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**Archives of Sexual Behavior**  
The Official Publication of the  
International Academy of Sex Research

ISSN 0004-0002

Arch Sex Behav  
DOI 10.1007/s10508-014-0286-2

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 3

**ONLINE  
FIRST**

## Archives of **SEXUAL BEHAVIOR**

The Official Publication of the  
International Academy of Sex Research

 Springer

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# Same-Sex Practicing Men in Tanzania from 1860 to 2010

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Received: 29 March 2012 / Revised: 11 August 2013 / Accepted: 26 January 2014  
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**Abstract** This article offers a review of published texts describing sexual relations between men in Tanzania in the period 1860–2010. It explores ways in which men who have sex with men have been named and understood; describes the sexual and social roles associated with differing same-sex identities and subjectivities; tracks politics, policies, and sociocultural expressions relating to sex between men; and explores the ways in which men's same-sex sexual practices have been responded to in the context of health and HIV. Among the impressions emerging from the historical record is that sex between men is not (and has not been) uncommon in Tanzania; that a significant conceptual distinction exists between men who are anally receptive and men who penetrate anally; and that there has been a range of views on, and opinions about, same-sex relations within the wider society. There is evidence that same-sex practicing men in Tanzania have been affected by HIV at least since 1982, with one seroprevalence study indicating that the burden of HIV among men who have sex with men was quite disproportionate as far back as 2007. However, while men who have sex with men have been defined as a “vulnerable population” with respect to HIV in national frameworks since 2003, this had not led to any

significant amount of targeted HIV prevention work being reported by either local or international actors by 2010.

**Keywords** Same-sex attracted men · Same-sex practicing men · Men who have sex with men · Homosexuality · Tanzania

## Introduction

As part of a study examining the contemporary lives and circumstances of same-sex practicing men in Dar es Salaam, we have identified and reviewed previously published articles, books, and reports that have engaged with the topic of male same-sex practices in the land currently known as Tanzania. This article offers an overview of this material and attempts to bring to the fore the impressions and insights it has afforded, over the past 150 years, of men who have engaged in relations with men. Table 1 provides an overview of the reviewed sources, which comprise 74 different publications produced in the period from 1860 to 2010. The compilation of this material has been ongoing since 2008 and was the result of broad database searches and the systematic tracing of references encountered during close readings of historical and present-day scholarship, documents, and reports on, or of relevance for, Tanzania.

While our engagement with this literature has occurred as part of a study aiming to help inform HIV-related programming with and among men who have sex with men in Tanzania (Moen, Aggleton, Leshabari, & Middelthon, 2012, 2013, 2014), our review does not limit itself to sources that have primarily or exclusively discussed HIV and/or health. Instead, what we present and draw on here is the full assemblage of texts we have identified (and are aware of, except for news media reports) that in some way and to some degree have dealt with

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**Table 1** Reviewed texts

Period to which work pertains	Reference	Theme/type of source	Description	Same-sex practices (SSP) main focus?
1856–1859	Burton (1872)	Explorer account	Stated that “unnatural crimes” were “held conducive to health” in Zanzibar	
1858–1860	Russell (1935)	Diplomatic report	British “political agent” commented on SSP in Zanzibar	
1882	Krapf (1882)	Dictionary	The first Swahili dictionary explained the terms <i>haniithi</i> and <i>shoga</i>	
1890s	bin Mwinyi Bakari (1903)	Historical document	Text from Bagamoyo described <i>mbenda</i> ; a dance danced exclusively by men in women’s clothing	
1899	Baumann (1899)	Ethnography	2.5 page report on <i>Conträre Sexual-Erscheinungen</i> (contrary sex acts) in Zanzibar	x
1902–1938	Gutmann (1926)	Ethnography	Referred to a fiction about stitching of young men’s anuses in Chagga initiation ritual	
Nineteenth century	S. F. Moore (1976)	Anthropology	Analyzed the Chagga initiation ritual	
Nineteenth century	H. L. Moore (2007)	Theory development	Referred to the Chagga initiation ritual as part of endeavor to develop theory of “how we become sexed beings”	
1910	Schmidt (2008)	Historiography	Historical study of same-sex desire and sexual crime in colonial German East Africa	x
1911	Karsch-Haack (1911)	Ethnographic synopsis	Referred to Baumann’s (1899) account from Zanzibar in order to support the view that homosexuality has “natural roots”	
1915	Ellis (1915)	Ethnographic synopsis	Author of first English medical textbook on homosexuality; referred to Baumann’s (1899) account in order to argue “for a universally applicable model of congenital homosexuality”	
1924–1926	Bryk (1928)	Ethnography	Described SSP in a chapter on “African sex deviations” based on 2 years of fieldwork in East Africa	
1933	Bloch (2003)	“Sexual anthropology”	Made detailed reference to Baumann’s (1899) account from Zanzibar	
1934–1938	Wilson (1951)	Ethnography	Describes homosexuality as “very common” in Nyakyusa boys’ villages	
1940–1960	Saleh (2009)	Social anthropology	Described liberal attitudes towards same-sex practices in pre-revolutionary Zanzibar in a study of the concept of <i>Dini Wal Duniya</i> (balance between living life to the fullest and religious observance)	
1957–1958	Beidelman (1961)	Ethnography	Found no court cases regarding “homosexuality” in Ukaguru. Homosexuality understood to have been introduced by foreigners	
1957–1963	Beidelman (1963)	Ethnography	Provided “homosexuality” as example of that which is considered unusual, unnatural and supernatural among the Kaguru	
1957–1976	Beidelman (1997)	Ethnography	Reported that “a few Kaguru men” enjoyed “homosexual relations,” but that it was “an unusual and secret pattern”	
1957–1959	Lienhardt (1968)	Anthropology	Mentioned observation of a man dressed in women’s clothes during a spirit dance in Kilwa	
1960s	Parkin (2004)	Ethnographic case	Discussed the first occurrences of <i>popobawa</i> incidents in Pemba	
1969	Malinwa (1969)	Fiction	Short story about a relationship between cohabiting Tanzanian men	
1982	Pokrovskii et al. (1992)	Case study	Reported that the first AIDS patient in USSR was a “homosexual male” who contacted HIV in Tanzania in 1982	
1984	Arnold (2002)	African literature	Referred to “virulent exchange of <i>taarab</i> songs concerning homosexuality” in Zanzibar	
1988/89	Tuominen et al. (1992)	Survey	Dental professionals most frequently answered “homosexual men” when asked about “high-risk groups” for HIV infection	
1990s	Changalucha et al. (2002)	Summary article	Stated that “homosexual commercial sex” was not noted in Mwanza in the 1990s	
1991	Ranta and Tuominen (1991)	Survey	Reported that dental students in Dar es Salaam widely identify SSP as risk factor for HIV transmission	

