

*Learning Sex and Gender in Zambia: Masculinities in the time of HIV/AIDS*

[Work in progress: not for quotation]

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In recognition of the need to involve more men in efforts to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, this paper focuses on some of the ways a group of men learnt in childhood and adolescence how to be men and the relevance of this for sexual conduct. My aim is to excavate the mainsprings of adult male sexual identity formations among a cohort of Catholic mission –educated Zambian men whom I taught at a secondary boarding school that I call St. Antony’s.<sup>1</sup> I first recorded their life histories in the early 1980s around the time they finished their secondary education. They were then mainly in their late teens or early twenties. I re-interviewed the survivors of the original cohort of 24 men some 20 years later in 2002 in the course of fieldwork that involved living in some of their homes. School contemporaries of the cohort were also interviewed as were a number of cohort-members’ wives and other household members.<sup>2</sup>

In a forthcoming companion piece<sup>3</sup> I discuss the role of the father and the male peer group in the development of masculine identities. I recognise the need to explore the structural, political, historical and economic forces that influence gender identity, often severely limiting the choices available to both boys and girls, holding them in a ‘prison house’ which is both material and symbolic.<sup>4</sup> Gender is an inherently

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<sup>1</sup> For an ethnography of the school, see A. Simpson, *Half-London in Zambia: Contested Identities in a Catholic Mission School* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The 2002 research, entitled “Men and Masculinities in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Zambia” (R00023493), was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, United Kingdom. Participant observation in Zambian households was augmented by the collection of life history material in interviews. Interviews, conducted mostly in English, but also in Bemba, Nyanja and Tonga, were taped with the interviewees’ permission. Anonymity was assured and I have used pseudonyms at all times throughout this paper. I am grateful to two local assistants, Dexter Kaluba and Chitalu Mumba for their assistance in interviewing school contemporaries of the original cohort and wives of former students, and for their insightful discussion of the data.

<sup>3</sup> A. Simpson, “Sons and Fathers/Boys to Men in the Time of AIDS: Learning Masculinity in Zambia”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 31, Number 3, September 2005.

<sup>4</sup> R. Parker, R.M. Barbosa, P. Aggleton, *Framing The Sexual Subject: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality and Power* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000) p. 17.

relational term and the reader may be disturbed by the absence of women's voices here.<sup>5</sup> However, in this paper I narrow the discussion in order to highlight some of the cohort's early instruction in sex and gender and argue that, for many men, the enduring consequences of these lessons militate against their playing a positive role in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

It is generally recognised that we should not expect to find one single gender ideology in any society but rather a number of apparently contradictory ones, all of them constructed, and shaped by a myriad of social and historical forces, and negotiable in varying degrees.<sup>6</sup> However, while there is no intention here to essentialize either men or women, each variously situated in constantly shifting fields of power, a clear profile emerged from men's accounts, irrespective of ethnic identity or religious affiliation, about prevailing hegemonic ideologies concerning what it meant to be a man.

The present focus on men is not to deny the importance of studies that have argued for the need to put women at the centre of analysis. Women bear the brunt of the multifaceted consequences of the AIDS pandemic; many are particularly at risk and in need of empowerment because of men's violence.<sup>7</sup> Violence and the threat of violence, for example, increase women's inability to negotiate condom use. However, while recognising that men play a significant role in HIV transmission, there is no intention here to demonise them nor to pretend that they form an undifferentiated category free of contestation. My research among Zambian men reveals the fragility of many men's sense of their manhood, something that has constantly to be achieved and reclaimed in the performance of masculinity in public and in intimate spheres. Indeed in both spheres, masculinity may best be seen as a fragile entity. While recognising men's real and apparent power, I wish to explore some of the consequences of this fragility, many of the seeds of which are planted in childhood and adolescence.

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<sup>5</sup> Their voices are present elsewhere in my study.

<sup>6</sup> See R.W. Connell *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity, 1995, and *The Men and the Boys* (London: Polity Press, 2000); K.T. Hansen, "Negotiating sex and Gender in Urban Zambia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 10, Number 2, 1984; A. Meigs, "Multiple gender ideologies and statuses" in P. R. Sanday and R.G. Goodenough(eds), *Beyond the Second Sex: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Todd Sanders "'Doing Gender' in Africa", in H. L. Moore, T. Sanders and B. Kaare (eds), *Those Who Play With Fire: Gender, Fertility and Transformation in East and Southern Africa* (London: Athlone Press).

<sup>7</sup> Some of this violence is learnt in domestic spaces. See A. Simpson, *Sons and Fathers/Boys to Men*, and C. Campbell, 'Learning to kill? Masculinity, the Family and Violence in Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 18, Number 3, 1992, pp. 614-628.

The sheer scale of the human tragedy unfolding in central and southern Africa entails taking certain risks in the exploration of links between constructions of masculinity and men's sexual conduct. Concerns may be temporarily pushed into the background as anthropologists, along with others, engage in efforts to restrict the spread of HIV infection. However, if all representation risks the accusation of being pornography,<sup>8</sup> then investigations into sexuality run a particular risk. It is also crucial to avoid the danger of appearing to construct an "African sexuality," in opposition to some supposed "white" or "European" one.<sup>9</sup> Colonial and postcolonial fantasies of black men's hypersexuality may be perpetuated and prevailing contests among at least some Zambian men about the meaning of manhood may be screened from view. Involving men may well entail targeting them directly and indeed confronting them about the hegemony of some masculine definitions of sexual behaviour,<sup>10</sup> though this may risk anthropological research in AIDS prevention efforts becoming merely another form of social control.<sup>11</sup> What has become generally recognised is that the communication of Western biomedical "knowledge" alone will not achieve the aim of curtailing the spread of HIV/AIDS. More needs to be learned about the contexts in which the transmission of HIV takes place and in which health messages are constructed, transmitted and received.<sup>12</sup> Ethnographic data, such as that described in this paper is aimed at facilitating AIDS prevention efforts by offering local intimate knowledge about the meanings of manhood and their role in the spread of HIV.

In the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Zambians have been fed a daily diet in the news media of mostly depressing statistics and news. In *urban areas* many have witnessed what they described as the AIDS "industry" at first-hand and found it hard not to come to some cynical conclusions. This has been especially so because of their feelings of powerlessness to access adequate medical help for their family members and, in some instances, for themselves, because, until very recently, of the exorbitant

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<sup>8</sup> S. Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> For some of the debates, see J. C. Caldwell, P. Caldwell and P. Quiggin, 1989, "The Social Context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa", *Population and Development Review*, 15 (2), 185 – 234; B. M. Ahlberg, 1994, "Is There a Distinct African Sexuality? A Critical Response to Caldwell", *AFRICA* 64 (2): 220 – 242; S. Heald, 1995, "The Power of Sex: Some Reflections on the Caldwells' 'African Sexuality' Thesis", *AFRICA* 65 (4): 489 – 505.

