

# ANNALI

VOLUME

69

NAPOLI 2009

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI “L’ORIENTALE”

## ANNALI

Rivista del Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici  
e del Dipartimento di Studi e Ricerche su Africa e Paesi Arabi

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Prezzo del presente volume: UE € 90,00; altri Paesi € 110,00

Abbonamento annuale: UE € 90,00; altri Paesi € 110,00

*Per ordini e abbonamenti:*

DIPARTIMENTO ASIA, AFRICA E MEDITERRANEO  
Redazione Annali  
Palazzo Corigliano, Piazza S. Domenico Maggiore 12 – 80134 Napoli (Italy)  
e-mail: annas@unior.it

ISSN 0393-3180

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Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Napoli B. 434/63 del 16-1-1964

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SERGIO BALDI

**Life in Danger?  
LGBT Movement in Nigeria\***

Most Africans today argue that homosexuality was, and has always been, un-African and that it never existed in any prominent way in African societies. They actually argue that Western nations, whilst they denigrate certain African sexual norms like polygamy, are the ones responsible for past and current attempts to foist the acceptance of homosexuality on African countries and their peoples, a practice many believe to be 'western' or 'European'. And we also suspect that the obsession has been mostly with male-to-male sexualities because of the general presumption and fear that homosexuality is an attack on African masculinity. Historians of Africa are beginning to learn that the basic assumptions underlying these African attitudes towards homosexuality are wrong and quite clearly un-historical. In fact, though often ignored or suppressed by European explorers and colonialists, homosexual expression in native Africa has always been present and took a variety of forms.

The first record of possible homosexual couple in history is commonly regarded as Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum, an Egyptian male couple, who lived around the 2400 BCE. The pair are portrayed in a nose-kissing position,

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\* This is a revised edition of a paper presented at *Multiple Modernities of Same-Sex Sexuality in Nigeria* (National University of Ireland at Maynooth, August 18-20, 2010). The author likes to thank Mr. Mahmoud Adam, *lettore* for Hausa and Mrs. Fatouma Tandika, *lettore* for Swahili at Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" for their kind and untiring collaboration in giving their help in this article. He likes to thank warmly Professor Rudolf Leger (J.W. Goethe Universität, Frankfurt) for providing material for this article and his useful remarks on reading this paper.

It is interesting to note the reaction of our Hausa and Swahili informants questioned about homosexuality and lesbism in their countries. They rejected its existence, confirming what said by Murray, Roscoe (1998: xiii): «Yet others acknowledged that 'sodomy' occurred in Africa but claimed that it was introduced by non-Africans – Arab slave-traders (Kagwa 1934: 98) or Europeans – or by another African group. Eastern Bantu-speakers claimed that pederasty was imported by the Nubians (Schneider 1885: 295-96); the Sudanese blamed Turkish marauders (Weine 1848: 120)».

the most intimate pose in Egyptian art, surrounded by what appear to be their heirs (Rice 2001: 98).

E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1970) recorded that male Azande warriors in the northern Congo routinely took on young male lovers between the ages of twelve and twenty, who helped with household tasks and participated in inter-racial sex with their older husbands. The practice had died out by the early 20th century, after Europeans had gained control of Africa, but was recounted to Evans-Pritchard by the elders to whom he spoke.