**Table 1** continued

Period to which work pertains	Reference	Theme/type of source	Description	Same-sex practices (SSP) main focus?
1991–1992	Amory (1994)	Anthropology	Mentioned cross-dressing men in performances and dances in Zanzibar	
1991–1992, 1997	Larsen (2008)	Anthropology	Discussed SSP men over several pages, including their gendered practices and participation in spirit ritual	
1992–1994	Rajani et al. (1994)	Situation analysis	Found that sex for money was rare among street boys in Mwanza, but that many engage in anal sex with each other	x
1992–1996	Rajani and Kudrati (1996)	Social analysis	Portrayed anal sex as important rite of passage between street boys in Mwanza	x
1995	Amory (1998)	Ethnography	Ethnographic study of “ <i>shoga</i> identity” in unidentified location along the East African coast (may or may not be Tanzania)	x
1995	Walsh (2009)	Ethnography	Examined the “most widespread” “ <i>popobawa</i> panic” in Zanzibar	
1996	Leshabari and Kaaya (1996)	Review	Reviewed literature on health among Tanzanian youth; noted the paucity of literature on same-sex practices in Tanzania	
1997–1998	Lockhart (2002)	Qualitative interviews	Described same-sex sex as ubiquitous among “street boys” in Mwanza and common between mutually consenting boys	x
1997–1999	Lockhart (2008)	Life history	Described regular same-sex sexual experiences as part of the life history of a street boy	
1995	Lugalla (1995)	Critical analysis	Mentioned that children practice homosexuality for money in discussion about impacts of structural adjustment policies	
1997–1998	Mwakagile et al. (2001)	Survey	Reported that 2.3 % of male youth attending a clinic for sexual and reproductive health in Dar es Salaam engage in same-sex sex	
1997–1999	Ng’walali et al. (2005)	Autopsy study	Identified “homosexual HIV exposure” in 9 of 52 men examined in study of neuropathological changes due to HIV	
1998	Matasha et al. (1998)	Survey	Reported that 9 % of 1° school pupils in Mwanza had anal sex as their first sexual experience	
1998–2000	Nilsen et al. (2006)	Survey	Found that 8 % of men seeking Dar es Salaam STI clinic characterized themselves as “homo- or bisexual”	
2000–2006	Reuster-Jahn and Kießling (2006)	Ethnolinguistics	Identified colloquial terms used to denote same-sex practicing men as part of project to examine urban street language in Tanzania	
2001	Kayoka (2001)	Popular media	Discussed “gay and lesbian culture” in “analysis of gender representation in Tanzanian entertainment newspapers”	
2002	Beez and Kolbusa (2003)	Anthropology	Reported that homosexual men are “accepted” in <i>taarab</i> contexts in Dar es Salaam	
2002	Urassa et al. (2005)	Survey	75 % of pregnant women in Moshi were aware HIV can “commonly be transmitted” by homosexual intercourse	
2002–2003	Salles (2005)	Master thesis	Described views on “homosexuality” among young Tanzanian leaders	
2003	Rwebangira and Tugaraza (2003)	Law review	Stated that “it is an abomination by virtue of Tanzanian cultural norms to advocate for” homosexuality	
2003	Mohamed and Wieringa (2005)	Qualitative interviews	Provided comments on same-sex practicing men in book chapter on female same-sex practices in Tanzania	
2003	Opiyo-Omolo (2004)	Encyclopedia	Included brief note on “homoerotic, homosexual and bisexual behaviours” in Tanzania (ref also footnote 17)	
2003	The Prime Minister’s Office (2003)	Government paper	Identified MSM as “vulnerable” and in need of “special attention,” prescribed increase in sexual behavior change activities, care, support and impact mitigation	
2004	Ondego (2004)	Christian faith	Quoted Tanzanian clergy in book arguing that “homosexuality has seriously damaging consequences”	x
2004	Mwangi (2004)	East-African music	Described (negative) attitudes towards SSP in a study of masculinity and nationalism in East-African hip-hop	
2005	Kiragu and Nyong’o (2005)	NGO report	Investigated “the experiences of LGBTI groups” in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda	x

Table 1 continued

Period to which work pertains	Reference	Theme/type of source	Description	Same-sex practices (SSP) main focus?
2006	Kiragu (2006)	NGO report	Tanzanian activists described challenges to LGBTI organizing in “first regional conference of LGBTI activists in E. Africa”	x
2006	Nilsson and Ewalds-Kvist (2006)	Survey	50 % of nurses in DSM said they had experience with SSP men	
	Pew Research Center (2007)	Opinion survey	Reported that 3 % of Tanzanians agreed with the statement that “homosexuality should be accepted”	
2007	Zanzibar AIDS Control Programme (2007)	Survey	Reported on condom use, STIs, drug use, and the prevalence of HIV, hepatitis and syphilis among MSM in Zanzibar	
2007	Dahoma et al. (2009)	Survey	Quantified HIV prevalence, “HIV behavioral risks” and the prevalence of STI among “MSM” in Zanzibar	x
2007	Johnston et al. (2010)	Survey	Reported prevalence of drug use among “MSM” in Zanzibar and occurrence STI among “MSM” who inject drugs	x
2007	Tanzanian Affairs (2007)	Magazine	Reported on meeting of Anglican primates in Dar es Salaam; schism over homosexual priests and same-sex marriage	
2007	United Republic of Tanzania (2007)	Government paper	Stated that there is a “need to acknowledge the HIV-related vulnerability” of MSM, and to “advocate for their access to HIV preventive information and services and for decriminalization of their activities” (p. 54)	
2008	Tanzanian Affairs (2008)	Magazine	Interview with Anglican Bishop Mhogolo on the topic of homosexuality	
2008	Zanzibar AIDS Commission (2008)	Government report	UNGASS report summarized study findings pertaining to same-sex practicing men in Zanzibar	
2008/09	Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2010)	Opinion survey	Reported that a high proportion of Tanzanians answer that homosexuality is “morally wrong” in opinion survey	
2009	CHRP, IGLHRC, & Global Rights (2009)	NGO report	Referred to rights violations for “LGBT persons” in shadow report in connection with Tanzania’s fourth periodic report to UNHRC	x
	Kisia and Wahu (2010)	NGO report	Interviewed LGBTI persons, human rights activists, and government agencies in 5 East-African countries	x
2009	United Republic of Tanzania (2009a)	Government paper	Stated (with reference to USAID) that “violence... by communities, the police and other activists, drive MSM underground making it very difficult to reach them with HIV prevention measures or information and support for safer sexual practices”	
2009	United Republic of Tanzania (2009c)	Government paper	Reviewed work on anal sex in Tanzania and portrayed homosexuality as unacceptable “for most religious communities”	
2009	International Service for Human Rights (2009)	Minutes from United Nations Human Rights Committee	Government minister stated that homosexuality was “unacceptable in our society,” and that the government “could not force people to accept it”	
2009	United Nations Human Rights Committee (2009)	UN paper	UNHRC reiterated its concern “at the criminalization of same-sex relations and regretted lack of measures “to prevent discrimination”	
2009	United Republic of Tanzania (2009b)	Government paper	Prescribed establishment of “targeted STI management services” for MSM in “hotspots”	
2009	Thompson (2011)	Discourse analysis	Provided overview of sources discussing <i>popobawa</i> ; a “sex mad demon” who “tends to prefer male victims”	
2010	United Republic of Tanzania (2010)	Government paper	New national HIV policy formulated as objective to “address the risk of HIV transmission among MSM” and to “ensure that access to HIV related services without discrimination”	

**Table 1** continued

Period to which work pertains	Reference	Theme/type of source	Description	Same-sex practices (SSP) main focus?
2010	Ahmed (2011)	Master thesis	Reported on HIV-related outreach events targeting "marginalized populations" including "MSM," in Zanzibar	

*Secondary sources* Several of the texts referred to in Table 1 are discussed by other authors, including Greenberg (1990), Forster (1995), Dunton and Palmberg (1996), Bleys (1996), Murray (1997), Murray and Roscoe (1997, 1998), Epprecht (2008a, b), and Miehlbradt (2011)

male same-sex practices, subjectivities, and politics in Tanzania.

The motivation for this choice has been a conviction that helpful attempts to contribute to HIV prevention in a given social setting are likely to benefit from as holistic an understanding as possible of the social, cultural, and historical characteristics of that setting. The insight anthropology promotes is that such knowledge may be developed through extended presence and participation in the various social contexts that are experienced and constituted by the subjects in question, accompanied by an engagement with material that may in various ways help contextualize data produced through fieldwork. Inspired by this rationale, our own enquiry consisted, at its core, of 15 months of participant observation with and among Tanzanian men who are sexually attracted to other men. This work was complemented by (1) a review of contemporaneous media reporting about male same-sex practices in Tanzania, which we will discuss elsewhere and (2) an effort to identify and engage with relevant historical sources. It is the latter material we present and explore in this article.