<sup>10</sup> Among recent commentators who have spoken of the need to change men are C. Baylies and J. Bujra, *AIDS, Sexuality and Gender in Africa* (London, Routledge, 2000) and R. Morrell (ed), *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (London, Zed Books Ltd/Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> See M. C. Clatts, 1994, "All the Kings Horses and All the King's Men: Some Personal Reflections on Ten Years of AIDS Ethnography", *Human Organization*, 53, 1, 93-95.

cost of anti-retroviral therapy. They have needed courage to face the everyday reality of those around them, at home, in the neighbourhood and at work, suffering from AIDS-related conditions. The general perception in 2002 was that the AIDS crisis was deepening, not getting better and this led many – both men and women - to conclude that condoms did not safeguard against HIV infection, a deduction officially supported by such bodies as the Catholic Church. Added to such suspicions about condoms was the perception among many men that condoms threatened the performance of their manhood in sexual encounters and thereby their achievement of a reassuringly “masculine” identity.

In 2002 the age range of the men in the cohort was between 35 and the early 40s. They belonged to a number of ethnic groups, primarily Bemba and Tonga, but also including Lala, Ila, Chikunda, Lamba and Lozi. Though very few men (unlike their wives) regularly attended church, almost all claimed a Christian identity. Religious affiliations included Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventist, United Church of Zambia, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Assemblies of God and various Pentecostal churches. There was a wide range of income within the group, some men earning as much as seven million *kwacha* a month and some as little as 100, 000 *kwacha* a month or less.<sup>13</sup> Occupations included the following: doctors, security guards, lawyers, petrol pump attendants, managers, miners, lecturers, teachers, engineers and “businessmen” – the latter generally involved in informal trading. Several respondents were unemployed. All were resident in urban or provincial centres. All except two were married, and many of the marriages were inter-ethnic. Some wives were in professional employment; some were marketeers and traders. Others were housewives with no employment beyond the household.

There was a wide range of education level, occupation and income among the men’s parents. About a third of the original cohort’s parents were primary school teachers, sometimes one parent – usually the father – and sometimes both parents. Several men came from rural subsistence farming backgrounds, though there were also a number of former students whose fathers held professional posts in government and industry at various levels. Three fathers had university degrees and four mothers were nurses. Receiving their education in the period before the introduction of

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<sup>12</sup> See S. Heald, “It’s Never as Easy as ABC: Understandings of AIDS in Botswana, *AJAR Volume 1*, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> The rate of exchange fluctuated during 2002, but averaged about 4500 *kwacha* to the US dollar.

substantial school fees, school populations were more diverse in their socio-economic composition than they would later become, though students themselves were acutely aware of disparities in wealth.

Household and family forms and sizes had varied considerably. In some households, there might be one or two siblings, in others as many as twelve or fifteen. In polygamous marriages, a boy might have as many as fifty or sixty siblings and half-siblings. There was a great range in the number and gender of siblings, the respondent's position in the children's birth order, the nature of the parents' relationships and the type of their parents' marriage – whether monogamous or polygamous. Most former students spent their childhood in households that were under the control of an adult male, normally their father. Few of these men had a childhood and adolescence untroubled by their parents' marital disputes, separation, divorce or the death of a parent. For some at least a part of childhood was spent away from the parental household, with older siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles or away at primary boarding school.

Some former students spent their childhood almost exclusively in either rural or urban areas, while others moved back and forth between the two. Many, especially those who grew up in town, had little contact with grandparents, several of whom had died before the child was born or in his early childhood. Many boys moved residence – with or without their parents – several times during childhood and adolescence, attending a number of primary schools before going away to St. Antony's for their secondary education.

None of the men in the cohort had undergone circumcision or other ritual initiation into manhood.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, they learnt manliness – often literally – at the hands of their fathers and their peers, both before and during schooldays. Knowledge, identity and desire grew out of certain work on the body. In a father's physical punishment, in the development of physical strength in work and training in sport, in the fighting

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<sup>14</sup> It has been observed that higher rates of HIV transmission in Africa are found in regions where circumcision is not practised. See A. Buve et al, 'Multicentre study on factors determining differences in rate of spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa: methods and prevalence of HIV infection, *AIDS* 15, suppl. 4, (2001), pp. S5–S14. One estimate of people in Zambia living with HIV/AIDS at the end of 2003 puts the adult rate (15 – 49 yrs.) at 16.5%, with a low estimate of 13.5% and a high estimate of 20.0% ('UNAIDS/WHO epidemiological fact sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections, 2004 Update').

skills needed to defend himself from other boys and in early sexual desire and experience, a boy's body became fitted to a particular moral universe.<sup>15</sup>

I do not wish in any way to suggest that childhood experiences *determine* later masculine identities; these will always remain shifting, situated, multiple, provisional and for some, if not all, conflictual. However, childhood experiences were undoubtedly central to the making of these men as engendered beings. This paper explores accounts of the early sexual experiences of the cohort before and during their primary and secondary education. Men, unlike their wives and other female partners, readily described their first "adult" sexual experience – by "adult" they meant when they first ejaculated into a girl. Age of sexual debut varied considerably, though for the majority of the cohort and their contemporaries it occurred between the ages of twelve and sixteen, that is while the boys were still attending primary school. Men's retrospective accounts were couched in the language of conquest and domination and centred on attempts at vaginal penetration. They recalled feelings of "being a man" when penetration and ejaculation were achieved. For an early age they were anxious to reassure themselves that they would be able to father children – a central requirement for acceptance as a 'real man'.

### **Play before primary school:**

Many men recalled games from the age of five or six which involved exploration of girls' bodies, and, for some, boys' bodies as well, and attempts to imitate the heterosexual behaviour of elders.<sup>16</sup> Although they were unable to produce semen, what was important to them was that the boy should lie on top of the girl. From an early age boys understood they were required to assert the active role, spatially expressed as "above" and for the girl to take the passive role – "below" in the encounter.<sup>17</sup> Several men described seeing older boys and adults – often older male

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<sup>15</sup> See L. Wacquant, 'The Prizefighter's Three Bodies', *Ethnos*, 63,3 (1998), p. 346.

<sup>16</sup> A. Richards, *Bemba Marriage and Present Economic Conditions. Rhodes-Livingstone Paper No. 4* [1940] (1969: 15) describes such play as common among Bantu peoples, noting that, beyond the building of huts and the cooking, children sometimes attempted to imitate the sex act. Leonard Bloom (1972:291) quotes from one account among many of such "family games" given in Zambian students' written autobiographies that he collected and analysed, though he offers no evidence of explicit reference to sexual activity. L. Bloom, "Some Values and Attitudes of Young Zambians, Studied Through Spontaneous Autobiographies", *African Social Research*, 14, December 1972.

<sup>17</sup> In later life men learnt that women were taught at initiation how to "dance in bed" and, although to adopt the missionary position, to be anything but docile in sexual performance.

siblings and uncles – engaged in sexual intercourse and recalled their noting that the “proper” way to have intercourse was for the male to be on top. None of the cohort members spoke of seeing their parents having intercourse. They may well not have done so, or the taboos around witnessing such an event may have prevented its being reported, or indeed the memory might well have been repressed. Men differentiated this play activity from their first “real” experience of sex that entailed vaginal penetration and the release of semen inside a female partner.