Looking closely into the Hausa language – that being my field of research – we find under the entry of ‘homosexual’ in Ma Newman’s dictionary the following words: *an daudu*, *an luwadi/lu u* and *an hamsin* (Ma Newman 1990: 124b). Considering these items in a word by word translation then their meaning is «son of Daudu», «son of sodomy» and «son of fifty». The first word, *dan daudu* – a possible derivation of Dauda, meaning David – shows by changing the final vowel a rather pejorative meaning according to Hausa society.<sup>1</sup> After Gaudio (1998: 308, n. 7) «*Daudu* is an abstract noun referring to the phenomenon or practice of men who act like women. *Dan daudu* (literally «son of daudu»; pl. *’yan daudu*) refers to the men themselves». *Dan luwadi* means «male who affects women’s manners, speech» and *dan hamsin* means «son or male of fifty», *i.e.* «a man who takes or receives fifty in the sense of money». Similar pejorative expressions in Swahili are *msenge* or *mtoto sioniski* or *basha*, again the translation is «homosexual, child without any value» and the last noun describes people who prefer to have contact with homosexuals.<sup>2</sup> Homosexual relations among the Hausa are considered frequently as trans-generational type since the age between partners mostly – but not necessarily – span an entire generation. This means that an older man will seek sexual companionship of a younger man or boy and will make gifts to the younger man in return. The older man is called *kwazo* which in standard usage means «diligence, hard work» while the younger man is known the elder’s *haja* «goods, merchandise». Thus, the older *dan daudu* might offer cash or material gift to the younger man for sexual companionship. The masculine boyfriend as the prerogative to act on sexual urges, but individuals in this case also accumulate a kind of socio-economic capital that allows them to go after their own sexual desires. In many respects this logic preserves the conventional patriarchal view of sexuality as for example an exercise of power. A

<sup>1</sup> Fremont Besmer explains that Daudu is a praise name for any Galadima (*i.e.*, a ranked title). It 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 1938: 30, n. 4).

<sup>2</sup> In Swahili the historical, socially recognized category of ‘male transvestites’ is referred to as *shoga* (pl. *mashoga*) in Mombasa, whereas *hanisi* (pl. *mahanisi*) or *hanith* (pl. *mahanith*) are terms for the same phenomenon in two different dialects of Swahili (Kimvita and Kiunguja, respectively).

great challenge to patriarchal power exposed between partners who see each other as equals (Greenberg 1988: 66 calls this relationship «egalitarian type»). They often call each other *kawaye* meaning «girl friends», referring to a special non sexual friendship traditionally developed between Hausa women or girls. This expression can also be applied to lesbianism or to sex between men who are of equal social status.

Whereas all the above mentioned words refer to men, there is for Hausa *'yar madigo* as the female counter part, lesbian woman. The expressions, given above, derived from the two main languages from Western and Eastern Africa, i.e. Hausa and Swahili show us that homosexuality and lesbianism are part of the society maybe even deep rooted in it. But when you ask a member of this society, you will receive a superficial answer that there is nothing like homosexuality and lesbianism and maybe only in very few exceptional cases.

Woman-woman marriage has been documented in more than 30 African populations, including the Yoruba and Ibo of West Africa, the Nuer of Sudan, the Lovedu, Zulu and Sotho of South Africa, and the Kikuyu and Nandi of East Africa (Carrier, Murray 1998). Typically, such arrangements involved two women undergoing formal marriage rites; the requisite bride price is paid by one party as in a heterosexual marriage. The woman who pays the bride price for the other woman becomes the sociological 'husband'. The couple may have children with the help of a 'sperm donor', who is a male kinsman or friend of the female husband, or a man of the wife's own choosing, depending on the customs of the community. The female husband is the sociological father of any resulting offspring. The children belong to her lineage, not to their biological father's (*ibid.*: 256-57).

Formalized, socially-recognized relations between two men also exist in Africa. Among the Zande (located in southwestern Sudan, northeastern Congo, and the Central African Republic), a male warrior could marry a teenage boy by paying a bride price to the boy's parents. The man addresses the boy-wife's parents as his in-laws, and performs services for them as a befitted son-in-law. Unlike women-women marriages, man-boy marriages end when the boy comes of age. The former boy-wife can now take his own boy-wives, and his former husband can marry another boy-wife (see Murray, Roscoe 1998: 27).

At the very dawn of history in Southern Africa, when there was a transition from the hunting-gathering economy of the Khoisan to the cattle-based economy of Bantu-speaking people that brought more male control over the sexuality of women, dissident sexualities such as *hungenochani* (homosexuality) began to emerge or were already known.