While the number of identified texts is greater than we had perhaps expected when the work to identify them started, it is nonetheless illuminating that it was possible to include practically all pertinent sources in a review of this kind. What this undoubtedly signifies is that only limited academic attention has been paid over the past 150 years, across fields and disciplines, to the particular issues we deal with here. It also needs to be pointed out that a majority of the reviewed sources deal with the topic of same-sex practices rather cursorily, often only in short passages (sometimes even just in a few sentences) and almost always as part of work that focuses on additional and/or broader concerns. Only a handful of the publications listed in Table 1 report on original scholarly research that was specifically or exclusively dedicated to the study of male same-sex practices and/or same-sex practicing men. However, while the comparative paucity of source material means that the past cannot be reconstructed or grasped in fastidious detail, we nonetheless find that the historical record provides insights that are of relevance and potential benefit to contemporary HIV-related work.

We have organized our review into eight thematic sections followed by a discussion. The topics examined, in sequential order, are (1) ways in which same-sex practicing and/or

gender-atypical men have been named in the period from 1860 to 2010, (2) ideas about the origins and frequency of male same-sex sexual practices, (3) societal attitudes towards men engaging in sexual relations with other men, (4) the different "types" of same-sex practicing men emerging from the historical record, (5) transactional sex between men, (6) accounts pertaining to health and HIV among men who are attracted to men, (7) politics and policies of relevance to same-sex practices, and (8) cultural expressions in which gender crossing and same-sex relations play a role.

The 150-year long journey represented by the reviewed literature takes us to both inland and coastal areas of present-day Tanzania. It begins and ends on the Swahili coast, however, as both the first and the last of the sources deal with circumstances on the Zanzibari isles. A majority of the 82 reviewed texts have been authored by foreigners and the journey also both begins and ends with terminology borrowed from overseas.

### Designations in Use and Central Concepts

While General Christopher Palmer Rigby used the term sodomites to refer to a reportedly sizable group of men he encountered in Zanzibar between 1858 and 1860 (Russell, 1935), a consortium of local and U.S. researchers 150 years later consistently employed the expression men who have sex with men (or the acronym MSM) when they reported on a study of male same-sex practices in Unguja, the largest of the islands constituting Zanzibar (Dahoma et al., 2009; Johnston et al., 2010).<sup>1</sup> During the 150 years in between the work and reports of these observers, a considerable number of additional European-language terms were also successively applied to denote Tanzanian same-sex practicing men, including the German words *Conträren*, *Päderasten*, and *Lustknaben*, and English labels such as catamites, invertes, gynandromorphic men, passive pederasts, homosexuals, gays, and LGBTI persons.

<sup>1</sup> According to Ahmed (2011), the term MSM is not only used in current academic writing, but also appears to have become a generally preferred term among government and NGO employees in Zanzibar. He points out that the term collapses conceptually distinct categories of same-sex practicing men because there "are different terms [in Zanzibar] for men who engage in sexual relations with men, depending on their position in sexual encounters" (p. 52).

This diverse and changing lexicon mirrors the shifting characterizations and understandings of same-sex practicing men as they have evolved in the West over the 150-year period during which the reviewed texts from Tanzania were penned and much of the material unmistakably reflects Euro-American vantage points, perspectives, and interpretations. Whether Western vocabularies and concepts have always accurately reflected local performances, understandings, and discourses, on the other hand, is considerably less likely.

The term “homosexual,” for instance, which entered the literature from Tanganyika in descriptions pertaining to circumstances there in the 1920s, was in Europe closely linked to a gradual, but eventually extensive shift in the understanding of, and meaning attached to, sexually intimate desires and practices from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. A central feature of this shift was the arrival of the idea that humans could be understood as belonging to “different types or kinds of being” (Halperin, 1989, p. 259), as it were, by virtue of their sexuality (Foucault, 1978; Weeks, 1985). There is now considerable scholarship on the historical and cultural specificity of this shift. Indeed, as Halperin (2000) has written, “no single category of discourse or experience” (p. 89) appears to have existed either in pre-modern Western societies, or outside the West, that have “comprehended exactly the same range of same-sex sexual behaviours, desires, psychologies, and socialities, as well as the various forms of gender variance, that now fall within the capacious definitional boundaries of homosexuality” (p. 89). While several of the reviewed sources have nonetheless deployed the term homosexuality to refer to same-sex practices in the part of Africa now known as Tanzania, none have critically discussed the historical and cultural appropriateness of this deployment. However, there is frequently a palpable tension between the empirical realities that have been portrayed and the European concepts that have been used to mediate them.

On the other hand, in addition to “homosexuality” and the rest of the European vocabulary mentioned above, several locally used designations also emerged from the reviewed material, notably *hanisi* (also spelled *hanithi*), *shoga*, *msenge*, and *basha*.<sup>2</sup> While none of these are words that are idiomatically related to the West, three of them correspond closely to terms existing in other parts of the western Indian Ocean region [i.e., the areas along the Indian Ocean from India to Madagascar (Gilbert, 2002)]. Whereas *hanithi* and *shoga* have Arabic equivalents, *basha* is a word of Persian origin (Porter, 1995).

The conceptualizations these terms refer to, moreover, are not congruous with contemporary European constructions of

homosexuality. In contrast to the latter, none of the local concepts pertain to same-sex practicing men in general. Instead, three of the terms mentioned (*hanisi*, *shoga*, and *msenge*) refer specifically and exclusively to men who are receptive in anal intercourse while the fourth (*basha*) conversely describes men who penetrate anally. As will be seen, a penetrating/penetrated divide is central in much of the reviewed material from Tanzania. It is also evident in present-day colloquial language in the country, as Reuster-Jahn and Kießling (2006) have demonstrated. As part of their study of Tanzanian street language, they identified 10 slang terms that were in common use to denote same-sex attracted men at the beginning of the present millennium. All of these were understood to classify men as either inserting or inserted. A majority (eight out of 10 words) denoted men “who receive penetration” (p. 23) (*anti*, *bwabwa*, *chakula*, *choko*, *mshumaa*, *mtoto wa mtu*, and *fuga ndevu*) while only two terms referred to their “penetrating partners” (*baba askofu* and *basha*). Similar distinctions between the inserting and the inserted has existed for a long time also elsewhere in the western Indian Ocean region (El-Rouayheb, 2005; Schmitt & Sofer, 1992).

Several of the locally used terms furthermore relate sexual positionality to notions about gender. Among labels used to denote (biological) men who engage in receptive anal sex are *shoga* (a term which is also used to denote a woman’s best female friend), *anti* (a swahilification of the English “aunt”), and *mke si mume* (which translates as “neither man nor woman”) (Baumann, 1899). While these designations associate sexual receptivity with either womanliness or a blended or neutral gender, anally penetrating men have habitually been understood as both ordinary and “real” men on the Swahili coast (Amory, 1998); indeed, as perfectly “proper, normal males” (Swartz, 1990, p. 127). Furthermore, the term *basha* [which is variously laid out to mean the king in a deck of cards, a military commander, and the captain of a ship (Porter, 1995)] does not presuppose that the sex of the man’s partner is male. Rather, as explained in the 1981 edition of the Standard Dictionary of Swahili (Akida, 1981), *mabasha* are “men who sodomize “people,” not exclusively men” (Porter, 1995, p. 145).

Finally, one of the terms mentioned above (*hanithi*) associates male anal receptivity with a reduced ability to penetrate. The first Swahili dictionary (Krapf, 1882, p. 95) explained *hanithi* both as a “a sexually impotent man” and as “sodomite.” The same dual definition has appeared also in more recent dictionaries (e.g., Malaika, 1994) and an association between anal receptivity and penile weakness can also be traced in literature from other locations with which Tanzania is culturally linked. Shepherd (1987) and Porter (1995) have reported that *hanithi* describes penetrable men and connotes impotence in Mombasa<sup>3</sup> whereas

<sup>2</sup> In a comment dated 2003 in the Tanzania pages of the *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality* (Opiyo-Omolo, 2004, p. 1014) it is stated that “there is traditionally no word for *male homosexual*” in Swahili. While there has been no Swahili term with exactly the same meaning as that with which “homosexual” is currently imbued in the West, there has indeed existed words denoting men who engage in relations with men.

