since 1990. The country's new Constitution was liberal and egalitarian, and did not outlaw homosexuality. That being said, many of its leaders have been clearly homophobic, not only referencing Biblical interdicts, but also taking up the notion that homosexuality was imported to the region by colonizers, and is foreign to African tradition. (It is interesting to note that such politicians also stigmatize foreigners present upon Namibian soil.) Around 1995, many of the nation's cabinet ministers denounced homosexuality as a "non-African scourge on society" and a "mental illness" treatable by hormone therapy. Beginning in 1996, Sam Nujoma, President of Namibia between 1990 and 2005, formally condemned homosexuality on many occasions, accusing gays and lesbians of being agents of European imperialism and of destroying local culture by virtue of their "gayism." In October 2000, he asked gays and lesbians to leave the country; around the same time, Nujoma's Minister of the Interior Jerry Ekandjo commissioned a 700-man police unit aimed at "the elimination of gays and lesbians from the surface of Namibia." Ekandjo also remarked that the Namibian Constitution does not guarantee any rights to homosexuals.

In spite of these very difficult conditions, or because of them, a gay and lesbian movement surfaced in Namibia in 1989, when a group of lesbians founded the Sister Namibia Collective; later, they associated themselves with other gay activists to launch the Rainbow Project in 1997, composed of over 1,000 members. The Rainbow Project was the third gay and lesbian movement in Africa, in addition to those in South Africa and Zimbabwe; in addition, the first Gay Pride celebration in Namibia took place in the capital city of Windhoek in 2000.

### *Botswana*

In Botswana, a state surrounded by South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, male homosexuality has

been outlawed since colonial times; deemed "carnal relations against nature," such crimes are punishable by up to two years of imprisonment. Homophobia among the political establishment is also rampant, as evidenced by the criminalization of lesbianism in a broadening of sodomy laws in June of 1998.

In January of 1999, the Botswana Christian Council called for the repeal of laws on homosexuality. Reverend Rupert Hambira based the decision on evangelical charity ("We must not judge others; we must leave judgment to God") and noted that homophobic laws cannot be based on the Bible, as it is "full of human errors and subjective opinions" and was used by the Boers to justify apartheid. Hambira was supported by the head of the University of Botswana's sociology department, Dr Mulingi, who, while personally disapproving of homosexuality, refuted the homophobic argument pertaining to its non-African character: on the contrary, he argued, homosexual relations were common in Central Africa before colonization. These affirmations provoked violently hostile reactions from University of Botswana students, whose leader, Biti Butale, decried: "We are horrified by homosexuality and other fads of Western philanthropists."

A gay and lesbian movement, LeGaBiBo (Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals of Botswana), appeared at the end of the 1990s, developed under the protection of a very active human rights organization named Ditshwanelo, which in 2000 received the Felipa de Souza Award for its actions in support of homosexuals. In 1996 and in 2001, encouraged by South Africa's progressive achievements, a gay activist named Utjijwa Kanani, with the support of renowned British human rights lawyer Peter Duffy, contested the homophobic articles of the Botswanan penal code before the High Court, believing that they contradicted the fundamental values of the nation's Constitution.

### *Mozambique*

Like Angola, another former Portuguese colony, Mozambique considers homosexuality to be a behavior prejudicial to public morality. Articles 70 and 71 of the Mozambiquan penal code criminalize male homosexuality; they stipulate that homosexual acts are punishable by three years of imprisonment in a re-education center, where inmates are subject to forced labor. However, there is reason for optimism; as of November 2007, a new gay rights movement has begun in the form of a gay organization (albeit unregistered), and

politicians have not ruled out pro-gay legal reforms in the future.

—*Pierre Albertini*

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—*Africa, Central & Eastern; Africa, Western; Anthropology; Rhetoric; Violence.*

## AFRICA, WESTERN

The region commonly referred to as West Africa comprises numerous countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, the Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo; Cameroon might also be added to this list, given its history and diverse ethnic groups (Fulani, Hausa, etc.) are largely tied to this region.

Currently, each country in this region has tended toward political pluralism, which has allowed a certain degree of democratic functioning. In Ghana, Mali, and Senegal, the changeover of political power between parties has been relatively satisfactory; however, other countries such as the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Niger, and Nigeria have experienced political instability in this regard. Generally, citizens in these countries have demanded constitutional reforms that would allow for greater democracy; however, the revision of legal texts and political policy necessary for such change are not to be found on many ruling governments' agendas. In such unfavorable conditions, debate on individual liberties, let alone the **decriminalization** and recognition of homosexuality, is not possible.