From the age of five or six Kangwa learned from other children that as a boy he should lie on top of a girl, in games with female cousins and other small girls. Often they did not take off their clothes. There was no penetration. It was not, as he ruefully commented later in his life and in failing health, “the kind of sex that would give you AIDS”. Comments such as “You and your wife”, by which his mother and his aunts referred to him and the small girls he played with, caused Kangwa to think about the relationship between men and women.<sup>18</sup> Such were some of Kangwa’s early lessons about sex. At home in the village, as a young boy, unobserved Kangwa had seen his young uncles having sex with girls in the surrounding bush during the day and at night in the hut he shared with them:

“I suppose my earliest sexual experience, from what I can remember, I learned from friends. It was a common game. We used to organise some small households. You’d pretend that there is a small household here, a small household there. The boys would build the shelters. The girls would cook. There’s a husband and wife and there’s a husband and wife. That’s how I learnt about sex. It was a combined thing. You know how it is. Small children easily get excited, even for small things. Small children would be cockerels and they would watch the husbands and wives. We called it “cooking in small quantities”. The cooking accompanies the whole thing. I mean you don’t just end up cooking small quantities of *nshima* and relish. You try to pretend that you are a normal big person.”

### **Parents’ silence:**

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<sup>18</sup> Shire’s autobiographical account of his Shona childhood (1994) highlights the role of female kin, especially the paternal aunt (*vatete*), in reinforcing myths of maleness. “Men don’t go to the moon: language, space and masculinities in Zimbabwe”, in A. Cornwall and N. Lindisfarne (eds), *Dislocating Masculinity* (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 147-158.

Former students reported that it was generally considered taboo for parents to speak to their sons about sex<sup>19</sup>, though Dominic's mother recommended local medicine to him to increase his sexual potency.<sup>20</sup> For the most part a discreet silence appeared to be maintained on both sides. Most parents made oblique allusions in their efforts to discourage their son from sexual activity which would distract him from his studies, and, should it result in a pregnancy, might cause a boy to be expelled from school. The little instruction and advice that was available to boys sometimes came from grandparents and uncles, though as families spread to various parts of the country, few had grandmothers nearby who could whisper to them. The main source of information was slightly older male peers. The boy learnt that "strength" – both physical and sexual was the most important quality for him to attain.

While the silence between parents and male children regarding sexual matters fitted their notions of "respect" and propriety, many former students expressed regret that while instruction on sexual matters was given to their sisters at puberty and again prior to marriage, they themselves were left to find out for themselves. When a younger sibling was born, parents had told small boys that they had bought the baby at ZNBC (a supermarket). Sexual knowledge was assumed to come "naturally" to boys. Some boys were puzzled by "wet dreams" and sought advice from male cousins and peers. Many recalled that, as young boys, they had been taught that sex was bad. Parents and elders had warned them that girls and women bit men. Some, like Sampa, recalled being warned by elders that they would get burnt if they tried to have sex with a girl: "They would tell us '*Ngamuleyangala nabanakashi mukapya*' – 'If you have sex with girls your penis will get burnt.'"<sup>21</sup> Boys were warned that some

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<sup>19</sup> Richards [1940] (1969) noted that, while the Bemba discussed certain physical facts frankly, they used "a variety of euphemisms when discussing sex relations and are particularly careful when members of different age groups are present." (1969: 17) Delius and Glaser (2002) argue that there was a degree of intergenerational communication on sexual issues in pre-colonial African societies in Southern Africa and that the communication gap between South African youth and their parents is a recent phenomenon. In 2002, grade eleven high school students in Lusaka were divided about whether they would like their parents to discuss sexual matters with them. See A. Simpson and B. Heap, *Process Drama: A Way of Changing Attitudes* (2003: 68) Stockholm: Save The Children.

<sup>20</sup> Many married men reported the pressure they felt, especially from their mothers, to produce children.

<sup>21</sup> In separate conversations, Sampa's mother recalled elders warning her, when she was young, that if she had sex with boys her fingers would grow abnormally long. T. Rasing (1995: 52) records this teaching in recent girls' initiation rites in an urban Roman Catholic community on the Copperbelt. See T. Rasing, *Passing on the Rites of Passage*, (Amsterdam: Avebury Press for the African Studies Centre, Leiden.)

girls had diseases and that if they got a sexually transmitted disease their penis would have to be cut off. All in all, it was better for boys to keep far away from girls.

What were rarely communicated to parents and adults were incidents which men recalled as sexual abuse.<sup>22</sup> Some men claimed to have been abused by older girls or women. Sampa, for example, asked me if it was possible for a man to be raped by a woman. He described an incident around the age of eleven, before, he said, he was able to produce semen, though he had already attempted penetrative sex with a number of girls of his own age. He was called into an outdoor shower by a “big [mature] woman”, a neighbour, as he was passing:

“She was bathing. She called me, ‘You can you bring me some soap?’ I went inside there and she did what she wanted to do with me. She made love. I was so young. I found her naked, but she said, ‘No, just come!’ By that time I had already known these things. So I knew what she wanted. I was ready. I had an erection. She just pulled down my shorts.”

In adulthood, Darius concluded that he and his younger brother had been “sexually abused” by their sixteen-year-old cousin and stepsister who would bathe them:

“My cousin would start playing with my penis. She would just play with it. Then my stepsister did the same. She also actually played [had intercourse] with my stepbrother. They were both from the same mother and the same father. So she wanted to entice me. She would even ask to bath me. Whenever she went with my younger brother who accepted being bathed she would sort of abuse him, but the boy would come and show me what the girl was doing to him. She was masturbating him and putting his penis inside her vagina.”

### **Sexual debut in groups**

Groups played an important role in early sexual experience, especially during primary school. Enoch dated his initial awareness about sex to the time he started primary school at the age of seven. Grade one classmates boys and girls would pair off, girls

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<sup>22</sup> In unreported cases of abuse and in discussions of ‘homosexual’ activity in Zambia men often spoke of the “African gift of silence”.

saying “This is my husband” and boys saying “This is my wife”. What he considered his first sexual encounter after early childhood play was at around the age of ten when he was in grade four. Like a number of other former students, it was in a group with three other boys from his class and provided an early lesson in exchange:

“There was this lady – well, she must have been around eighteen. She told me and my friends, ‘If you buy sweets for me, I will let you have sex with me.’ I didn’t have any money but the other boys bought some sweets and we went to her house at night. It was just getting dark – towards nineteen hours. She had given us directions. When we reached the house we went straight to the room that she told us and we found her in bed pretending to be asleep. She told us to be quiet or her father would hear us. So the first boy started playing with [having sexual intercourse with] that lady, then the second, then the third and then me. But even if I did that I didn’t have the experience because of my penis at that time. I failed to penetrate. I didn’t go inside. I didn’t ejaculate. I don’t know whether it was because I was too young or because of a lack of experience or out of fear. I just lay on top of her.”

He didn’t ask his classmates about their own experience with the young woman and the darkness of the room prevented him from being able to observe, and, he hoped, from being observed. During his childhood Enoch repeatedly wondered, “Is it true that the penis can go into a woman?”

### **Cousins’ lessons:**

Cross-cousins figured in many accounts as the boys’ first teachers in matters of sex, though some men spoke of their first sexual encounters with parallel cousins as “a kind of incest”.<sup>23</sup> Darius dated his “proper” sexual debut at the age of sixteen when he was in grade ten.<sup>24</sup> It was with a younger cousin who had come on a visit to his

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<sup>23</sup> L. Mair, *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1953); A. Richards (1940: 24) and E. Colson (*Marriage and the Family among the Plateau Tonga*, 1958, Manchester: Manchester University Press) comment on the earlier preferential cross-cousin marriages among the Bemba and the Tonga, though, by the 1950s this type of marriage had lost favour among the latter. Mair (1953: 81) notes how marriage between cross-cousins (children of a brother and sister) had been the ideal among matrilineal peoples in Central Africa and that Bemba parents of either a boy or a girl were entitled to claim a relative in this category as a mate for their child.