The Shona of Zimbabwe, for example, like other societies, observed a culture of discretion regarding sexual matters, and actually recognized various forms of queer sexualities. Examples of pre-colonial gender variance and sexual inversion included ritual incest and celibacy, such as the *mbonga*, a female

guardian whose celibacy protected the Shona chief, and the *chibanda*, a caste of male diviners possessed by female spirits and referred to in early European sources as 'passive sodomites'.

Among the Lovedu people, the gender inversion involved women. The 'rain queen' kept her virginity but married girls. In the nineteenth century, Ndebele and Ngoni warriors introduced the practice of ritual male-male sexuality as part of war preparations.

Anthropologists Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (1998a) reported that women in Lesotho engaged in socially sanctioned «long term, erotic relationships» called *motsaalle*.

As regarding lesbianism among the Hausa people we do not have any valuable documentation as in the case of the Igbo society. When referring to lesbianism there is a problem of the status of the body as the bases for gender identity. Many scholars have written in different ways on how femininity is constructed and practised around the world. It is yet unclear as to what extent the analytical concept of 'woman' is adequately represented in people's experiences of gender in different cultures. The prevalence of lesbian communities reflects the particular gender and sexual repression lesbians have to face under this binary, or gender-sex regime. The Hausa women – belonging to the poorest or wealthy classes – are supposed to be violated and secluded according to orthodox interpretation of Islamic law and are supposed to be dependent on their husbands for sexual needs. Unmarried women for example going out of the house without a veil risk being called *garuwa*,<sup>3</sup> which is not the case in the Igbo society. In the Igbo society – like in more than thirty African ethnic groups,<sup>4</sup> woman-woman marriage has been documented (O'Brien 1977: 109). Such arrangements involve two women undergoing formal marriage rites. There must be a bride price paid as in a heterosexual marriage. The woman paying the bride price becomes the sociological 'husband'. The female husband may be the sociological father of any resulting offspring and the children belong to her lineage, not to the biological father's (Carrier and Murray 1998: 256-57).

As stated by Basden (1921: 213), the idea of an Igbo marriage is «a foremost place in Igbo social economy. It looms upon the horizon of every maid and youth as an indispensable function to be fulfilled with as little delay as possible after reaching the age of puberty». Since the Igbo are a patriarchal society, marriage is an indispensable factor for the continuation of the family line of descent. The most important factor in Igbo marriage is to have children

<sup>3</sup> On the translation of this word, I prefer the French expression 'femme libre' to the English one 'prostitute', which does not have this meaning in the old Hausa society, where the woman could act prostitution in a part of her life, for several reasons, just during some time and after could stop with this work and marry, being a respected person in the society (see Baldi 2004: 39-43).

<sup>4</sup> Including the Yoruba and Ibo of West Africa, the Nuer of Sudan, the Lovedu, Zulu and Sotho of South Africa, and the Kikuyu and Nandi of East Africa (Carrier, Murray 1998: 255-56).



and the first and foremost consideration is the fertility of the couple. It goes so far that the father of the family requests this every morning in his kola nut prayer. If an ordinary Igbo man or woman is asked why he or she desires to marry, the spontaneous answer will be: «I want to marry in order to beget my own children, to get a family like my parents». But a childless woman is regarded as a monstrosity. This idea is still present in the Igbo society of today. A childless marriage is universally recognised as *chi ojoo*. On this Basden again comments: «A childless marriage is a source of serious disappointment and sooner or later, leads to serious trouble between man and wife» (*ibid.*: 226).

The position of a wife in her husband's family remains somehow strange until she begets a child. At this stage she is welcome as a responsible housewife in her husband's extended family. The birth of the child gives her the reputation of a wife. The fate of a sterile woman is a very hard one indeed, since she is made the object of conversation and ridicule by some of her female neighbours. If an occasion for a quarrel arises, she gets the most painful telling off. Her women rivals would call her *Mgbaliga, Nwanyi-iga* (lit. the sterile woman, the barren one) who has her maternal organs for mere decoration.

Such a woman will go to native doctor for psychological help. She might be condemned to a diet of medicinal roots and herbs. This is understandable since the fundamental causes were not and could not have been known by the *Dibias*, ill-equipped as they were with scientific medical instruments. Today, the cases are better handled in hospitals and maternity clinics. The child is practically a vindication of her womanhood.