<sup>3</sup> In recent work from Zanzibar, Larsen (2008) takes the term *hanithi* to signify all “men who are known to have sex with men” (p. 117). If this is accurate, it represents a deviation from what appears to have been the historical meaning of the term elsewhere on the Swahili coast.



Wikan (1982) found that the term *khanith* “carries the sense of effeminate, impotent, soft” (p. 168) among men who assume a “sexually passive role” (Wikan, 1977, p. 307) in Oman.

### Existence, Prevalence, and Origin of Same-Sex Practices

Several of the reviewed texts convey the impression that same-sex practices have been perceived as quite common in Tanzania, on the mainland as well as in Zanzibar.

General Rigby indicated that the men he termed “sodomites” were plentiful in Zanzibar in 1860 (Russell, 1935) and Baumann (2001 [1899]) wrote that there was a “rather high frequency” (p. 63) of *conträre Sexual-Erscheinungen* (contrary sex acts) there also 30 years later. More recently, it does not appear to have been difficult to recruit hundreds of MSM in Unguja for a study that focused on sexual practices and the prevalence of HIV and other sexually transmissible infections in 2007 (Dahoma et al., 2009).

On the mainland, “homosexual practices” were “said to be very common” among young Nyakusa men prior to marriage in the mid-1930s (Wilson, 1951, p. 87) whereas “a few Kaguru men were said to enjoy homosexual relations” in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Beidelman, 1997, p. 273). A study of “urban street boys” in Mwanza in 1997–1998 found that almost all (74 out of 75 study participants) had engaged in same-sex sexual activity involving anal penetration at some point in time and about three quarters engaged in such sexual activity regularly (Lockhart, 2002).<sup>4,5</sup> At approximately the same point in time, medical researchers presented data to suggest that “homosexual practices” were commonplace also in Dar es Salaam. Fully 8% of adult men attending an STI clinic in the city between 1998 and 2000 characterized their “sexual preference” as either “homo- or bisexual” (Nilsen et al., 2006) while 2.3% of young men (aged from 10 to 24 years) attending a youth health clinic for sexual and reproductive health in 1997–1998 reported that they engaged in same-sex sexual relations (Mwakagile et al., 2001). As a more indirect indicator of frequent (and discernible) same-sex practices, almost half of the

nurses working at two hospitals in Dar es Salaam in 2006 indicated that they had cared for “homosexual and bisexual” patients (Nilsson & Ewalds-Kvist, 2006).

While portrayals of same-sex practices as fairly common can be found in several of the reviewed sources, almost none have reported that such practices were rare or absent in Tanzania. One exception is Talle (2007, p. 366), who stated that Maasai “[m]en can never have direct erotic contact with each other, homosexuality being defined as a detested and deeply ‘inappropriate’ activity for circumcised males.”<sup>6</sup> However, there is no reference to empirical data regarding same-sex relations in Talle’s report and it is not clear whether she referred to normative points of view or to what she perceived to be actual practice. She did, however, mention that among Maasai “two or more morans may have sex with the same girl” (p. 365) at the same time.

A few of the reviewed texts allude to discourses concerning the origins of same-sex practices. Mohamed and Wieringa (2005) noted that it was common in inland Tanzania to believe that “homosexuality originated from the coastal region” (p. 53) whereas Baumann (2001 [1899]) was in no doubt that the high frequency of same-sex relations he described on Zanzibar was “attributable to the influence of Arabs...together with Comorosans and the prosperous Swahili mixed-breeds” (p. 63). Among the Kaguru, Beidelman (1997) reported that it was assumed that men who “enjoyed homosexual relations...had learned such sexual proclivities from outsiders” (p. 273), especially from “Europeans and Arabs in towns and markets.”

### Societal Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Practices

In the aforementioned study by Nilsen et al. (2006), comparisons were made (for a range of variables) between Dar es Salaam on the one hand and Bergen, Norway on the other. The investigators appeared unprepared to find that the proportion of men who indicated that they were “homo- or bisexual” was higher in the Tanzanian than in the Norwegian sample (8 vs. 5%) and described this as “unexpected, since homosexuality is assumed to be more accepted in Europe than in Africa” (p. 325). To what degree same-sex sexual practices have been societally accepted is a theme that recurs in several of the reviewed sources and a range of diverse attitudes and opinions is described. In the following, we examine this miscellany first for Zanzibar and thereafter for mainland Tanzania.

Several reports have highlighted a high degree of societal acceptance of same-sex practices in Zanzibar. Burton (1872)

<sup>4</sup> That same year, nine percent of primary school pupils in Mwanza “reported anal sex as their first sexual act” (Matasha et al., 1998, p. 571), but they were not asked about the sex of their partners.

<sup>5</sup> Anal sex between men and women has also been described as common in Tanzania. In 1990, 37% of truck drivers along the Tanzania-Zambia highway, and 37% of their female partners, reported that they had engaged in anal sex (Laukamm-Josten et al., 1995). Yet, in a study in rural Mwanza in 1993 (Munguti et al., 1997, p. 1558), it was assumed that it would be too “sensitive to ask subjects whether they had personal experience” with anal sex, and they were instead asked whether they “had heard of anal sex occurring in their village.” Ten per cent of respondents answered this question in the affirmative.

<sup>6</sup> A passage in “Under Kilimanjaro” (Hemingway, 2005) reads that the Maasai had “been adored by all the homosexuals who ever had worked for the Empire in Kenya or Tanganyika because the men were so beautiful” (Reynolds, 2008, p. 6).

noted that *liwat*<sup>7</sup> was considered only a minor transgression (“a mere peccadillo” [p. 380]) there whereas Baumann (1899) wrote that *geborenen Konträren* (“inborn contraries”) were tolerated and understood to exist as a result of God’s will (as opposed to *berufsmäßige Lustknaben* (“professional pleasure-boys”), who were reportedly despised). Middleton (1992), who conducted fieldwork in Zanzibar and several other locations along the East African coast, noted that “homosexuality is...tolerated during Ramadan when heterosexual intercourse is prohibited” (p. 120) whereas Saleh (2009) described the pre-revolutionary period in Zanzibar as a time when “the orthodox Muslim majority cohabitated in perfect harmony with...homosexuals. The latter had their space without having to fight for it. The society was neither encouraging them nor subjecting them to any kind of persecution” (p. 199).

However, the “space” available for same-sex attracted and/or gender-crossing men reportedly narrowed after the 1964 Zanzibari revolution. Saleh (2009) saw this as a consequence of the expatriation of many local and “enlightened religious scholars” in the wake of the revolution, followed by an “importation of foreign scholars” (p. 200). As a result, “alien ideas” were brought into the country and “the past tacit understanding that guaranteed the rights of minorities, such as those of homosexuals...started to be challenged.” As an example of this type of challenge, Arnold (2002) described how *taarab*<sup>8</sup> musical troupes were closely monitored by the Zanzibari government in the post-revolutionary era and, “after a particularly virulent exchange of *taarab* songs concerning homosexuality,” a formal censorship board was established in 1984 with a view to “review [*taarab*] songs...before they [could] be performed and aired on the government radio” (p. 148). More recently, however, the government of Zanzibar (through its Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Zanzibar AIDS Control Programme) has been among the first in Africa to support and conduct HIV-related epidemiological research among same-sex practicing men (Dahoma et al., 2009; Johnston et al., 2010).