<sup>24</sup> For clarity I have used the term ‘grade’ rather than ‘form’ throughout as some men would, for example, speak of ‘form three’ while others would refer to the same year as grade ten.

village. They continued to have sex regularly for the next six months. She took the initiative. The sexual relationship still continued even after they had both married, Darius explained (laughing): “Even now when we meet we become mischievous.” They did not use condoms, Darius explained, because he was too excited to start trying to find some, especially in a rural area where they were difficult to obtain. He recalled the first time he ejaculated into his cousin. He was not the only one to explain that he did not understand what was happening. Like others, he feared that he was urinating into the girl and tried to withdraw.

Older boys often acted as mentors. They were usually admired first of all because of their physique, their skill at sport, their prowess at fighting and their ability to protect their protégés from bullies. Mentors tried to teach younger boys how to approach girls. By the time he got to secondary school, Paul was aware that the changes in his body made him more inquisitive about what many other boys had been talking about. He became curious about girls and their difference and conscious that as a boy he was expected to take the leading role: “I understood that they were the objects that were to be conquered or to be put under your wings – or at your feet.” By the end of grade eight he had made new friends, among them one he described as “a very naughty boy”, a mentor in sexual matters. This new friend kept challenging Paul’s ignorance about sexual issues. He did this “in a very aggressive way. But in his way trying to get me to become the better man there – the full, complete man – the man that one should be – by knowing about such things and by having the kind of experience that he claimed to have himself.” Paul soon realised that a “real man” had several girlfriends and he tried to have girlfriends in different towns.

Older, sexually experienced girls, often “organised” by other boys, also played an important role. For all the stress on a man’s power, his active role and sexual strength, sexual debut often cast the boy in a dependent role. At times the ideal of male sexual conquest had been reversed: an older girl had taken the initiative. While some men were reassured by the girls’ expertise, their obvious greater knowledge and experience made others feel “inadequate”, “incompetent” and “foolish”. They were embarrassed to appear “childish” when they knew that, as “men”, *they* were supposed to take the lead. Whatever the public performance and rhetoric of masculinity might be, men’s sexual encounters in adolescence were not always straightforward narratives of male power and dominance. Some simply did not know how to proceed. From his early teens, Darius had gone to village parties (“Sundowns”) to drink beer

with his friends. There were girls at these dances though to begin with, even though his friends would organise a girl for him, he explained to me that he was shy and scared that he would “fail to perform”: “I didn’t know what to do in bed. I would touch the girl’s body, touch her breasts, then that would be the end of the story. My friends would go for sex but I couldn’t.” A few boys’ first sex was with an inexperienced younger girl. Some former students recalled forcing girls to have sex with them when they were not to be persuaded by “sweet words”. In general, the men said that no love was involved in their first efforts and many spoke of the pressure of the peer group.<sup>25</sup> There are few descriptions of kissing and cuddling.<sup>26</sup>

There were no reports of condom use in adolescent sexual debut and very few in adolescent sexual encounters generally. Almost half the cohort had at least one, and sometimes several, episodes of venereal disease as adolescents and young adults. A third of them fathered children, or caused pregnancies, while they were primary or secondary school students, though none of them were expelled. Very few of the cohort in their teenage years spoke about having the experience of falling in love and none thought that such an experience was a sound basis for marriage.<sup>27</sup> In later life most men would dismiss their first sexual encounters as insignificant.

For some boys the first experience was neither particularly memorable nor pleasurable. Indeed it could be deeply disappointing. Malama had what he called his first “proper” sex when he was about thirteen. It was a casual encounter, without, he explained, any particular meaning: “I mean I had sex but it didn’t make any sense. What I experienced and what I was hearing – well, they couldn’t match.” While many stated that they regarded pre-marital sex a sin but this did not prevent them from engaging in it. Besides, they remarked in their late teens, “You can’t expect a virgin wife when you marry.” A few of the men recalled feeling “guilty”. For others

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed there was a general absence of talk of emotion at sexual debut.

<sup>26</sup> Young men said kissing on the mouth was a European practice, formerly unknown in Zambia. Some men contended that it was unhygienic. Many students said that “Africans” who witnessed scenes of men and women kissing found their sexual appetites quickly aroused. In the 1970s and early 1980s films that contained such scenes were often greeted with roars of laughter by the student body at St. Antony’s. For some years after Independence, on the orders of President Kaunda, kissing, like violence, was censored on Zambian television and in cinema films.

<sup>27</sup> Such views parallel those recorded by Richards among earlier generations of Bemba people: “Both men and women will describe what they find physically attractive in the opposite sex. But in the choice of a wife they do not seem to be guided by the ideal of romantic love as it is understood in present day middle-class Europe or America.” ([1940] 1969: 22)

it was the discovery of a source of great excitement and pleasure, when, as more than one explained, “something mysterious happens all over your body”.

As the boys grew older, most of them were convinced that their parents were aware of their sexual exploits. The veil of silence between a son and his parents was torn when a “pregnancy case” was brought against their son. Boys and their parents tried to prevent these cases being drawn to the attention of the school authorities who, in theory, were obliged to report them to the ministry of education. The penalty was expulsion.<sup>28</sup> The boy’s family would usually offer to pay “damages” for the pregnancy and sometimes give promises of marriage, to be fulfilled once the boy had finished school.

At fifteen, in grade seven, Enoch learnt that he had made his girlfriend pregnant. He had built his own hut in the village and she had slept with him most nights for several months. He had not realised that a teenager like himself could cause a pregnancy. He thought only “big people” could produce children. When the case was brought before the village headman, Enoch denied paternity even though he was convinced that he had caused the pregnancy, “It was something I did unknowingly. We had been sleeping together and I had released into her most nights.” He was afraid of losing his chance of secondary education. The girl had stopped school some years earlier in grade three. After her death, and his marriage, Enoch took the child to live with him.

Promise had a similar experience while at primary school. He excelled at sport and his athletic prowess was admired by both teachers and fellow pupils. His build and his skill attracted many girls and he had a number of sexual partners in the later stages of his primary education.<sup>29</sup> It did not occur to him to use condoms; besides, they were difficult for a boy in his area to obtain. He formed a particularly close

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<sup>28</sup> J. M. Mwanakatwe, Minister of Education in Independent Zambia, wrote about the need for sexual discipline among the early cohorts of Zambian secondary school students. (J.M. Mwanakatwe, *The Growth of Education in Zambia Since Independence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.) He lamented that few parents and guardians in 1960s took any real interest in “the proper upbringing of their sons and daughters” and singled out girls for particular rebuke. Mwanakatwe highlighted “the intolerable misconduct” (1968: 236) of pregnant schoolgirls and endorsed the UNIP government’s hard-line policy of expulsion of the girls and the boys responsible. He reminded readers: “In tribal society an unmarried girl who became pregnant was regarded as a social outcast; indeed under Zulu law the sanction against parties responsible for illegitimate pregnancies was death.” (ibid: 236) He argued against the re-admission of school-girls after the delivery of their babies, expressing the view that their re-admission “would degrade educational institutions”.