But how does Igbo custom or tradition consider marriage? An old informant called it a union of a man and a woman leading to that of the two extended families. Another informant said: it is a lasting union between a man and a woman.

Adizue Obi (1970: 115) defines it as «the union between a man and a woman for the duration of the woman's life, being normally the gist of a wider association between two families or sets of families».

For the ordinary Igbo, marriage is the lawful living together of man and woman of different families for the purpose of begetting children after some rites have been performed. Before marriage, a young man who loves a girl would speak to his parents about her. The parents will examine not only her physical beauty, but also her physical, mental and moral fitness, then her resourcefulness, graceful temper, smartness and general ability to work well. Her parental background will be investigated. «Such a tree, such a fruit» it is said.

«The word 'Love' according to the European interpretation is not found in the Igbo vocabulary». «The nearest approach to the idea is *ifu nanya* – that is, 'to look in the eye' in a favourable manner». According to his statement, the word 'love' does not exist in the Igbo language. Later on, he emphatically concluded: «Love, then, usually has no part to play in native courtship» (*ibid.*: 137).

From all we have seen so far, it is evident that the Igbo does not go into marriage without adequate preparation. It is a step which must be taken with the eyes wide open.

If the results are unsatisfactory, the marriage is dropped. To be able to pass the test of these inquiries both the youth and the maid have got preparations to make. Her family background and the character of the mother have a lot to add or to subtract as the case may be. Since all girls were practically meant for marriage in the past, parents usually trained their daughters as future house-wives.

In the Igbo society, polygyny is not merely tolerated, it is encouraged and accepted, still monogamous marriages greatly outnumber polygynous ones. Among the Igbo, a father accepts responsibility for all his wife's children throughout his life. This makes the choice of a wife and the recognition of marriage an important matter for the community.

We are still in the realm of monogamy and it may be important to point out that usually all marriages begin as monogamous, but many end up as polygamous. This is because it does happen that the young man in growing up may take more wives according to his means and the circumstances in which he finds himself. The childlessness of the first wife is not the only reason. In fact there are many as we shall see in Woman-to-Woman Marriage.

This fact may be described as the devise whereby a sterile woman tries to render her supreme service to society, thereby strengthening her position as a useful and responsible member of her husband's family. She pays for a new wife on behalf of her husband, or she provides him with the necessary funds for a new marriage, with a view to raising children for her husband by proxy as we may put it. Meek (1925: 18) describes another form of this type of marriage, saying: «Even an unmarried woman may marry another woman by paying a bride price...». Adizue Obi (1970: 159), however, disagrees with Meek's description, stating that «in our submission, this is not a marriage between one woman and another. The fact that the bride price and other customary dues were paid by a woman is immaterial. After all, many mothers make these payments for and on behalf of their sons of any age; so do fathers, guardians and maternal uncles».

From Adizue Obi's argument one can state that what really makes one a husband before law is not essentially the payment of the bride price alone but taken in conjunction with consent, capacity and the formal giving away. A typical case of a woman marrying another exists among the Nuer where a rich and influential woman may marry another woman by giving marriage cattle for her and then she is the father of her children begotten by some male kinsman of the female husband.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The same pattern applies for the Zulu in South Africa, where a similar situation exists, *i.e.* a woman can marry a woman after she has paid the bride price, dowry, and she functions as the father of the children of her wife. In the cases where Meek was talking of married women,

*Nwunye Nkuchi* which means an inherited wife or a wife taken in another's stead. Basden testifies that this was widely practised in Awka Province of South Eastern Nigeria. A man by this practice takes over his dead father's wife or dead brother's wife where there is no heir, or male issue or if the heir is a minor. This depends on the will of the woman, her age and the man's ability to maintain her. Her previous marriage was not terminated by the death of her husband. It now continues with this heir who has inherited her. My Hausa informant, Mahmoud Adam, who is from Northern Ghana says marriage by inheriting a dead brother's wife was common among the Dagombas and other ethnic groups of Northern Ghana, but rare these days. Apart from this 'leviratic' marriage, Arthur Phillips (1953: 55) describes another type, called 'Ghost marriage', saying that this is encountered in East and Central Africa.