Thus, in Ghana, as in Nigeria, Togo, and Mali, homosexuality is illegal. In Cameroon, Article 347 of its penal code condemns all "acts that are immodest or **against nature** with an individual of one's gender"; those convicted of the crime face six months to five years' imprisonment and a fine ranging from the equivalent of \$40 to \$400 US (if the person involved is between 16 and 21 years old, the penalties doubles). In Senegal, the penal code is as severe; Article 319 prescribes from one to five years' imprisonment and a fine between the equivalent of \$200 and \$300 US. In Burkina Faso, where homosexuality is also punishable, the legal system takes advantage of the vague definition of "public indecency" to prosecute homosexuals, a phenomenon which also occurs in Senegal and Cameroon. While all countries in West Africa recognize the right of individuals to a "satisfying sexuality," few could have foreseen its consequences with regard to homosexuals.

In West Africa, religion constitutes an important point of reference with regard to identity. Certain countries still strongly abide by old traditional religions, almost all of which are organized around the worship of ancestors, such as the Ivory Coast (65% Animist, 12% Christian, 23% Muslim), Benin (70% Animist, 15% Christian, 15% Muslim), and Guinea-Bissau (56% Animist, 5% Christian, 30% Muslim). Others are more apt to follow **Islam**, such as Mali (90% Muslim), Guinea (85% Muslim), and Niger (90% Muslim). Ghana, on the other hand, is mainly Christian (63%, with 21% Animist and 16% Muslim). In general, religious cohabitation is harmonious. In West Africa, **Christianity** arrived with colonization, whereas Islam, present in the region longer, arrived not

by way of conquest, but rather more diffusely through intertribal exchange, a fact which has not led to the phenomenon of Arabization. This cohabitation has incited very little religious proselytism in the region, except in Nigeria (10% Animist, 40% Christian, and 50% Muslim), where proselytism is an ancient tradition and which, in the nineteenth century, inspired a call to jihad which led to the formation of the Fulani Empire of Sokoto (which encompassed the territories situated today in Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger). More recently, the establishment of *sharia* (Islamic religious law) in certain states in Nigeria has brought about a cycle of violence between Christians and Muslims, and has resulted in death penalties imposed upon women accused of adultery.

Just as it is difficult to adequately summarize the vastness and diversity of West Africa as a geographic region, it is equally difficult to summarize the various forms of homophobia found there, which differs from country to country. However, it can be examined in relation to the region's history and traditions, and how well countries have adapted to the changing mores and sexual practices of contemporary society.

#### *The History of the Region*

The history of West Africa includes powerful pre-colonial states such as the Ghanaian Empire (starting in the 4th century), the Yoruba States in Benin and Hausa (10th century), the Malian Empire (11th century), the Sosso Empire (12th century), the Ashanti kingdoms (13th century), the Songhai Empire (14th century), and the Sokoto Empire (19th century). These states that emerged, but in the Niger region and on the Atlantic coast or by Lake Chad, were halted in their succession and destroyed by colonization in the nineteenth century. What followed was a process of re-tribalization which, by administrative will, divided populations into ethnic groups. This explains the broad definition of what, in this region, is considered a tribe or ethnic group. For example, the Fulani are present in nine countries, including Cameroon and Chad; the Mandinka are found not only in Mali, but also in Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone; the Hausa are in Libya, Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria; and the Yoruba are in Benin and Nigeria. Members of these ethnic groups number in the millions; they are further made up of subgroups, whose origins are composites of ancient alliances, pacts, or blood relations. Ethnicity in this region is thus often a construct whose origins are

difficult to explain, and becomes a sort of convenient catch-all phrase used to justify historical precedence for particular beliefs or behaviors, all the while playing an important role in the construction of identity.

Historically, the creation of great empires in West Africa had the effect of mobilizing great armies, each exclusively male, with the exception of the Kingdom of Dahomey (now Benin) from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, where one found the famous Dahomey Amazons, an all-female military regiment. For the most part, these empires projected the image of a strong and dominant masculinity, which resulted in an important social stratification that first appeared among the Mandinka in the Empire of Mali in the form of castes, organized according to myths by the empire's founder himself, Soundiata Keita. Accordingly, in the great chieftainships, certain powerful men could live with another man, who assumed the status of spouse or wife. To this day, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, there is evidence of homosexual relationships between man-wives and their customary husbands.