A variety of public sentiments towards male same-sex practices has been described also on the mainland. One of the earliest accounts that portrayed accepting attitudes came from the area northwest of Lake Nyasa where “[e]veryone [thought] it all right” for Nyakyusa boys to sleep together in the 1930s (Wilson, 1951, p. 196). One of Wilson’s “exceptionally reliable” informants pointed out that “[s]ometimes when boys sleep together each may have an emission on the other (*bitundanila*). If they are great friends, there is no wrong done.” For boys to force each other into intimate relations, on the other hand, was characterized as a “great wrong” and for

adult men to sleep together was reportedly “forbidden.” More recently, Beez and Kolbusa (2003) have reported from Dar es Salaam that “homosexuals are treated in a liberal way” in *taarab* contexts, in which they are “accepted as part of the audience” (p. 69). Moreover, from his reading of Tanzanian “entertainment newspapers,” Kayoka (2001) wrote that there has been an increase in the number of same-sex attracted men “coming to the open and proudly admitting that they are homosexuals” (p. 4) and also that Tanzanian newspaper columnists offer “little condemnation of gays, if the gay subject shows that he is capable of using his penis as well” (p. 5). In further reference to societal approval, Kiragu and Nyong’o (2005) concluded (based on interviews with both “LGBTI groups” and mainstream NGOs in East Africa) that “there is a level of tolerance and acceptance of sexual minorities [in Tanzania] which is absent in both Kenya and Uganda” (p. 29). A 2006 study also found signs of affirmative attitudes within the health sector. A majority (82 %) of nursing staff at two hospitals in Dar es Salaam were of the opinion that “homosexual HIV/AIDS patients were entitled to the same care” as their heterosexual counterparts (Nilsson & Ewalds-Kvist, 2006, p. 20).

While signs of assent are thus not hard to come by in the published material, they are not the only sentiments reported. Several of the reviewed sources described the existence of varying degrees of disapproving attitudes towards, and moral condemnation of, same-sex practices.

Among the Kaguru some 50 years ago, same-sex sex (along with several other practices, including a man sucking a woman’s breast) was reportedly regarded as *kwinja*—a concept signifying a departure “from the normal in both a moral and a physical sense (Beidelman, 1963, pp. 49–50). Beidelman was of the impression that an adult who committed “bestiality, sodomy or certain other sexual offences would risk being killed” (p. 51). He added, however, that “it is clear that not all such offences merit death” and wrote that there were indeed some Kaguru men who “enjoyed same-sex relations” (Beidelman, 1997, p. 273). He could not, moreover, find any court cases pertaining to “homosexuality” in Ukaguru (Beidelman, 1961, p. 14).

Among the Chagga, S. F. Moore (1976) has interpreted a nineteenth century (and no longer practiced) initiation ritual as a prohibition on homosexuality. At the time, some Chagga chiefdoms required that young men be secluded in the forest as part of the male initiation process. While they were away, children and young women back in the village were told that the men were undergoing operations during which their anuses were stitched closed (Gutmann, 1926; H. L. Moore, 2007; S. F. Moore, 1976). While such operations never took place, initiates were told to keep this a secret and to never disclose that they defecated. S. F. Moore (1976) has interpreted this as a way of teaching young men to be “closed to other men” (p. 359). Yet, by the time a man had an own child that had been circumcised, his *ngoso* (the supposed anal plug) was removed and the man was said to be stepping “aside and becom[ing]

<sup>7</sup> The Arabic term *liwat* is often translated as “sodomy” and is variously understood to mean the anal penetration of a man, or the anal penetration of either a man or a woman (Omar, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> A genre of musical performance/entertainment with long traditions in East Africa. It involves singing of poems accompanied by instruments and often by dance.

like the women” (Gutmann, 1926, p. 337).<sup>9</sup> S. F. Moore did not discuss whether the latter feature of the custom should be interpreted as a sign that the prohibition on anal receptivity had then been lifted.

More recently, the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association has gone on record to describe it as “an abomination by virtue of Tanzanian cultural norms to advocate for” homosexuality (Rwebangira & Tungaraza, 2003, p. 77) and Salles (2005) found that several trainees enrolled in a Youth Leadership Training Programme characterized same-sex practices as “bad” and “immoral.” Mwangi (2004), moreover, has argued that “homosexuality” is treated “as a pathology” by many East African hip-hop musicians and pointed to the lyrics of a popular Dar es Salaam-based singer (Mbibo, 2003) as an example. Mohamed and Wieringa (2005) wrote that “LGBT people” were “considered to be immoral and satanic” (p. 53) in Tanzania and the following year some “LGBTI activists” said that Tanzanian media tended to portray same-sex attracted men and women “as individuals whose morality and religious standing is questionable” (Kiragu, 2006, p. 17). A 2007 opinion poll ( $n = 704$ ), moreover, found that only 3 % of Tanzanians agreed with the statement that “homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society” (Pew Research Center, 2007, p. 117) while another opinion survey in 2008–2009 ( $n = 1,504$ ) reported that 91 % of Tanzanians thought “homosexual practice” was “morally wrong” (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010, p. 276). The following year, in a study of the situation for “LGBTI persons” in East Africa (Kisia & Wahu, 2010), some of the men interviewed in Tanzania described personal experiences of denunciation and discrimination, including being rejected by a family member, ejected by a landlord, and ill-treated by a medical practitioner. Occurrences of this kind were also noted by Tanzanian “LGBT activists” interviewed in 2004 as part of a risk assessment of “LGBT populations” (Anyamele et al. 2005).<sup>10</sup>

Several of the reviewed texts also discuss attitudes towards same-sex sexuality expressly in the context of religion. In 2003, “some hundreds of Muslims demonstrated in Dar es Salaam against the proposed visit to Tanzanian tourist centers and game parks by a group of 100 American homosexuals” (Tanzanian Affairs, 2003, p. 17) and at “a symposium shortly afterwards... Moslem scholars, teachers, students and Imams began to make plans on the best way to combat homosexuality

in Tanzania.” In Christian circles, Reverend Mtikila has portrayed “homosexuality interchangeably as perversity and ‘a deficiency of one’s moral sense’” (Ondego, 2004, p. 57) and Archbishop Mtetemela has been quoted as saying that “the Anglican Church of Tanzania believes that Homosexuality is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God” (Miehlbradt, 2011, p. 80). In response to the consecration of Gene Robinson in the U.S. in 2003, moreover, the church announced “that it did not recognize... Robinson to be a bishop” (Tanzanian Affairs, 2004b, p. 25) and would cut its links with “bishops who consecrate homosexuals” (Tanzanian Affairs, 2007, p. 4). Views like these, however, have not been uncontested within the church. Bishop Mhogolo of Central Tanganyika pointed out “that not all Tanzanian bishops were of one mind” (p. 5) with regard to these issues. He stated that “gay and lesbians are violently persecuted, mistreated, hated and ostracized” in Tanzania, warned against such mistreatments and sentiments, and opined “that homosexuality has never been a problem to the church in Africa” (p. 6). He continued: “There are so many other problems ranging from poverty, ignorance and diseases that the church in Africa could address instead of importing the issue of homosexuality which is a problem of the American church.” Asked whether he thought “homosexuals” would be allowed to take up positions in church leadership in the future, Mhogolo on a later occasion said that he thought it was “unlikely that there would be a change,” but that “in any case, nothing could be done at present to change the situation as homosexuality was illegal in Tanzania” (Tanzanian Affairs, 2008, p. 21).

### Portrayals of Same-Sex Practicing Men

At least four “types” of same-sex practicing men are discernible in the literature: the feminine and sexually receptive man, the exclusively penetrating same-sex practicing man, the young man who engages in same-sex practices prior to marriage, and the street-boy who engages in same-sex sex as part of cultures associated with childhood homelessness.

#### The Feminine and Sexually Receptive Man

Several of the reviewed sources provide descriptions of same-sex practicing men as distinctively effeminate. In the oldest of the reviewed texts, Rigby depicted sodomites in Zanzibar as men who “walk[ed] about dressed in female attire, with veils on their face” (Russell, 1935, p. 342). Saleh (2009), writing about traditional “homosexual gatherings” in Zanzibar, also referred to “homosexuals” as men who “were dressed in female clothes with artificial breasts” and who “wore lipstick and eye make-up” (p. 201). More recently, two of three “types” of same-sex practicing men Larsen (2008) described from

<sup>9</sup> Translated in S. F. Moore (1976, p. 362).

<sup>10</sup> In 2010, homosexuality was also raised as a topic in Mafia Island as part of local objections to a planned trance-dance festival that was expected to draw a large number of European tourists to the island. The festival was “perceived as a threat both to the environment and to local traditions” (Caplan, 2011, p. 21) and one person stated on a webpage: “We would like it to be known that we locals of this island welcome visitors but it is ESSENTIAL that they respect our customs and one among these is that there is no HOMOSEXUALITY” (p. 20).