It consists in a woman being married to the name of a man who died unmarried so that his line need not die out. Consequently, children born of this marriage should bear the name of this unmarried dead man.

When a man dies without a male issue, one of his daughters stays back, selects lovers with whom she cohabits to beget children on behalf of her dead father. This institution also existed among the Western Igbo where it was called *Idegbe*, and among the Edo-Speaking people who called it *Arewa* or *Arhewa*. The children, thus raised, would inherit her father's property. Among the Lele of the Kasai, such a woman is said to be called 'wife of the village'. Of course here the very idea of *Idegbe* precludes marriage, so that there could be no doubts regarding the affiliation of any children born to the woman in question.

As regards the Igbo, Leo Igwe<sup>6</sup> (2009) says: «The children born by the wife bear the family name of the woman-husband, not that of the man responsible for the pregnancy. I want to add here that the men who sleep with such wives in most cases are married men. And normally it is regarded as immoral, in fact it is a taboo for a married man to sleep with or 'father' children from

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sometimes marrying other women, the fact is that those women were marrying in the name of their deceased fathers or husbands. On the other side, formalized, socially-recognized relations between two men also exist in Africa. Among the Zande (located in south-western Sudan, north-eastern Congo, and the Central African Republic), a male warrior could marry a teenage boy by paying bride wealth to the boy's parents. The man addressed the boy-wife's parents as his in-laws, and performed services for them as befitted a son-in-law. Unlike women-women marriages, man-boy marriages end when the boy comes of age. The former boy-wife can now take his own boy wives, and his former husband can marry another boy-wife (Carrier, Murray 1998: 27).

<sup>6</sup> Leo Igwe is the executive secretary of the Nigerian Humanist Movement. The Nigerian Humanist Movement is an association of non-religious people who seek a rational, constructive approach to human affairs. It offers a positive alternative to all religious and dogmatic creeds. It acts to uphold and defend the human rights of humanists and of the general public. It supports via legislation any other democratic and constitutional means to improve social conditions. It supports the widest conception of education and enlightenment for the better understanding and enjoyment of human life.

another woman. But in this case an act normally considered immoral is allowed».

Monogamy is the prevalent institution in many parts of the world and also in Africa. But this does not mean it has not got its defects. In fact monogamy is a lofty ideal to be aspired to, but its practice in the world of today is so imperfect and equally full of many scandals that at times it would seem better to legalise polygyny.

The polygynous system can lead to the economic exploitation of women, that is, by reducing them to mere tillers of the soil, fetchers of water and hewers of wood. In the case of harem type polygyny, the woman can be reduced to the man's pleasure object, destined for the satisfaction of his sexual desires. Furthermore, it does sometimes happen that the women are too many for one man to cope with, so that, they of necessity have to seek lovers outside the family. Socially, it may at times not be in the best interests of the woman.

To begin with the advantage of polygyny all we are saying here is that monogyny being the approved and ideal, is in practise full of abuses. Polygyny has its good points but is not to be compared with monogamy. Polygyny is condemned on the grounds that it implies an outrage to the feelings of women. Again it must not be forgotten that in any polygynous society most of the men have one wife at any one given time, although they may later take two or more. In fact, as stated by Grottanelli (1988: 125) «theoretically vast majority of peoples are polygynous but the rule in such societies is permissive polygyny and actual monogamy».

It is a striking feature however why African countries do issue laws against it. Recently the Cabinet of Nigeria passed a new law which carries the title 'The Prohibition of Relationships Between Persons of the Same Sex, Celebration of Marriage by Them, and for Other Matters Connected Therewith'. It prohibits anyone from having homosexual relations, supporting the matter of homosexuality, propagating it, or even giving interviews on it can be punished by a jail sentence of up to five years. Homosexuality is forbidden in Nigeria and is considered sodomy and in some states where Islamic law is applied, one can be condemned to death. When this law was presented to the Nigerian Parliament, in one of the hearings a member of the Parliament tried to connect homosexuality with corruption as and with anti-Islamism, stating that «most Nigerians will say with certitude that homosexuals are sinners and will bring Sodom and Gomorrah over the society and because of that God will be angry with Nigeria».