In fact, while homosexual relations are generally condemned, old traditions have sometimes created social conditions in which these relations can take place, as in Gagnoa in the Ivory Coast, where one finds the concept of male couple known as *woobi/yossi* (female/male). Ferdinand is a young man, a *woobi* who performs the role of the wife in his relationship with a *yossi*. He states: "In my family, my homosexuality has never been a problem. My grandmother raised me as a little girl. It was no surprise to anyone that I was feminine. At the age of ten, I knew I was a *woobi*." Moreover, he explains: "On the other side of the country, in the East, there is another tradition, the day of the Abissa. On that day, girls dress as boys and boys dress as girls. But most of all, each has the right to reveal his or her life to their family, who must accept it without reproach. It is the day when young *woobis* talk to their parents." However, if local traditions allow a certain amount of flexibility in gender and sexuality, on the whole, stigmatization remains the general rule.

#### *Animist Traditions*

In West Africa, while religions of Semitic origin value masculinity above all, ancient myths represent divinities who are often twins (male and female) or hermaphrodites; and in agrarian societies, a good number of divinities are female, which makes it easy to find female priests, seers, healers, initiates, and members

of secret sects. Traditions inherited from ancestors often include initiation rituals celebrating masculinity or femininity that conform to social group models, which include the act of male circumcision, a procedure which almost every man in the region has undergone to this day, and female circumcision, still present in countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. In these ways, sexuality remains highly controlled by the social group, especially as pro-birth attitudes in the region are quite present, given the fact that child mortality remains high and life expectancy is between forty-seven and fifty-four years of age (and decreasing further since the beginning of the AIDS pandemic). In this context, any dialogue pertaining to sexuality is restricted to the issue of procreation; as a result, the discussion of homosexuality is silenced from the start.

In these ancient cultures, homosexual relationships find their structure, logic, and significance in the idea of duality, which permits the understanding of numerous aspects of sexuality of certain ethnic groups, including their life experience, made easier by the fact that they largely congregate in urban areas such as Yaoundé, Cameroon, or Lagos, Nigeria. The concept of duality also allows us to understand homosexuality on one side, and the stigmatization it causes on the other. It gives it a mythological coherence. Anthropological literature on witchcraft suggests the plurality of the human individual, in which all of us possess a double who is invisible and immaterial. It is this double who participates in encounters between sorcerers, and it is through the double that occult cannibalism occurs (the sorcerers' doubles eat their victims' doubles, and then continue to live). As well, what happens to one's double has repercussions on the person's material half. Among the Fulani, as in a number of other African ethnic groups, sleep is the moment when the soul, the immaterial double, leaves the body, escaping the laws of space and time. It is at that moment that sorcerers can attack and annihilate it.

This fundamental concept is important when studying the entire field of sexuality in West Africa, even among those many who insist they no longer believe in it. It allows us to understand local representations of sexuality, including homosexuality, erotic dreams and fantasies, and also allows a deeper understanding of the dual notions of sex and gender, and masculinity and femininity. According to this concept, human beings possess two sexes, one that is apparent and another in-

visible, that falls within the realm of the double; they can be similar to one another, or different; they can be equal in size, or not. One can have power over one's double and act through it, or not; according to tradition, this is what distinguishes sorcerers from others. When one has this power, one can act against others through their double: they can be attacked, take away someone's strength, strike someone with illness, or devour someone; they can even force someone into a sexual act. Given that sleep is when one's double is most vulnerable, these acts occur during a person's dream state. Sorcery or witchcraft is thus a universe of doubles, where certain individuals are conscious, can see, and have power over others, who have no consciousness and are blind and inert.

Men usually have a masculine double, but it may also be the case that their double is feminine. Moreover, there are women whose double is masculine. This fact is important in determining one's sexual orientation. According to legend, it is the work of sorcerers who can control one's double, often taking on the appearance of an individual in order to mislead those who could discover their activities. It is also thought that sorcerers seize the penis of a sleeping man and use it as a whistle or horn in order to send messages to other sorcerers. In the same manner, some women whose double is feminine can take the genital organs of a man in their circle and use them during relations with other women without the man, the husband for example, ever knowing. This form of castration manifests itself in the visible world by the man's timorous character, especially his timidity before the castrator (the woman). Thus, neither masculinity nor femininity are stable constructs; a woman can hide an invisible male sexual organ or transform her feminine double into a masculine one in a form of fantastical transsexuality.