Zanzibar were characterized by varying degrees of effeminacy. The more common were described as:

...unmarried homosexual men who mix feminine and masculine gender markers in a moderate way. They wear male clothes and restrict their feminine ornamentation to putting *wanja* on their eyes, henna on their nails and using the incense *udi*. Their behavior is slightly feminine, in terms of bodily movements, ways of talking, and a preference for female tasks such as cooking, cleaning and so on. They spend most of their time in the company of women. (Larsen, 2008, p. 118).

As a representative of a yet more womanly kind of man, Larsen presented Sabri, a person who “behaves, moves, and talks as if he were a woman. He partly dresses in women’s clothes, puts on make-up, colors his nails with *henna* and decorates his hands with both *henna* and *wanja*” (p. 119). Larsen concluded that Sabri “transgresses the gender categorization by appearing like a woman through what he does” and that “[b]y manipulating accepted gender markers Sabri can choose to belong to a woman’s world rather than to a man’s world and, moreover, to be accepted by women in his vicinity.”

On the mainland, Bryk (1939), who carried out ethnographic work around Lake Victoria in the mid-1920s (Brinck, 1957), reported that “typical cases of homosexuality” (Bryk, 1939, p. 149) occurred among men there and he was of the impression that the men who constituted these “cases” were “impotent fellows with feminine manners” (p. 150). A study of court cases pertaining to same-sex sexual violations in the German East African colony at the beginning of the twentieth century also demonstrated the centrality of gender to the way in which male-to-male sexuality was understood: the African plaintiffs typically “did not complain about violation of their bodies, but of their masculinity” (Schmidt, 2008, p. 56). Approximately 90 years later, some of Salles’ (2005) study participants conceived of “gays” as men who engaged in gender swapping practices. One interviewee explained “homosexuality” as “an act of pretending to be the other sex rather than what you really are” while another referred to “gays” as “boy[s] practicing like a lady” (pp. 174–176).

Several of the reviewed sources portrayed gender-crossing practices also in the absence of, or without explicit reference to, same-sex sexual engagement. In Bagamoyo in the 1890s, bin Mwinyi Bakari<sup>11</sup> (1903) described 17 *ngoma* (musical events<sup>12</sup>), one of which was “danced by men only, dressed in

women’s clothes” (p. 93).<sup>13</sup> In Kilwa Kivinje, Lienhardt (1968) attended a spirit dance and reported that “[o]ne dancer was a man dressed in women’s clothing, with the front of his robe stuffed with cloth to look like a woman’s breasts” (p. 39). He noted that a “personage of this sort often enters into spirit dances.” During fieldwork in Zanzibar in 1991–1992, moreover, Amory (1994, 1998) encountered a large number of cross-dressing men during the *Mwaka Oga* and *Idd al Haj* festivals. She found that “[t]here were too many men dressed in women’s clothing...to suggest that they were all *mashoga*” (Amory, 1998, p. 71).

### The Anally Penetrating Man

While many of the reviewed sources have focused on men who are effeminate and receptive in anal sex, their partners have mostly gone unmentioned. Those who have written about them, moreover, have mostly limited themselves to explain how they remain comparatively unremarkable also in daily life. Based on fieldwork at an undisclosed location on the East African coast, Amory (1998) pointed out that “because the *basha* is seen as a ‘real man,’ his identity remains unmarked” (p. 77) (unless he is encountered together with a *shoga*). Indeed, as Ahmed (2011, p. 52) reported from Zanzibar, “[m]en who are receivers and perform oral sex are viewed as homosexuals whereas men who penetrate and receive oral sex are not.”<sup>14</sup>

Men in the latter-mentioned category were relatively invisible also in the 2007 survey of Zanzibari MSM. Considering the study participants who had had “non-transactional sex” with a male partner in the past month, for example, the study group appears to have consisted of only 2.3 % exclusively penetrating men.<sup>15</sup> That the proportion was this low would seem to be compatible with one of two different explanations: either *mabasha* may not be so numerous in Zanzibar as one might have expected based on Amory’s, Swartz’s, and Ahmed’s accounts or else they may perhaps have turned out to have been almost as invisible to the researchers as Amory suggested they tend to be to society at large.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The text was written by bin Mwinyi Bakari and other “pure Swahili persons” (King, 1981, p. viii) in the Bagamoyo area. “They were asked in the 1890s by Dr. Carl Velten, a German linguist, to write down the traditions and customs of their people. This they did in Swahili, using the Arabic script.”

<sup>12</sup> As Campbell (1983, p. 3) pointed out, the word *ngoma* “commonly refers to drum, but is often used to encompass any occasion in which dancing, drumming and singing take place.”

<sup>13</sup> In a comment to this passage, Allen (1981) noted that this might “mean it was the preserve of transsexuals” (p. 243).

<sup>14</sup> From Mombasa in Kenya, Swartz (1990) reported that “[t]he Swahili distinguish sharply between proper, normal males who are quite willing to engage in homosexual practices as the active participant, and feminine, “ruined” males who take the passive role in these practices” (p. 127).

<sup>15</sup> Calculated on the basis of the numbers provided in the article’s Table 1. The same calculation indicates that 48.4 % of the surveyed “MSM” were exclusively receptive men and 49.2 % were “versatile.”

<sup>16</sup> That *mabasha* are considerably less marked and visible than *mashoga* has also been reported by Porter (1995), who did fieldwork in Mombasa in the late 1980s.

### The Young Man Who Engages in Same-Sex Relations Prior to Marriage

A rather differently portrayed same-sex practicing man is the one who has engaged in relations with other men prior to marriage, represented by the young Nyakusa men who traditionally lived in all-male age-mate villages (Wilson, 1951). Interestingly, Wilson made no reference to patterns suggesting that these relations were structured along gendered or bodily position lines.

### The Same-Sex Practicing Street Boy

A fourth category of same-sex practicing men is represented by “urban street boys” in Mwanza (Lockhart, 2002, 2008; Rajani & Kudrati, 1996; Rajani et al., 1994). A study of such boys in 1997–1998 showed that practically all had engaged in same-sex sexual activity (Lockhart, 2002). Four patterns of such activity have been identified. The first is “initiation sex” in which boys who are just entering the street scene are anally penetrated by one or more experienced street boys. A second form occurs between boys who sleep in the same spot at night; typically, a boy wakes up to find that he is being anally penetrated by another boy. Both of these patterns were known by the street term *kunyenga*, which most boys carefully distinguished from “real sex.” A third pattern is constituted by “the many encounters that [involve] mutual consent, usually between boys who [are] good friends and of equal age” (Lockhart, 2002, p. 303), described as “sexual expression of affection and consideration” by Rajani and Kudrati (1996, p. 310).<sup>17</sup> Finally, a fourth pattern was found among those boys who had sex with older men who they did not know and/or sex for money. The latter pattern was relatively uncommon, however, and accounted for “less than 5 % of all potentially risky sexual encounters” (p. 307) among the street boys in Rajani and Kudrati’s study.

Although *kunyenga* was not usually associated with any monetary transaction, Lockhart (2002) interpreted it as a kind of “survival sex.” He argued that the sexual activities involved were “associated with the boys’ ability to survive on the streets” (p. 307) because they were the “most important means available to the boys for maintaining the hierarchy of power and authority characterizing their relationship with each other” and that “their strong interdependence, in turn, is their most effective strategy for survival.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Lalor (2004, p. 834).

<sup>18</sup> In this discussion about what contributes to “survival,” Lockhart did not mention sexual relations between mutually consenting boys who were good friends. From the description offered, one is left wondering if the closeness and intimacy these relations seem to represent might not perhaps also sometimes offer positive contributions to wellbeing and survival.