<sup>29</sup> For similar observations on the links between excellence in sports and school work and the ability to attract girlfriends, see I. Niehaus, ‘Towards a Dubious Liberation: Masculinity, Sexuality and Power in

relationship with a grade six girl. (She has since died). In grade seven Promise, at the age of fourteen discovered she was pregnant and she told him that he was responsible. Unsure whether he was “rescued” by chance, Promise explained:

“Fortunately there was a miscarriage. Well, I don’t know whether she aborted or whether it was a miscarriage. It was fortunate because I was still young. What could I do? Anyway we both qualified for grade eight.”

The girl’s family sued Promise over the pregnancy. He remembered the contrasting reactions of his parents. His father, he recalled, “didn’t bother much” and paid one of his cattle in compensation. His mother, however, was furious, complaining bitterly that he had put his education at risk.

Sampa said that from the age of fifteen he had started to fear that he might make a girl pregnant. He recalled having had sex with “maybe eighteen or nineteen” primary school girls. Sampa never used condoms and in retrospect was puzzled why he had had no pregnancy cases to answer: “Maybe I was too young. Maybe it’s because I didn’t stick to one girl. Maybe if I had had just one girlfriend, I would have made her pregnant. I don’t understand because I was producing plenty of sperm.” In a parody of the behaviour of some male teachers towards female pupils at both primary and secondary schools in Zambia, he explained his *modus operandi*, revealing like many other boys an early awareness of the play of power in sex. For him sex was a kind of game:

“Even big [older] girls liked me. Maybe it was because I was intelligent at school. I used to teach the girls different things, especially mathematics. Well, then, it was just a matter of commands: ‘You, okay, let’s go and do something.’ The girls also wanted it.”

Sampa went to the Copperbelt to complete his primary education there. However, he would return for holidays to his grandparents’ village where he would enjoy the attentions of a number of girls. He remembered one four-week holiday while he was in grade seven, when he had sexual intercourse with no less than eight girls. He attributed his attraction to his being a “townsman”: “The girls in the village were just

on me. They thought, ‘This guy, he’s from town! He’s better than these guys at the village.’” At fifteen, Sampa contracted venereal disease. Frightened, he was sure the disease would make him impotent, if it did not kill him. In his distress he went to his great-grandmother who first whipped him for “playing with girls” and putting his education at risk. She then gave him “traditional medicine” and he seemed to recover.

At the age of twelve, Paul was warned by his father to be “careful” and not get too involved with girls, but rather to be “strong” and wait until he had finished his education. Paul thought that this advice gave him some kind of direction. Unaware of condoms during his primary education, he recalled that he tried as much as possible not to have sex. His behaviour was driven by the fear of causing a pregnancy and then both having to face the responsibility and the embarrassment. He did not consider making a girl pregnant “cool”. Besides, though girls at primary school would write him love letters and propose relationships – evidently girls were capable of making the first move - Paul had little interest in responding to them. The fellow pupil who had tried to be his mentor in sexual matters could not persuade Paul at least to experiment with a girl. Paul recalled that in grade seven, “Secretly within me I didn’t care one way or the other. I didn’t care whether I succeeded or not in those ventures. Maybe I didn’t really want to succeed, you know.” In retrospect, at forty, he considered that his sexual development had lagged behind his physical development. He reflected that it was perhaps his “late” development that had protected him from what he now considered premature sexual activity and from the risk of early exposure to HIV experienced by many of his school contemporaries.

### ***Muti***

Several boys and young men, especially those in the rural areas, obtained love potions and aphrodisiacs from “bush doctors” in order to attract girls. Some of these medicines were cigarettes made from various plants and herbs to be smoked while chanting the name of the girl they wanted to “hook”. While some boys disdained the use of any aphrodisiacs, claiming they were “strong” or “energetic” enough already, or that herbs and roots were dangerous when associated with the spirit world and, perhaps, malign forces, many were eager to obtain them in order to enhance their “sexual strength”. Some preparations were composed of roots soaked in water. A boy would either drink the medicine or apply it to his penis. Enoch had a distressing

experience with such medicine, some roots given to him by a classmate, while he was at primary school. His penis became so swollen that urinating became extremely painful. Promise recalled using ants with his friends when he was very young in an attempt to increase his sexual power:

“We used to take those very small ants, the brown ones that make holes. We were told by older boys to put them onto our breasts – those small breasts, the nipples. When you put them there, they would bite you and the breasts would get swollen. Now when the breasts got swollen, they said you would have more power, more sperm.”

### **St. Antony’s**

In the 1980s interviews young men, with few exceptions, maintained that pre-marital sex was “normal”. In student initiation – called “mockery” newcomers had to prove their manhood and thereby their right to belong in tales of sexual experience given in a speech at night in the dormitories.<sup>30</sup> Sex was to be enjoyed. Many of young men spoke of “playing” sex, a direct translation from local languages such as the Bemba verb *ukukwangala*, “to play”. Yet, while sex before marriage was to be enjoyed, for many it was still “against the Bible”, “like stealing” and therefore “a sin”. Some expected God to punish them for their sexual activity because the proper place for sex was marriage. While they greatly appreciated the education offered by the Catholic Brothers, who vowed to live a celibate life and who were dedicated to the Virgin Mary, they were puzzled by the expressions of masculinity the missionaries embodied. Many expressed their scepticism that Catholic missionaries did indeed live according to their declared ideal.<sup>31</sup> A celibate person could not, in their view, ever be truly happy. First there was the need to find “relief” from the sexual tension a “normal” person must feel. Beyond that, sexual activity was a way of keeping

<sup>30</sup> See *Half-London* pp. 128 – 134.

<sup>31</sup> Richards [1940] (1969) observes that Bemba attitudes revealed that they considered sex intercourse as “necessary to normal well-being, and a pleasure to which all are entitled”. She comments: “Chastity in the sense of complete abstinence is not a recognised ideal at any stage of life, whether before or after marriage, and the bulk of pagan Natives consider the pre-nuptial chastity demanded by the missionary as an almost fantastic conception – to judge from some of their comments – and the practice of

healthy. As they looked ahead, they stressed that for a boy to become a man he would have to have children; and this would entail sex.

In the early and mid 1980s HIV/AIDS was only just beginning to be mentioned in the media and what was being said sounded very far removed from the lives of secondary school students in a boarding school in rural Zambia. What had made AIDS appear such a remote threat in particular was that initial reports and campaigns placed great stress at first on “risk groups” such as “homosexual men”, and later truck drivers and commercial sex workers. On the point of homosexuality, students and former students were adamant about what they saw as the overwhelmingly heterosexual character of Zambian society. They repeatedly told me, “It’s you Europeans who are homosexuals. We African men, we like our women.” None of us could imagine how AIDS would soon come to dominate everyday life in Zambia.

