



GALA IS AN INDEPENDENT PROJECT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY ARCHIVES TRUST

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AN OPENING WORD

Dear friends,

As a member of GALA's Advisory Committee, I am delighted to welcome you to our second newsletter of 2005, which focuses on the publication of the book *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa*. Let me begin by congratulating the editors, Ruth Morgan, director of GALA, and Saskia Wieringa, as well as the eight women activists who each coauthored a chapter.

This breakthrough book was conceptualized around Ruth's kitchen table in the lead up to the fourth International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) conference, themed "Sex and Secrecy" held in Johannesburg in 2003. Ruth and Saskia thought of hosting a session on same-sex experiences among women in Africa, but found that this aspect of life in Africa has been neglected or ignored by activists and academics in Africa. A possible reason for this lacuna in same-sex research in Africa is the misnomer that same-sex relations are 'unAfrican', or an 'import from the west'. Identifying African women researchers is further made difficult by the fact that leaders like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe or Sam Nujoma of Namibia have made same-sex relations a crime.

To address this gap in research on same-sex practices in Africa by Africans, Ruth and Saskia initiated the African Women's Life Story Project, which provided training to nine women activists who identified as lesbian, from six different African countries, to do such research. The participants were trained in Johannesburg (where South Africa's constitution affords protection to same-sex relationships) in conducting life history interviews on women's same-sex relations and practices, to code and transcribe these interviews, and analyse them. They were introduced to major interview techniques used in oral history, as well as participant observation and triangulation with other methods such as the collection of secondary data. In addition they were exposed to the major theoretical concepts underlying research on women's same-sex practices and relations, and to the wide variety of women's same-sex practices in Africa. An important part of their training was to discuss issues of identity, and the tension/s between sexual behaviours and identities.

The women returned to their countries where they collected 3-5 personal narratives from women involved in same-sex relationships or with same-sex practices. These interviews became the basis for their presentations at the IASSCS conference in Johannesburg, where each woman presented her findings and experiences in a full conference session. Elaborated papers based on eight of these presentations, which provide an insight into same-sex relations and same-sex practices, have now been included in the book. Brief extracts from the book *Tommy Boys* appear in this newsletter.

On behalf of the GALA Advisory Committee, I would like to thank The Gender, Women and Development Desk of the Humanist Institute for the Co-operation with Developing Countries (HIVOS) in the Netherlands, who funded the project. Many more people helped with this project than GALA can acknowledge here; some are referred to in the book. Abha Bhaiya, Evelyn Blackwood, Donna Smith, Bart Luijck, and Zanele Muholi made important contributions and our special thanks go to the courageous women who agreed to be interviewed for the project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rehana Vally,

Department of Anthropology, University of the Witwatersrand, and member of the GALA Advisory Committee

NEW PUBLICATION

Cover photo: Zanele Muholi ©

Our new book, *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* presents a rich picture of the wide variety of same-sex practices and relations, both historical and in present times in Eastern and Southern Africa.

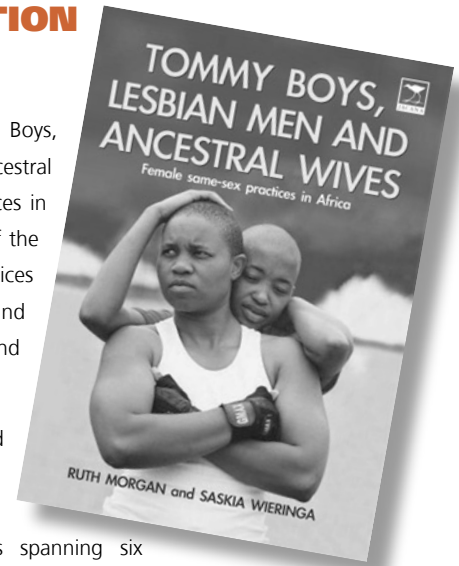
Edited by Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa, eight of the chapters have been co-authored by women activists spanning six different countries—South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Swaziland and Namibia. They have collected personal narratives on a range of issues related to sex and secrecy, an incredibly difficult area to research as many African leaders declare it taboo on the basis that these practices are alien to African culture and an import from the depraved west. The book demonstrates that there are silenced, traditional, institutionalised ways in which African women contracted same-sex relations. Second, it proclaims the right of African women engaged in same-sex practices or relations to their identities as Africans, as several interviewees state: we, lesbian women, are born here in Africa, we belong here. Who can say we are un-African? Third it gives a vivid portrait of the lives of African women engaged in same-sex relations and practices, portraying the joys of having found love as well as the pains of betrayal and the hatred encountered in their communities, as well as the many shades of emotions in between. This book eloquently testifies that although silence isolates and protects these women, some are beginning to speak out.

Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives is published by GALA and Jacana Media, and is available from your nearest Exclusive Books. Alternatively contact Jacana Media at sales@jacana.co.za or (011) 628 3200.

Join GALA for the launch of its newest book *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives* from 16h00 to 18h00 on 8 August 2005 at the Women's Gaol, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. The editors, as well as contributors from South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Swaziland and Namibia will be on hand to discuss their experiences in putting together the publication.

Prior to the launch, local lesbians and women activists are also invited to join GALA, Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) and Constitution Hill for a day long workshop on the use of the book and life stories to empower lesbians and to increase visibility of lesbian issues. The workshop will take place from 10h00 to 15h30 on 8 August, also at the Women's Gaol, Constitution Hill.

To attend either the launch or the workshop please RSVP to Busi Kheswa on (011) 717 4239 or kheswab@gala.wits.ac.za.



'I WANT TO MARRY THE WOMAN OF MY CHOICE WITHOUT FEAR OF BEING STONED': OPTIONS FOR KENYAN WOMEN WHO WANT A SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIP

By Nancy Baraka with Ruth Morgan

Women who want same sex relationships opt to stay in the closet and feel they have to eventually get married to men in order to keep up appearances of normality. Laura explains that she would have to get married to a man if she stayed in Kenya: "If homosexuality remains illegal and age is catching up with me, I guess I will have to get married. However I will not be as happy as I would have been with another woman." Laura would cope with their same sex attraction by having a girlfriend on the side: "I will see another woman while I am still married. I can have her as my close friend. Men have nothing against that. I can have my sexual satisfaction with another woman I love."

To the outside world this may seem like one big identity crisis but for the average woman of over 26 years in Kenya there is a greater acceptance of this situation as this is the only way she can meet her needs and get romantic, sexual, social and emotional satisfaction with women.

Quite a number of the out lesbians have relocated overseas where they can safely practice what they believe is their right. The ones who stay feel forced to live a secretive life that denies them the happiness they want to have. As Laura says: "However I am not comfortable here. It has always been my dream to feel free in whatever I do. If

I opt to love women and not men that should be my own choice. I want to kiss my woman in public without the fear of ridicule. I want to marry the woman of my choice without the fear of being stoned. All this I will achieve in a country where homosexuality is legal. I fear relocating because my family depends on me for so many things. So I am torn up between (sadly) loyalty to my family and my choice of happiness."



Photo: Zanele Muholi ©

GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER ROLES AMONGST OVAMBO WOMEN IN NAMIBIA

Madelene Isaacks with Ruth Morgan

This extract from chapter four explores the complex gender identity created by Sîros, one of the women I interviewed. Some of the women see themselves as lesbian or bisexual while others do not. Sîros sees herself as a lesbian and sees herself as a modern woman although she plays a predominantly male role in her family: "I'm a lesbian....Okay, my definition is like in, it's a woman attracted to another woman." She feels pride in the fact that she is in a lesbian relationship: "I am proud of it [being a lesbian]. Maybe because, sometimes I think I am proud of it because I am in a relationship. Maybe it would have been tough for me if I was alone..."