### Transactional Sex

Some of the reviewed sources make specific reference to transactional sexual relations between men. Schmidt (2008) described a brothel of male sex workers that was in operation in colonial Dar es Salaam and Lugalla (1995) noted, in a discussion about the impact of structural adjustment policies in the mid-1990s, that “some boys practice homosexuality in exchange for money” (p. 49). In Zanzibar in 2007, moreover, Dahoma et al. (2009) reported that 34 % of surveyed MSM indicated that they had paid—and 65 % that they had been paid—for sex with another man in the previous month (however, a majority of 76 % had had “non-transactional sex” with a male partner in the same period).<sup>19</sup> In Mwanza, on the other hand, there was reportedly “no evidence of homosexual commercial sex” in the 1990s (Changalucha et al. 2002).

### Health and HIV

While Burton (1872) reported from Zanzibar that “unnatural crimes”<sup>20</sup> were “held conducive to health” (p. 419) in that location in the nineteenth century, most of the other texts that have discussed health in the context of same-sex relations highlight adverse outcomes and associations. Baumann (1899) maintained that “passive pederasts” in Zanzibar experienced that their “scrotum gradually [shrank]” (p. 64) and that their “capacity for erection” got lost. “Most” such men came down with “rectal problems” and were prone to drinking much alcohol. Indeed, they were “considered sturdy drunkards to such an extent that the Swahili designation *Walewi* (= drunk) in many cases can be used for “pederast.” It is not clear on what grounds these evaluations were made; Baumann’s report does not make reference to any systematic collection of health-related data.

His interest in stimulant use resurfaced in Zanzibar some 100 years later when participants in the 2007 “MSM” study were asked in detail about their utilization of various stimulants (Johnston et al., 2010). Sixty percent reported to have used “drugs other than alcohol” in the 3 months preceding their being interviewed and 13.9 % had *injected* drugs in the same period. The same study found that the overall prevalence of HIV infection among MSM in Unguja stood at 12.3 % in 2007 (Dahoma et al., 2009), approximately 20 times that of the overall adult population, in which it was 0.6 % that year according to the Tanzania Commission for AIDS (2008a). The proportion of “MSM” who were HIV positive was more

<sup>19</sup> In transactional sexual relations between Tanzanian men and women, payment has been found to be “much higher” for anal than for vaginal sex (Hoffmann et al., 2004).

<sup>20</sup> In England from the eighteenth century, the term unnatural crimes “covered sodomy, bestiality, and any homosexual act or invitation to the act” (Cocks, 2003, p. 17).

than twice as large among those who injected drugs (24.7 %) <sup>21</sup> as among those who did not (10.6 %).

On the mainland, no HIV prevalence study has of yet been carried out among men who have regular or occasional sex with other men and same-sex practices have been referred to only in a few HIV-related reports. That Tanzanian same-sex attracted men have been affected by the HIV epidemic for a long time nonetheless seems evident. Twenty years ago Pokrovskii et al. (1992) reported that the first case of HIV in a citizen of the USSR “was a homosexual male who contracted HIV infection in 1982 in Tanzania.” Furthermore, in an autopsy study of neuropathological changes in the brain of persons infected with HIV in Dar es Salaam between 1997 and 1999, 17 % of the examined men were reported to have been homosexually exposed to the human immunodeficiency virus (Ng’walali et al., 2005).

While HIV-related research pertaining to same-sex practicing men has been limited in Tanzania, both health personnel and laypersons appear to have been well aware, for a long time, of the HIV transmission potential inherent in unprotected sex between men. When dental professionals were asked to identify “high-risk groups” for HIV infection in 1988 and 1989, “homosexual men” was the most frequently mentioned (Tuominen et al. 1992) and most dental students also identified same-sex sex as a potential risk factor for HIV transmission a couple of years later (Ranta & Tuominen, 1991). A survey of 250 women attending an antenatal clinic in Northern Tanzania in 2002 found that 75 % were aware that “HIV can commonly be transmitted by homosexual intercourse” (Urassa et al. 2005, p. 845). In 2004, “leaders of gay and lesbian associations” in Tanzania variously rated HIV-related risks among “LGBT people” as either “medium” or “high” (Anyamele et al., 2005; International Capital Corporation Limited, & The Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe 2004).

### Politics and Policies Pertaining to Same-Sex Practices

A sub-set of the reviewed texts discuss same-sex practices in various political and/or policy contexts. From Zanzibar, we have already mentioned descriptions assessing the impact of the 1964 revolution on the situation for same-sex attracted men and also the more recent proactive position taken by the Zanzibari Ministry of Health and Social Welfare with regards to HIV-related research among such men.

On the mainland, same-sex relations played a notable role in Dar es Salaam’s political circles while the city was the capital of German East Africa. As part of internal power struggles, several members of the German administration brought

charges against each other, some of which involved accusations of same-sex sexual conduct. Even the colonial governor was accused of having had sexual relations, both with Max (one of his male servants) and with *binti* Hamiss, <sup>22</sup> a (cross-dressing) man who was associated with a brothel of male sex workers in Dar es Salaam (Schmidt, 2008). The governor was never convicted, however, and went on to file defamation charges against his accusers. The “judge considered the African audience for the allegedly defamatory statements as an aggravating circumstance” in the ensuing case and stated that “the court had the duty to impose severe penalties because the defendants had lowered the reputation of the white population in the eyes of colonial subjects” (p. 48). Schmidt saw this as reflective of concerns over what many in the colonial administration “perceived to be propriety, which had to be preserved under all circumstances to uphold white civilization and to sustain the colonial project” (p. 28). Notwithstanding this, the colony clearly provided an opportunity for non-consensual sexual conduct for some Europeans. A number of court cases pertaining to same-sex sexual violation were tried during the German colonial period, the majority of which involved African plaintiffs against European men.

The German colonial period came to an end in 1919, after which Tanganyika became a British colonial protectorate. Among the impositions in this era was the introduction of a legal prohibition on “carnal knowledge against the order of nature,” modeled on Section 377 of the penal code the British had imposed on India in 1860 and which was later replicated throughout the Empire (Human Rights Watch, 2008). <sup>23</sup> Carrying this colonial legacy forward, the Tanzanian Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act still provides that “any person who has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature...commits an offence, and is liable to imprisonment for life and in any case to imprisonment for a term of not less than thirty years” (Ottosson, 2010, p. 19; United Republic of Tanzania, 1998). <sup>24</sup> Zanzibar’s penal code, differing from that in effect on the mainland, <sup>25</sup> provides that a “person who will be convicted of sodomy will be liable to 25 years imprisonment” (Ottosson, 2008, p. 37; Tanzanian Affairs, 2004a).

<sup>22</sup> Hamiss is a (male) name, while *binti* means “young lady” (or “daughter”).

<sup>23</sup> The African countries in which the British imposed versions of this regulation were Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. It was also imposed on numerous countries across Asia and the Pacific islands (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> According to Kiragu and Nyong’o (2005), “the punishment ... was enhanced from 15 years to a minimum of 30 years” after a review of the Sexual Offences Special Provision Act in 1998.

<sup>25</sup> “Apart from sharing the Court of Appeal [...] with Mainland Tanzania, Zanzibar has a distinct and separate legal system” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> In a 2005 survey among persons injecting drugs in Zanzibar (irrespective of sexual practices), 30 % tested positive for HIV and 22 % for hepatitis C (Dahoma et al., 2006).

The prohibition on “carnal knowledge against the order of nature” is often understood to disallow even consensual same-sex sexual relations and this has recently given rise to human rights-related criticism of Tanzania. A shadow report submitted by a consortium of local and international NGOs in connection with Tanzania’s fourth periodic report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2009, for example, argued that the country’s penal code “violates the protection promised in Article 17” (CHRP, IGLHRC, & Global Rights, 2009, p. 5) and Article 2(1) of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1966). This same theme (and the mentioned report) was also brought up during the 96th session of the Human Rights Committee, during which the Tanzanian Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs stated that homosexuality is “unacceptable in our society” and argued “that the Government could not force people to accept it” (International Service for Human Rights, 2009, p. 6). Nevertheless, in its “concluding observations” the United Nations Human Rights Committee (2009, p. 6) reiterated its previously stated “concern at the criminalization of same-sex sexual relations of consenting adults” in Tanzania “and [regretted] the lack of measures taken to prevent discrimination against them.” It called on the country to “decriminalize same-sex sexual relations of consenting adults and take all necessary actions to protect them from discrimination and harassment.”