Under these conditions, the idea of responsibility is, of course, unfounded. On one hand, the double can act while one sleeps. On another, a stranger or spirit can take over another body. This leads to a notion of transferal of responsibility, which can offer an explanation for illness or failure. We may not succeed because of the will of another who has a hold over us. With regard to sexuality, this idea is also used to explain infertility, particularly given a culture that holds both procreation and the worship of its ancestors in such high regard. How can one become an ancestor oneself if one does not procreate? Sterility is considered a woman's greatest failure: in such cases, the husband is

permitted to take another wife, maintain concubines, or even renounce the woman who does not bear him any children. Infertility can also be attributed to erotic dreams with a homosexual theme.

Moreover, according to these beliefs, certain individuals know how to manipulate this energy to their own advantage. Thus, it is believed that homosexual men seeking sexual services characteristically have a certain portliness about them, apparently due to the semen absorbed from their partners. Alternatively, a heterosexual man who engages in sexual relations with a homosexual runs the risk of losing weight, his energy being sucked out by his partners. Homosexuality is thus an activity by which men's doubles (whether masculine or feminine) attack others' doubles in order to feed off their vital energy.

This helps us to understand why homosexuality is so feared in these cultures. Going against the norm, the homosexual is therefore stigmatized. It is linked to the world of sorcery or witchcraft, that is to say, violence. In this world, the homosexual possesses a feminine double; he is a woman in one dimension and a man in the other. This is why he manifests a sexual attraction to a gender that is identical to his own in the visible world. Homosexuality is thus "rationalized" as being a heterosexuality of doubles. It is said that during intimacy, homosexuals assume their feminine form and have normal relations. This so-called "rationalization" reveals how difficult it is in this culture to understand how someone can be attracted to one's own gender. According to this interpretation, there can only be sexual relations between opposite genders. Because of homosexuality's historical link to sorcery, it is considered an aberration and thus a crime.

In this light, homosexuality is automatically condemned without consideration of other views. Associated with witchcraft, it is considered a great sexual perversion, an act against nature. To this day, many young people in West Africa insist that they are incapable of submitting to such perversions, even for large sums of money.

#### *Islam and Christianity*

Islam and Christianity are not truly opposed to traditional cults, from which they borrow and recycle back to them. In West Africa, the invocation of the precepts of Islam or Christianity to denounce homosexuality is constant. According to Christianity, homosexual relations constitute a sin and even an abomination, and ac-

ording to Islam, in those areas where *sharia* is applied, sodomy can be punishable by death.

Even though it is often fused with animist beliefs, the view expressed by Christians in the region is meant to be highly orthodox; they refer to the church's most absolute homophobic tradition. In this sense, African Christianity is often harsher, more dogmatic, and more violent than the views ordinarily expressed in, say, Western Europe, where many Christians long ago learned to temper their words and adjust their rhetoric in societies that are not disposed to having a fundamentalist diktat imposed upon them. By comparison, in West Africa, religious views generally resonate better with the populace. Consequently, West African Christians do not hesitate to express more radical views with regard to morality, in general, and homosexuality, in particular. As an example, Father Jean Ndjewel, Catholic priest of St Stephen's Congregation in Yaoundé, published an online document in which he affirms:

Homosexuality is sodomy, an abomination, an active manifestation of Satan.... The works of Satan are the opposite of all that which is of divine creation. They are tainted with irregularity, cheating, and abomination. The Church in its sanctifying function must, by way of its sacraments, bring perpetual salvation to those lamentable individuals, that is to say the infirm, the sick, and those assaulted by the devil.... The exorcisms that are the powerful prayers of the Church and are appropriate to root out impure spirits from the bodies of human beings are, therefore, fitting solutions for the eradication of the homosexual phenomenon.

As far as Islam is concerned, *imams* (spiritual leaders) sometimes advocate the death penalty for homosexuals, in accordance with *sharia*. The power and influence these leaders hold over the faithful embolden these views. However, while homosexuality is widely condemned, Islamic tradition also demands the separation of the sexes, which leads to the formation of same-sex groups who are always together and who have little access to those of the opposite sex. Paradoxically, homosexual relationships tend to develop under such conditions, even if they remain discreet, including in such deeply Islamic cities as Bamako (Mali), Conakry (Guinea), Freetown (Liberia), and Niamey (Niger).