Men described their anxiety to ejaculate as quickly as possible, an anxiety that for many continued into later adult life. They spoke of times when they had “failed” to ejaculate, or ejaculated prematurely outside the vagina, and some realised that they had “failed” to satisfy a woman.<sup>32</sup> Sexual activity was depicted in violent imagery. The ability to “fire” several “rounds” of sex at each session became for the majority an important index of manhood.<sup>33</sup>

Using the “scientific” language of school, they explained that their own early sexual activity was largely driven by the desire to “experiment” and gain the experience necessary for adult life and marriage. They feared that their wives might well have had considerable sexual experience and that they, as men, might be found wanting in their sexual performance. One source of information came in secondary school biology lessons, though these tended to focus on the “mechanics” of sex. There was little about relationships and emotions – though some of this was touched upon in religious education lessons which were compulsory in the junior school but an optional subject in the senior school. Many of the cohort did both parts of the

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celibacy as incredible.” (1969: 15) See also H. F. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-speaking Women in Zambia in a Century of Religious Change*, Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> See L. Segal, *Slow Motion* (London, Virago, 1990) pp. 211-212, for the inherent potential in heterosexual performance for a man to experience a sense of failure, ineptness and confusion. Darius was alone in taking pride in premature ejaculation, claiming it as evidence of his greater than average sexual potency. See J. Holland, C. Ramazanoglu, S. Sharpe and R. Thomson, *The Male in the Head* (London: The Tufnell Press, 1998), for a similar focus on male performance among young men in British cities.

<sup>33</sup> The desire for several rounds of sex partially explains the men’s later preference for their women partners to be “tight and dry”.

course, though few of them referred to it in our conversations around the end of their school careers.

*Christian Living Today* (CLT, 1975), the senior religious education syllabus followed at St. Antony's, was taught throughout Zambia. Developed by a committee of Catholics and Protestants from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia for use in secondary schools in these countries, it was intended to replace the Cambridge Overseas Bible Knowledge syllabus and designed to be acceptable to a range of Christian churches. The emphasis at the preparatory workshops in the early 1970s was on "*education for life*" (1975:1), the starting point being "*the student's own experience*" (ibid) (italics in the original). One of the major themes of the course was "Man and Woman" divided into the sub-themes of "Family Life", "Sex Differences and the Person" and "Courtship and Marriage". An appendix on human sexuality described in ideal terms "Stages of Human Sexual Development" and "Aspects of Personality Development in Boys and Girls". Though not explicitly acknowledged, in the latter section, the influence of a rather benign interpretation of Freudian psychology is evident, especially, for example in the discussion of the father-son relationship (CLT: 132). There is no suggestion here of the fear of the father that the majority of men in the cohort recalled.<sup>34</sup> Again, regarding the period between the ages of 6 and 9, the syllabus contradicted childhood play experiences, noting "boys and girls at this age are not interested in their sexual differences" (ibid).

On other matters, aspects of the syllabus chimed well with the views of many of the young men, though they rarely made any reference to the religious education course. Their opinions on matters of sexuality covered a wide range. Student views on masturbation ranged from condemnation to qualified tolerance.<sup>35</sup> Some young men expressed opprobrium, at times on religious grounds. They said such practices were "against the Bible", though no one mentioned Onan, and besides masturbation entailed "wasting" semen and creating matter out of place. A number spoke of

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<sup>34</sup> See A. Simpson "Sons and Fathers/Boys to Men".

<sup>35</sup> Laqueur (2003) has recently outlined a cultural history of masturbation in the West, dating modern masturbation to around 1712 and the publication of the tract 'Onania'. He details its move "from the distant moral horizon to the ethical foreground" (2003: 18), and its history from "heinous sin" and later "crime", though Freud's depiction of masturbation as a developmental stage and beyond into the late twentieth century when it was claimed by some as an "instrument of freedom". (2003: 22) Laqueur finds Foucault's account of the surveillance of masturbatory practices in the development of biopower [1976] (1990) lacking as it omits "the story of the joint march of commercial culture and civil society", both crucial in the history of what Laqueur argues remains a taboo topic in western culture. (Laqueur, 2003: 274; 296)

masturbation as “abnormal” and an excessive interest in self-masturbation was thought to lead to or be an indication of homosexuality. Self-masturbation was dealt with briefly and sympathetically in the syllabus, though students agreed that it could become “a very troublesome habit” (CLT: 132). Mutual masturbation was not mentioned in the course book.

Elders warned boys that masturbation would lead to impotence.<sup>36</sup> Many students among them Kangwa, Henry and Enoch, who all identified themselves as Catholics, saw nothing wrong, though they did not find it “exciting”. Some boys had made the discovery entirely on their own, others had been taught by male peers. Like attitudes to same-sex sex, the general opinion was that masturbation could not provide much pleasure. In general, young men had thought of masturbation simply as a means of “relief” from the build-up of pressure caused by the absence of regular sex, though they spoke also of the need for a degree of self-control. Among the teenagers, frequency was an issue. Once or twice a month, for some, was considered reasonable; more frequent than that was thought to lead either to a disinterest in women and or an inability to satisfy them, often because of premature ejaculation. The general attitude was that there was little need to masturbate at school as one could always find a girl, either in the villages around the school or during visits to the nearby town. However, it was recognised that some young men were too shy, lacking the “courage” and facility with persuasive words required to “hook” a girl.<sup>37</sup>

### **Competitive masturbation**

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<sup>36</sup> Colson (1958) observes that among the Plateau Tonga young children engaged in masturbation as part of their sexual experimentation: “Small boys and girls masturbate without any notice being taken of it by older people, and small boys occasionally engage in mutual masturbation in public. That some stigma may attach to the practice, however, is suggested by the reaction of a child if someone comments on the matter. Two little girls giggled when they saw a 4-year-old masturbating and announced, ‘John pulls himself (*ku-li-kwela*). At this the child set up a howl and rushed off in tears and the two imps giggled with delight at the uproar they had caused.” (1958: 272) See Richards (1969: 16, note 2), where she mentions evidence of mutual masturbation as an indication of homosexual activity among boys. Both Richards (1969: 16) and Colson (1958) describe young girls meeting in small groups to practise the custom of enlarging the labia by stretching, as a preparation for full adult sex life. Richards observes that some of the young girls who met in small groups to practise stretching the labia sometimes joined up in pairs and referred to each other as husband and wife.

<sup>37</sup> See A. Simpson “Courage, Conquest and Condoms: harmful ideologies of masculinity and sexual encounters in Zambia in the time of HIV/AIDS”, in Douglas A. Feldman, (forthcoming 2005), “*AIDS, Culture and Africa*”, Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida.