While the colonial “carnal knowledge-prohibition” is still in effect, in 2003 the Government of Tanzania explicitly identified men who have sex with other men as a “vulnerable population” with respect to HIV (The Prime Minister’s Office, 2003). The country’s current national multisectoral strategic framework on HIV/AIDS (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007, p. 54), moreover, not only states that “there is a need to acknowledge the HIV-related vulnerability” among such men, but also asserts that there is a need to advocate “for decriminalization of their activities.” The National HIV and AIDS Policy, furthermore, calls for measures to ensure that MSM can “access the necessary preventive and care services to protect themselves and prevent the spread of HIV infection to the general population” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2010, p. 23)<sup>26</sup> while the current HIV prevention strategy for the mainland prescribes establishment of “targeted STI management services” for MSM (United Republic of Tanzania, 2009b [Annex 2.11]). Notwithstanding these policies and plans, no expenditure was reported on “programmes for MSM” in the 2008 UNGASS report from Tanzania (Tanzania Commission for AIDS, 2008b).

<sup>26</sup> To achieve this, it formulates as an objective to “address the risk of HIV transmission among MSM,” “research in order to understand the magnitude of anal sex and its possible contribution to the HIV and AIDS pandemic,” “provide HIV education on the risk of anal sex and access to preventive and care services,” and “ensure that access to HIV related services without discrimination to contain the pandemic.”

Community organizing among same-sex attracted persons in Tanzania is referred to in the reviewed literature for the first time in 2003. That same year, four groups of “LGBT people” were interviewed as part of a mission gathering “facts and stories about the risks faced by MSM and WSW” (Anyamele et al., 2005, p. 34) in Africa. Later reports described conferences to which Tanzanian same-sex attracted persons have contributed (International Capital Corporation Limited, & The Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe 2004; Kiragu, 2006; Parkinson, 2007) and also included a study investigating LGBTI organizing in Tanzania and the rest of East Africa (Kiragu & Nyong’o, 2005).

### Other Cultural Expressions

We have already referred to traditional cultural expressions in which same-sex practices and/or gender crossing play a role. While some of these have been associated with pleasure, the *popobawa* (literally: “batwing”) has mostly been associated with fear. This creature, which has been referred to as a “sodomizing homosexual bat spirit” (Crozier, 2011), is “variously thought of as a djinn (*jini*), spirit (*pepo* or *mdudu*), demon (*shetani*), beast (*mnyama*), monster, or an embodied form of witchcraft (*uchawi*)” (Thompson, 2011, p. 8). Since the 1960s, the *popbawa* has periodically been said to sexually assault people on Zanzibar, and occasionally also on the mainland. Its presence is often reported in times of political crisis, such as during the period leading up to the first multi-party elections in Tanzania in 1995 (Parkin, 2006). Several scholars have discussed this phenomenon, an overview of whom can be found in Thompson (2011).

We will end this review, however, with a brief reference to a work of fiction. In 1969, a short story entitled “Everything under the sun” (Malinwa, 1969) tracked a tense and tender conversation between Meta and Welimo, two men living together in an unnamed Tanzanian urban setting. The story has been characterized as one about “a homosexual relationship” (Dunton and Palmberg, 1996, p. 24) and as “a portrayal of what is, in effect, a marriage between two struggling working class African men” (Epprecht, 2008b, p. 19).

### Discussion

When reference was made to men who have sex with men for the first time in the National Multi-Sectoral Strategic Framework on HIV/AIDS (The Prime Minister’s Office, 2003), it was stated that “little or nothing at all” was known about the “situation and behaviours” (p. 41) of such men in Tanzania. However, while there had indeed been sparse HIV-related research among same-sex practicing men in the preceding decades, this review shows

that it was not accurate to assert that there existed no information at all about such men. As we have shown, a variety of texts have, in fact, discussed Tanzanian same-sex practices over the 150-year period since 1860.

Taken together, these texts provide insights of considerable potential utility for HIV prevention programming, most fundamentally because they document that same-sex relations are, and have been, quite common among men in Tanzania and because they demonstrate that the men who engage in them have been affected by HIV since early on in the HIV epidemic. These insights had not, however, led to any significant amount of targeted HIV prevention work by 2010 (neither by local nor by international actors), and it may hardly be surprising, therefore, that recent work should find that the burden of HIV among MSM is disproportionate in Tanzania.

Commendably, national HIV prevention frameworks have in recent years proposed an increased focus on same-sex practicing men in prevention programming. While existing knowledge affords a robust rationale, and demonstrates a compelling need, for the immediate conduct of such work, the reviewed material also provides reasons to caution against the formulation of HIV prevention programming that draws uncritically on models informing similar programs in the West. Although several of the reviewed publications deploy Western constructs (such as “homosexual” and “gay”) which effectively presuppose that men who engage in sex with men can be understood as a unitary subpopulation, the overall impression given by the historical record is that this neither has been nor is the best way of understanding men’s same-sex relations in Tanzania. Instead, significant distinctions need to be made between men engaging in receptive anal sex on the one hand and their penetrating partners on the other. While the first category is perceived as “different” and noticeable (and has received the lion’s share of attention in the literature), the latter tends to be understood as made up of persons that are “ordinary men.” An important objective for future HIV prevention work in Tanzania must be to develop approaches and strategies that aim to include and involve (also) those men who exclusively or predominantly take the penetrating role in male-to-male sexual relations.

Some reports from Africa have portrayed attitudes towards same-sex attracted men in wider society as monolithically negative. While disapproval has in no way been absent in Tanzania, it is of significance to note that a diverse set of public opinion is discernible in the reviewed literature. Same-sex practicing men have been condemned, discredited, and discriminated, but they have also been defended, accepted, and included. It is clearly not possible to say that Tanzanians harbor a single set of attitudes towards, and reflections about, same-sex practices and those who engage in them. This is hardly surprising, but all too often descriptions of African

attitudes towards same-sex practices convey the impression that Africans have but one view about them.

For same-sex practicing men themselves, however, the voices that discredit them are bound to be particularly significant, in Tanzania as everywhere else. The few recent texts that have brought the voices of such men more clearly to the fore also reflect an understandable degree of resentment that is associated with experiences of disapproval and discrimination. There are good reasons to listen carefully—and respond—to these voices, not the least by those who want to engage in HIV prevention programming with and among same-sex practicing men.

The voices heard in a majority of the historical texts, however, are rarely those of same-sex practicing men themselves, but rather those of others who have observed and/or have had opinions about them. While the reviewed material thus provides insight into the ways in which same-sex practicing men in Tanzania have been talked about by others, it much more rarely offers insight into the ways in which same-sex practicing men have understood, reflected on, and talked about themselves. Perhaps as a result, the overall image that is painted often focuses exclusively on markers that set same-sex practicing men apart as different. It is difficult not to note how easily these depictions, when taken together, and in the absence of broader and more holistic descriptions, risk producing images that reduce humans with “unusual” qualities to their unusualness.

The reviewed material was also skewed towards discussions that consider same-sex practices in the context of phenomena that are perceived as problematic and/or stigmatized, including drunkenness, transactional sex, HIV infection, childhood street life, and/or use of stimulant substances. While all of these are topics that are genuinely important to explore and engage with, it is of interest to note the aspects of life that are not focused on in the published material. Reviewed texts let us know very little about the everyday experiences of same-sex attracted men, about the joys and thrills that are part of their lives, and about the strengths and resources such men possess. In sum, a palpable lack in the reviewed material as a whole is portrayals of same-sex practicing men as full, diverse, and resourceful subjects.

**Acknowledgments** This study was supported by the Research Council of Norway, Programme for Global Health and Vaccination Research.

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