*New Contours of Homophobia Today*

Today, homosexuality remains highly stigmatized in all countries of West Africa. The existence of a dual judicial system that in one area is based on tribal custom and in another on law makes legal recourse random at best. In November 2002, the Archbishop of Freetown publicly accused the government of being responsible for the murder of five nuns during the turmoil that swept the country. Reacting angrily to this accusation, the Prime Minister accused the prelate of homosexuality, which according to this logic, was considered a worse crime than the murder of five people. For his part, Mathias Ble, a teacher in the Ivory Coast, suggested in a 2001 document that his country's government should open "social and moral rehabilitation establishments, [in order] to reform our brothers and sisters ... versed or advanced on this road of savage, sexual violence."

On the whole, homosexuality is described and discussed in West Africa with violent language, revealing the poor regard in which homosexuals are held. As in other regions of Africa, terms such as "ancestral tradition" (which was and must remain heterosexual) and "our negritude" (which makes each African a defender of that which has been agreed to be called "black," "negro-African," or "African" values) are uniformly invoked in such discussions. It is surprising to note that stasis is considered the norm, and that cultural uniformity appears as a fact, whereas historical and ethnographical research clearly refutes the idea of the universal heterosexuality of African traditions. The differences among African societies are numerous, and the history of the peoples of Africa is neither singular nor stationary. The abundance of cultures and their various mutations and subsections are so numerous that neither negritude, nor negro-African or African values, have ever really meant anything.

It is, however, curious to note the paradox that surrounds Western culture's contribution to the construction of the sexual identity of the people of Africa today. It is the West that introduced Christian dogma (largely homophobic) to the region, as well as colonial laws that were often very strict with regard to homosexual relations; but presently, the West is often perceived in Africa as a poor model because of its general **tolerance** toward homosexuality. If homosexuality is considered a foreign **vice** in the region, then contemporary homophobia should also be considered an import. At the March 1997 Cotonou Conference, which dealt with the elimination of legal barriers to sexual and reproduc-

tive health in French-speaking Africa, many important observations were made: for one, contemporary laws of African states are based on colonial laws, but they have not evolved; this leads to the fact that the national laws are often incompatible with large, international apparatus and the resolutions from international conferences. As for the states that have emerged from French colonization, the situation is somewhat confusing: the Napoleonic Code, upon which they more or less base themselves, does not criminalize homosexuality, but the articles regarding the affront to public decency allow for its repression. With regard to states that were once controlled by Great Britain, the situation is much clearer: since the sixteenth century, English law punished homosexuality, and the Labouchère Amendment of 1885 allowed this law to be extended to the various colonies. Today, all countries in West Africa remain on the same page with regard to homosexuality: it remains a criminal offence, and not only is decriminalization not on the agenda, but the official homophobic position has been reinforced again and again.

However, in the last few decades, conditions have changed that improve the lives of homosexuals in the region. Increasing urbanization is a determining factor. The average rate of urbanization is currently between 30 and 48%. Certain countries remain very rural, with very low urbanization levels, such as Burkina Faso (18%), Niger (20%), or Mali (29%), whereas others are much more urbanized, such as Senegal (46%), the Ivory Coast (46%), or Liberia (47%). Strikingly, countries that do not have access to the sea are the least urbanized. Linked to the history of colonization, larger cities in the region, such as Lagos, Abidjan, Dakar and Accra, are found on the Atlantic coast, former commercial ports that sprang up with "triangular commerce" (between Africa, Europe, and America) and later became the capitals of the countries that emerged from colonization. Their political-economic role, which attracted a large workforce from the rural interior and from neighboring countries, explains their rapid growth into melting-pots with populations of diverse origins. The city is, therefore, a meeting place, a place for mixing and sharing ideas, for being aware of social change; it is also a place that allows for anonymity and individual autonomy, away from the stifling pressures of community, **family**, and "traditions." These conditions create a greater opportunity for homosexual relations, even if they remain strongly condemned. Thus, the city, a place where new ideas are disseminated, becomes a

privileged space where homosexuals can engage one another.