Dominic at forty, like several others, recalled competitive masturbation to ejaculation with age-mates in demonstrations of the achievement of manhood.<sup>38</sup> Regular masturbation was thought to assist in enlarging the penis even if it risked some loss of semen and hence fertility. Promise described his own experience of masturbation from the age of ten or eleven years of age, over a period of more than two years, involving not only age-mates but considerably older boys, indeed, young men who took an active role. In Promise's account, as in those of others, the association between physical strength, sexual strength and social capital is clear. This activity had to remain secret from parents at home where such things were never mentioned between parents and children. Herd boys were paired to fight according to what were judged to be their relative sexual potency:

“It used to be very interesting. The older boys used to make us fight. Fight! Maybe, they could first of all start with animals. First the animals fight – bulls from different kraals. Then later we make a ring. We start fighting. First they see if you produce sperms or not. You see they were trying to find the right person to fight with. If you do not produce sperms – the two of you fight. If you produce sperms – the two of you – then you fight. These bigger boys – well, some of them were young men, some even twenty years old - we used to move with them when we were herding, well, they were forcing us to masturbate. Some of those bigger boys, they were at school with us. Others had already stopped. They were just herdsmen. At times, they would masturbate us, especially when you were just brought in the group at the beginning, but also later; they could come and start masturbating you. I really don't know why they would do that. Well, sometimes they could just come there. Maybe you are masturbating, but maybe you are doing it slowly. At times they wanted to find out who produced sperms fast, who released sperms faster than the others. You start, ‘On your marks, get set, go!’ You all start masturbating. Then they would find out who releases faster. So sometimes they would masturbate you. Now being faster - ah, you are praised, you are praised, ‘He's a man! He's a man! Yeah! He's the fastest! He's a man!’ So you see speed was important. One, the speed, two, the pressure at which the stuff was produced, that is the distance when you are standing. Yes, these are the

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<sup>38</sup> See E. O. Laumann and J. H. Gagnon, “A Sociological Perspective on Sexual Action” in R. G. Parker and J. H. Gagnon (eds.), *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*, New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 201-202, for discussion of such “circle jerks” elsewhere.

two things. They were telling us to do it, trying to find out our manhood. Whenever we met, we were asked to masturbate. And mostly what attracted these bigger boys was the power, the power – that is the strength at which the sperms were released. You see, there were those other sperms which were just released. I mean they could come out just like water. But then there were those sperms which were released with strength – shooting up, yes. At times you could do it lying, at times standing. Yes. They would be looking at you, judging who was stronger by judging how far the sperms were going. If you were the best they would shout “You are a man! You are a man!”(laughing)

Promise did not remember feeling shy when masturbating with other boys or being masturbated by them, though he would later feel shy when he first had sexual intercourse with a girl. Rather he recalled the pleasure he felt in being praised by other boys when he was found to be the “best” in the production of semen. He delighted in being recognised as “the boss” among his age-mates who had to obey his orders and perform the tasks he had formerly had to perform, like going in search of a stray animal. He enjoyed the sexual pleasure, the sense of relief, but he did not consider this activity as in any way out-of-the-ordinary. It was, he explained, “just something that used to happen – a form of leisure – just part of us”.

The number of sexual partners, especially in concurrent relationships, rapidly became for some the measure of their achievement of manhood and a form of contraception. Henry would normally have at least two girlfriends with whom he could have sex, like in his last year at St. Antony’s. The girls knew about one another but were each prepared to continue the relationship. Henry commented, “I explained to them that being in a boarding school meant there was a shortage of girls and so naturally I wouldn’t want to turn anyone away.” He recognised a double standard in his inability to accept a girlfriend who had sex with other men, attributing his feelings to “male selfishness”. Throughout this period Henry had unprotected sex, partly because of his preference to “chance” and “go live” and partly because, being young and *looking* young, he was unable to overcome the chagrin he imagined he would feel should he attempt to buy condoms at a chemist’s shop. “Chancing” was a preferable risk to the hazard of embarrassment.

Students noted that regular sex with the same partner often caused them to “lose interest”. The monotony caused them to seek another girlfriend, though they readily explained that a girl would at times also leave them for another boy, especially when she discovered that she was not the only one the boy was having sex with. At St. Antony’s, boys preferred to have partners from what they considered the same “class”, that is girls at secondary schools. The most sought- after girls were convent-educated.<sup>39</sup> In senior school, there was a lot of competition for girls among classmates, many of whom had an ambivalent attitude towards venereal disease. Some considered it a sign of carelessness or evidence of a lack of success in attracting the right “class” of girls. A lack of discrimination had led them to choose “finished” girls, obvious sources of infection.<sup>40</sup> As a secondary school student, Edmund had never used condoms. AIDS was not yet on the horizon for Edmund, and as to the risks of pregnancy or venereal disease, he observed at 38:

“The fear of pregnancy was never there until it happened. On two occasions I was said to have made a girl pregnant, but I don’t believe it was me. The risk of contracting a venereal disease from a girlfriend was very slim, unless one went to a prostitute. But those days I used to be conscious of class. It wasn’t a question of a girl’s beauty. We had a clique of girls – a few notables you could go out with. So the question of venereal diseases did not arise.”

At school, especially in their last year, many boys also had local girlfriends who lived in the villages surrounding St. Antony’s and who were either attending primary school or who had “dropped out” at grade seven. It was among these girls that most pregnancies occurred – or at least pregnancy cases were brought.

The boys and young men routinely gave their regular girlfriends presents. Some described this gift-giving as a way of thanking them for sex, even though, they noted, “traditionally” after intercourse, a woman, especially a wife, was supposed to kneel and clap her hands to thank her husband for sex. Others did not want to link the presents with a sexual transaction – preferring to consider them as expressions of

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<sup>39</sup> See A. Simpson *‘Half-London’ in Zambia*, p. 134.

<sup>40</sup> Henry at forty spoke of one of his best friends at school who had recently died of what was expected to be AIDS. In his view his friend had “got excited” because of the money he was making. Henry commented that he had always been poor at choosing “safe” girls to have sex with.

love and affection.<sup>41</sup> At primary school gifts had been a pen, paper, an exercise book, biscuits or other food or a small amount of money. Beyond the expression of gratitude, boys were conscious that they had to make efforts to keep a girlfriend for themselves. These were expressions of power and attempts to control their sexual partners. Kangwa explained: “One reason I gave my girlfriends presents is that I noticed when my partner was in need. The other reason was that I wanted to be seen to be in control of a girl in case other boys were also interested in her. There was always competition. You needed to prove that you were the right one.” However, some girls proved too demanding, wanting to be provided with coca cola and to be taken to the cinema, things that Kangwa could rarely afford. Giving presents remained a feature of men’s later pre-marital and extra-marital relations.

### **Birth Control**

In the religious education syllabus the term birth control was used as a synonym for planned parenthood. The syllabus did not set out only Catholic teaching that forbade anything other than abstinence and the rhythm method. Rather the course book highlighted the importance of having sufficient requirements to bring up children in an adequate manner. There was no mention of condoms, though these were presumably implied in the reference to “mechanical devices”, which, it was claimed, provided no protection from venereal diseases (CLT: 141).

The absence of condom use at teenage sexual debut among the cohort has several possible explanations. Many men said that, as students, they simply had not known about condoms or where to obtain them. There was the added problem about *how* to use them. Inexperienced and yet anxious to appear competent at intercourse, no one wanted this pretence to be undermined by an evident lack of familiarity with condoms. There was almost complete agreement that condoms reduced the pleasure of sex for the man. Kangwa never used condoms because, he explained, they “taxed”

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<sup>41</sup> M. Hunter, “The Materiality of Everyday Sex: thinking beyond ‘prostitution’, *African Studies, Volume 61, Number 1*, 2002 discusses the materiality of everyday sex in a township and an informal settlement in Kwazulu-Natal and rejects the simplistic label of “prostitute”. He notes the importance of the distinction between sex linked to subsistence and sex linked to consumption. Seeking the principal cause of HIV infection, he identifies the close association between sex and gifts as a central factor driving multiple-partnered sexual relationships. Hunter illustrates the instability of masculinities in times of economic decline in contexts where “real men” are portrayed or portray themselves as providers for women. See also S. Leclerc-Madlala, “Youth, HIV/AIDS and the Importance of Sexual Culture and Context”, *Social Dynamics 28:1 (2002): 20-40*.