Sîros also has a strong male role in her family as husband, provider and father to her partner's children. Although she is the head of the household and is strict with the children, she sees herself as a modern father and husband with more flexibility and mixing of roles: "I see myself as the head of the household. Obviously, the children are afraid of me....I don't know why but sometimes I am very strict with them, but it goes hand in hand with the fact that I love them and they know it.... Okay, listen like in general, honestly, we don't have fixed traditional man woman roles in our household, it's more modern, mixed roles. It's not as if I am now the man and when I get home I want to be served, it's not like that."

Although Sîros wears male clothing and takes the role of provider in her family she sees herself as a modern woman who feels more

comfortable in men's clothing. She does not see herself as a man. She has dressed like this from the time she started working at the age of seventeen. She claims that she does this, as it's most comfortable for her to do so: "I don't wear my clothes to say that I [want] to be like a man. I don't want to be like a man, or I'm not a man....I mean the clothes don't mean, it doesn't play a role in any case. So, as long as I feel comfortable...You know it's not that you want to say I want to be this or that, but it is a nice feeling to be able to wear [them] or to be who you are, and your clothes play such an important part."

For Sîros gender identification is complex as she goes on to say that biologically she feels like a woman but psychologically she feels like a man.

M: So you consider yourself as a woman?

S: Yes and no. (Laughter)

M: Can you elaborate?

S: Biologically yes, but inside, psychologically, I am, I just don't have those female kind of feelings I don't have that women's instinct and stuff. I am more...I relate more to a man when it comes to emotional issues and so. But not...like a woman, no.

M: If you had the opportunity, would you rather be a man?

S: Definitely.

'IMMORAL AND SATANIC': IDENTITY AND COMING OUT IN TANZANIA

Sophia Musa Mohamed with Saskia Wieringa



Photo: Zanele Muholi ©

All my respondents have travelled a difficult path to accept themselves. My respondents are conscious of their identity as a woman foremost. When I asked them how they saw themselves in relation to men three responded: 'I am better than them'. When I asked them further what makes them feel fully woman, Prisca, Hanifa and Jovita, replied that it was 'committed love' that was most important to their sense of self. So they derived their self worth to a large extent from the happy relationship that they are engaged in.

In spite of their self acceptance, pride of self even, they find it very hard to disclose their sexual identity. Family members usually react very negatively. None of the respondents is out to their families because of that. Asha explains why she is not yet fully out: "It is still such a problem in Tanzania. We have to hide our relationship as the government and the community are still homophobic." She only shared her first sexual experience with a 'classmate who in turn accepted my request'. She herself was not surprised when she had her first sexual experience: "As I already know who I am. That does not disturb me." Prisca hesitantly shared her first sexual encounter with her mother who reacted very negatively: "She insulted me instead." And later she was chased away from home as she refused to marry a man. It is not surprising then that she has only come out to very few people who are 'prepared to know my sexual status.' Hanifa likewise is only out to very few people, although she is proud of being a lesbian. She shared her first experience with her aunt 'who didn't even want to hear it.' Yet, she says: "[My] early experiences gave me pleasure and whenever I do it, I feel free and happy...It is always a pleasure fucking dykes."

ANCESTRAL WIVES AMONGST SAME-SEX SANGOMAS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Nkunzi Nkabinde with Ruth Morgan

Traditionally every sangoma is allowed to have an ancestral wife to help them with their healing work. The issue of a sexual relationship within an ancestral marriage is historically taboo. However the taboo has been secretly broken by some sangomas such as Hlengiwe. The relationship described here is secret due to the fact that these two women live in a conservative rural area: "My relationship with 'Nomsa' started the day she came out to find out why my husband wanted to pay lobola [bride price] for her although she never met him before. So when we explained everything to her and told her that she will not stay with my husband but with me. I believe that's where it started because after my husband paid lobola for her, she didn't waste any time and moved in with me...Two weeks later when we were alone...she started to ask me if I was a lesbian and why I got married [to a man]? I told her the reason why I got married and asked her to explain the words 'lesbian', 'gay' and

'homosexuality' to me ... she then explained them to me, then we kept on talking. Then during our lovely conversation, she asked me how I felt about her. Did I feel attracted to her or what? I just didn't know what to say then my heart started to beat so fast that I found myself mumbling. She kissed me and told me that she was a lesbian but that she had to hide it because of how life was in the rural areas. She explained if you talk about these things you are a sinner so let's keep it to ourselves. I just shook my head then we kissed and we never told anybody. We sleep together staying in the same house. She helps me inside the house and even assists with teaching the trainees [amathwasa]. She has learned to beat the drums and the trainees take her as their mother. They love her so much although they don't know that we are lovers. It's just between me and her."