This urbanization is an essential factor in understanding homosexuality's place in the region today. The idea that homosexuality is a minority activity controlled by taboos and witchcraft is slowly changing, thanks to urbanization. In the large cities, there are nightclubs frequented by homosexuals, and homosexuality is often perceived as a phenomenon of certain social strata, notably the affluent, who are then likely to purchase the services of same-sex partners. Sometimes female prostitutes serve as fronts and intermediaries for their male counterparts who dare not openly offer their services for hire. Some women complain about this competition that not only reduces the number of customers, but is also more lucrative. In recent years, Europeans have been accused of maintaining a huge homosexual "network" in the region, but this accusation falls in the line with the idea that homosexuality is imported; thus, AIDS is a "white illness" (in the same way that it is a "black illness" according to some outside of Africa). In rural areas, it is also believed that sexually transmitted diseases are exclusive to the city. In this way, the context of what is believed to constitute urban life largely colors the populace's views concerning sexuality.

In Cameroon, homosexuals have for a long time been called freemasons, as they are believed to belong to the esoteric world of mystic brotherhoods who practice this form of sexuality in order to acquire supernatural powers. It is thought that some do it in order to become wealthy, and others to increase the strength of their double. This concept is also linked to political power. In modern political mythology from Congo to Cameroon that is more current in the cities than in rural areas, there is mention of politicians who request that those who come to see them wishing to be hired for a particular job or contract are to be accompanied by their wives. In such a scenario, the wife enters the politician's office alone while the husband waits outside; how the wife "performs" has a direct consequence on her husband's career. In a variation of this tale, however, the wife is nowhere to be found, and it is the husband who must undress before his potential boss. This particular idea seems to be inspired by the beliefs that tie homosexuality to witchcraft and the manifestation of the double, but it is important to distinguish it in a homophobic light—given that this link is only made because it has to do with homosexuality. In the version where the wife is involved, it is

construed not as an invocation of witchcraft but as an abuse of authority.

The homophobic **discourse** in West Africa is thus based on old traditions and beliefs that have been adapted to the ideas of the contemporary world. These representations remain vivid in the heart of the public, and if they are not often talked about, it is due to a common fear of being stigmatized as being an irrational, superstitious fetishist. However, other components, such as the law, negritude, and the religions of Semitic origin, offer rhetoric that is just as homophobic, and, if not more so, encouraging a negative view of homosexuality. But just as the threat of stigmatization does not prevent people from having these traditional beliefs, neither does it prevent homosexuality from being more present and more visible in the cities.

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### Further Reading

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—Africa, Central & Eastern; Africa, South; AIDS; Anthropology; Family; Islam; Rhetoric; Sterility.

## AGAINST NATURE

The expression "against nature" is not specifically Christian. Though it can be found in the writings of St Paul (Rom 1:26), it originally stems from pagan philosophy, and in a more general sense, from a certain Greek and Roman interpretation of sexual morals. In fact, nothing is more cultural than this concept of nature. Traditionally, neither the Greeks nor the Romans were, properly speaking, homo- or heterosexual, but rather their sexuality was based on roles accorded to them by their social status: the dominant role (i.e. penetrating the other) was played by free male citizens, while the passive role (i.e. being penetrated by the other) was played by everyone else, that is, women, slaves, and adolescents. This was the practice of pederasty in its original pedagogical sense. In this context, someone who is, or acts, "against nature" (*para phusin*) does not respect this simple social norm; the word "nature" in this sense has almost the same meaning as "society."

Things began to change with the introduction of the popular form of Stoicism, which promotes an ethic of "living according to nature." Here, the word "nature" takes on a very different meaning (further yet from its contemporary sense), referring to the "divine order of things." Thus, following nature did not mean conforming to some sort of instinct (as is the current meaning), but rather to reason, as defined by one's biological function. This meant following physical laws, especially, of course, that of procreation. The goal was to seek out *ataraxia* (serene calmness) through the struggle against pleasures, desires, emotion, etc. The body was devalued as being the source of irrational passions, a contingent part of man.

This philosophical and existential system had a strong influence on the Church Fathers, who took up the body/soul dualism (a dualism missing from the **Bible**, even in the writings of St Paul), as well as the disdain for sexuality (which was contrary to the Biblical concept of Creation), reducing it to its "rational" end, meaning **marriage** and reproduction. Under these conditions, homosexuality certainly does appear to be "against nature" and relations between members of the same sex (sodomy in particular) were considered an insult to nature. In this context, homophobia is represented by the fear of the body, sexuality, and pleasure, and by the reduction of sexuality to its reproductive ends. Yet, the extreme example of **sterility** is, on its own, not enough to annul a religious marriage; it is not