Homosexuals are considered sinners, so many people in Nigeria can not even imagine what homosexuality means. Such contrast between the real life of homosexuals and the ignorance of the society about it are a big contradic-

tion. But there are also influential politicians – as Dare Odumuye<sup>7</sup> says – who fight for a more liberal interpretation of laws concerning homosexuality and lesbianism. They are not supposed to do it publically otherwise the atmosphere against homophony may gain support. Such is the kind of political games in Nigeria, nevertheless, there is still hope. We on one hand need money, but on the other hand we need technical and professional support – says Dare Odumuye – and he continues explaining: «Also in the West it took a long time for homosexuals to fight for their rights until they got the present status». He also refers to the fight against homosexuality in Africa when referring to Ghana, where a Conference on homosexuality and lesbian movement was forbidden. The same holds for lesbian women in Uganda where attacks destroyed the office of a lesbian congregation. Furthermore in Zimbabwe and Namibia homosexuals and lesbians are stigmatised as inferior citizens of these countries.

One should think that the Church has a different approach to this topic. But this is not the case. Especially in the African Church – both Catholic and Protestant – there is no gay tolerance, with a growing rebellion against liberal doctrines of U.S.

The African part of the Anglican Church has decided to separate in certain respects from the English mother Church, when a homosexual in the United States was ordered bishop.

The controversy exposes a fault line between conservative Christianity flourishing in many developing countries and the more liberal doctrines preached elsewhere. It also underscores a long-standing intolerance of homosexuality in Africa, which carries important health-care implications.

In a continent that accounts for more than 70 percent of the 40 million people worldwide with HIV/AIDS, homophobia makes it more likely that gays will be denied the prevention and treatment programs available to others – even as anti-AIDS drugs are becoming more accessible.

Gays are certainly not welcome in Nigeria's 17 million-member Anglican church, whose primate, Archbishop Peter Akinola, condemned the consecra-

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<sup>7</sup> Dare Odumuye was a member of House Of Rainbow MCC Nigeria and the sole founder and Late President of Alliance Rights Nigeria (ARN), a Nigeria-based sexual minorities equality rights advocacy organization. For opening up discussions around issues of sexual minorities and leading campaigns to bring homosexuality proudly into the public light and to secure rights and legal protections for gay communities in Nigeria and the whole of West Africa, Alliance Rights Nigeria was in 2003 awarded the Breakers of Silence Awards at the 2003 Red Ribbon Awards organized by Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria. Elected an Ashoka Fellow in 2004, Dare advocated for public acceptance of homosexuality and to direct interventions for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. He provided training and capacity building opportunities for gay men and women to prevent the spread of HIV in their own communities and to advocate for their rights in local and national forums. Details of his death still remain hazy. But we were told he took ill after returning from a trip to South Africa. He was buried in Ibadan on Thursday May 24, 2007.

tion of Gene Robinson<sup>8</sup> as bishop, calling it a «satanic attack on the church of God» (*Daily Telegraph*, 23 March 2007). He even issued a statement on behalf of the 'Primates of the Global South' – a group of 20 Anglican primates from Africa, the West Indies, South America, India, Pakistan and Southeast Asia – deploring the action and, along with Uganda and Kenya, formally severed relations with Robinson's New Hampshire diocese.

Akinola has emerged as the most vocal spokesman for conservative Anglicans who oppose the stance of the U.S. church – which welcomes gays as parishioners and even, in some cases, as clergy – and has warned that the issue may cause a schism in the Anglican church. If there is a break, many believe Akinola would be the driving force behind it.