'SOME SAY I AM HERMAPHRODITE JUST BECAUSE I PUT ON TROUSERS': TOMMY BOYS IN UGANDA

Marie Nagadya with Ruth Morgan



Photo: Zanele Muholi ©

In these extracts from chapter three the focus is on Marci, one of two respondents who identified as tommy boys. From an early age tommy boys tend to be completely different from other girls because the way they feel, dress and behave is masculine. Marci explained that from a young age he felt more comfortable wearing trousers and playing soccer with other boys: "I realized that I was different from other girls because it started a long way back when I was still a young kid...I used to live like boys more than girls because I used to play with them...When I was very young the way I used to dress, I used to like trousers. I used to be with boys...I realized that I was a tommy boy...I didn't like to put on those skirts just because I want to be a man and putting on a skirt I felt that I would be looked at as a woman yet I never wanted to be a woman."

As an adult Marci identified as a tommy boy rather than as lesbian: "I can't call myself a lesbian just because I feel am more of a man than a woman, and if you call me a lesbian that's undermining me, I feel I am a man..."

Marci is out and accepts who he is in terms of his sexuality. Marci describes how his family knew about his sexuality from an early age due to the way he used to dress in boys clothes: "My family knows just because before when I was a very young girl, the way I used to dress. I used to like trousers..." He resisted their attempts to change his sexuality during his secondary school days: "My parents could not divert me just because I was going on. So they did everything they could. They used to advise me, they used to do what, but all in vain. They failed because I felt proud that way... They used to take me to church, pastors used to pray for me. They used to tell my teachers but all in vain, they punished me but could not change me."

Marci has a strong sense of his own identity which helps him deal with negative reactions: "I am out just because people look at me the way I behave and some say I am hermaphrodite just because I put on trousers but on my side I don't care just because I feel proud that way and I feel that's what I am...sometimes people look at me as being so inferior. On my side sometimes I also feel inferior but it doesn't tackle me just because I am proud of what I am. And I have to accept what I am."

Although Marci can tolerate being spoken about by people, what worries him the most is the fact that same sexuality is illegal: "I don't care. Let them talk about me, given the fact that even the law of Uganda criticizes it. I have to abide...It affected me just because it's not included in the constitution of the country. I do it illegally." Marci feels that tommy boys need to fight for their rights: "Okay because I'm not the only Tommy boy around, there are some others, so we can get together and make a movement [in order to] fight for our rights."

USEFUL CONTACTS:

THE GAY AND LESBIAN LIBRARY

Our library has over 4000 books and 400 videos. It is open on Saturday afternoons from 14h00 to 16h30 at 705 University Corner, 11-17 Jorissen Street (off the corner of Bertha), Braamfontein. For more information contact our librarian Carol on 083 734 6163 or visit our website.

FORUM FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (FEW)

A networking, empowerment and support organization of and for black lesbians, and based in Johannesburg.

PEOPLE OPPOSING WOMEN ABUSE (POWA)

For support phone the helpline: (011) 642 4345. Or visit their website: <http://www.powa.co.za>.

THE INNER CIRCLE

Johannesburg-based gay Muslim support group. Contact Muhsin on 082 507 3412.

JEWISH OUTLOOK

South African Jewish LGBTI Alliance.
Email: jewishglbti@mighty.co.za.

ACTIVATE

LGBTI student society at the University of the Witwatersrand. For more information contact Zachele on 0836955065.

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