The former Nigerian President Obasanjo welcomed this tough behaviour and described homosexuality as «unbiblical, unnatural and non-African» (27 October 2004). In Cameroon a newspaper published the name of fifty presumed high ranking homosexual politicians and functionaries and demanded their penal prosecution since homosexuality is forbidden in Cameroon. The Organisation of Human Rights Watch opposed the forced examination of the anus as means of evidence. According to the present-day President of South Africa Jacob Zuma – at that time Deputy President – same-sex marriage «is a disgrace to the nation and to God» (24 September 2006). But same-sex marriage became legal on 30 November 2006 when the Civil Unions Bill was enacted after having been passed by the South African Parliament earlier that month. A ruling by the Constitutional Court on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2005 had imposed a deadline of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006 to make same-sex marriage legal. South Africa became the fifth country in the world – the first in Africa and the second outside Europe – to legalize same-sex marriage. This legalisation was to a great extent due to Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of Cape town, who also heavily criticised Nigerians anti-homosexual laws.<sup>9</sup>

On the other side in 2006, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo introduced legislation that prohibits same-sex marriages and criminalizes anyone who «performs, witnesses, aids or abets» such ceremonies.

But Dare Odumuye encouraged himself: «also other campaigns faced great difficulties: for example condom campaigns, abortion, family planning, sexual issues, and so on. Also these people were at beginning most heavily abused. But, nevertheless, many have continued their work and worked on the

<sup>8</sup> Vicki Gene Robinson (born May 29, 1947 in Fayette County, Kentucky) is the ninth bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire in the Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Robinson was elected bishop in 2003 and entered office in March 2004.

<sup>9</sup> «Today, South Africa is the only country in the world to include a sexual orientation clause in its bill of rights (section 8, part 2). Given South Africa's sordid history of negating the human rights of millions of its citizens, the recognition that "people's sexual nature is fundamental to their humanity", as Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it, is a remarkable turn of events» (Patron 2001: 124-25).

base of that problem without being unknown legged and being estimated. Millions of people in Africa are concerned».

The Nigerian case, unfortunately for the homosexual movement, is not a rare one, but it seems representative of a general situation in Africa, where homosexuality is illegal for gay men in 29 countries and for lesbian women in 20 countries.<sup>10</sup> The legal status in many ways mirrors the widespread homophobia on the continent, documented so clearly by statements made by, for example President Mugabe of Zimbabwe, President Nujoma of Namibia and President Museveni of Uganda. But it does not fully describe the situation, as African gay and lesbian organisations can also refer to many victories over the last years.

South Africa stands apart when it comes to the legal status of gays and lesbians in Africa, and can be compared with Western European countries. Not only is homosexuality legal and visible, but there exists a national legislation which bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Gay and lesbian office bearers are not unheard of. Annual gay pride parades are arranged, with substantial participation.

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<sup>10</sup> See data given by the International Lesbian and Gay Association and Annexe: Pays dont la législation prohibe l'homosexualité et la sodomie en Afrique, in Gueboguo (2009: 249-52).

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## SUMMARY

Homosexuality is considered by most Africans as un-African and has never really been prominent in any African society. For them, Western nations are responsible for past and present current attempts to foist or impose acceptance of homosexuality on African countries and their peoples. A practice many believe to be ‘western’ or ‘European’. This attitude is untrue because homosexuality in native Africa has always been present in a variety of forms, as documented by historians and anthropologists.

In most African countries homosexuality is considered a crime to be fought with severe punishments, sometimes even with the death penalty. In this regard South Africa is an exception, having recently passed very liberal laws regarding homosexuality. On the contrary Nigeria, that was tolerant in the past, is now passing bills very harsh bills towards homosexuality.

Apart from of LGBT movement focused on Nigeria, the article deals with another phenomenon, which is found in many African countries: woman-woman marriage. It has been documented in more than 30 African populations, including the Yoruba and Ibo of West Africa, the Nuer of Sudan, the Lovedu, Zulu and Sotho of South Africa, and the Kikuyu and Nandi of East Africa.

*Keywords:* homosexuality, leviratic marriage, LGBT, Nigeria.