[reduced] some of the feeling and in addition they encouraged “carelessness”. As young men, and in later life, many men did not ask whether a female partner lost sensation and pleasure when a condom was used. The minority who did said that women also reported a reduction of pleasurable sensations. Beyond this, many young men said that condoms were not “natural” and therefore should not be used in the intimacies of sex. Their notion of natural was inextricably bound up with their belief that God had created the world and the human beings in it. The God of Genesis had said “Go forth and multiply” and this should have nothing artificial about it, they explained, even though most continued to fear causing pregnancy.<sup>42</sup> The first few occasions when Darius had sex with a new girl he used condoms, but subsequently he did not, partly because of the loss of sensation he experienced, but also, because he soon “developed faith” in the girl. Like others, in a relationship that lasted over a period of time, ceasing to use a condom was an affirmation of trust that the partner was “clean” and free of disease. This discontinuation of condom use was a familiar pattern in men’s adult extramarital relationships. At no time, as a teenager or later in his life did Hambayi use condoms. Like the majority of his schoolmates, he associated condoms with prostitution and its promotion.<sup>43</sup>

Their antipathy towards condoms caused many of the cohort to alternate between partners with some frequency. In contrast to complaints about the monotony of staying with the same partner, many judged that the longer a relationship lasted, and the more accustomed to and eager the boy became for regular sex, the greater the risk of causing a pregnancy. By moving from girl to girl, and by having two or three girls at the same time, a boy felt he could protect himself from the risk of causing a pregnancy. As the girls would have different “safe periods”, the young man was more likely to feel it was safe to have sex with at least one of the girls at any particular time. In the opinion of many young men, if someone was using condoms it was evidence that his sexual activity was “excessive”. By relying upon the “safe period”, the boys placed the responsibility upon the girl, the extra burden of particular knowledge of the workings of her body which had to be tamed and domesticated for male pleasure and satisfaction. Chimbala, who was later to die from what was

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<sup>42</sup> As teenagers and again in middle age, men of all religious denominations and none, repeatedly stressed to me that God, and *only* God made babies. Human beings had sex but it was God who decided whether their intercourse would result in a child.

<sup>43</sup> Many of the men – and their wives – continued to make this association when they became parents and criticised ABC campaigns as encouragement to their children to engage in premarital sex.

suspected to be AIDS, at twenty, said he had never used a condom. His sexual debut at sixteen, while in grade nine, took place in a dark alley outside a disco in town on the day schools closed for the holidays. He explained that he relied on the “safe period”:

“At one time I had three girlfriends at the same time. They didn’t know about one another. I was frightened of possible pregnancies. I always check the girl’s period and make sure that the girl is mature and that she knows her own body. If she says, ‘No, I’m not alright’, then I leave her alone.”

Among the cohort of young men, there was considerable suspicion regarding the contraceptive pill, largely because they had heard that it could cause cancer.<sup>44</sup> Though he had his second episode of venereal disease, in junior secondary school, Sampa rarely used condoms because of the reduction in sensation and the girls he had sex with did not demand them either. He thought his attitude towards condoms was shared by most of his close friends with whom he regularly compared notes. However, Sampa differed from them in that he supplied his own girlfriends with stolen contraceptive pills. He had heard that the pill might cause cancer, but had decided that this was “a story put out to threaten [discourage] us”. By the end of grade ten, two of his closest classmates had each fathered two children with different young women. During his senior secondary school, he had another three girlfriends with whom he regularly had sex. At times he and his friends would be involved in fights with other groups of young men over girls. Sampa started drinking beer in grade eleven. Taking beer before having sex made using a condom even less likely. In addition to the possible loss of sensation, in Sampa’s experience the combination of beer and a condom meant that it would take him “too long” to ejaculate and so he preferred to “go live”. In later life many adult men recognised that under the influence of beer they were most likely to have unprotected sex, though some blamed

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<sup>44</sup> The anxiety about a link between the contraceptive pill and cancer appeared to lessen as they grew older. Men preferred this contraceptive option because of their reluctance to use condoms; most of their wives and sexual partners were either taking a contraceptive pill or regularly having contraceptive injections. However, at times they made “mistakes”, some of them leading to abortions. Often the decision for a woman to take contraceptive medicine was jointly made. Its effect, however, was also to give men almost unrestricted access to sex without having to wear a condom that many said spoiled sex. Besides, condoms made it more difficult to achieve a speedy ejaculation. While some men boasted that others who “took time” to ejaculate with a condom were simply lacking in strength, a minority explained that they had come to appreciate the pleasures of having sex slowly.

Satan when they “gave in to temptation”. Almost without exception, where AIDS was concerned, men saw women as a threat to them but they did not often appear to see themselves as a potential threat to the well-being of the women they had sex with.

## **Conclusion**

Young men in the 1980s said they were also always conscious of the need to “carry convincing stories back to school”, though some, like Paul, recalled that they were often able to concoct some simply from listening to others telling of their holiday adventures. In later life, despite some marriages that clearly challenged the prevailing gender order, fieldwork revealed that many adult men among the cohort and their contemporaries remained under the sway of the often unspoken contest with other men to prove their virility. They continued to feel the pressure of the peer group. In numerous instances this led them to have multiple partners and to engage in unprotected sex. They remained anxious to prove their manhood. To demonstrate to other men – and at times to other family members – that they were not “under petticoat government”, on leaving home, they would not disclose their whereabouts or the expected time of their return. Some explained that they feared that other women would question their manhood if they did not try to have a sex with them.

Former students, both as young men and in later life, regularly based their claim of ‘superiority’ over women on men’s supposed greater physical strength and greater intelligence and upon women’s greater susceptibility to spirit possession. In addition they pointed to ‘African tradition’ which, they claimed, always gave men precedence over women and permitted polygamy and to ‘Christianity’ – especially the Creation story in the *Book of Genesis* – where, they stressed, it was clear that man was created *first* and thus should take precedence. This alleged superiority made their right to the ‘control’ of women in sexual relationships, or at least to appear to control women, particularly in marriage, axiomatic. While they readily repeated the phrase “Your wife is your mother”, few of them appeared to establish the kind of relationship of trust and openness that they continued to enjoy with their mothers in their relationship with their wives. Wives often commented, “Men are difficult” and “Men are children”. Many remained fearful of contracting HIV from their husbands.

In essays entitled “My Future Wife” they wrote for me in senior secondary school, many young men noted that, apart from the need for her to be beautiful, “light-brown in complexion” and, if possible, to have “a triangular nose, like a European”, they expected their future wife to be “obedient”. At the same time they worried about having a troublesome or quarrelsome wife and expressed the hope that they would find someone who was kind and who would support them and advise them. On such hopes sex education must build, despite parents who continue to maintain that “sex education” simply means encouraging children to have sex.

During fieldwork, the topic of gender (in Zambia as elsewhere assumed to refer to matters concerning women!) was omnipresent in the talk in government offices, among civil servants, in NGO organisations and in the media. The fortunate few retreated to hotels in Siavonga, and lodges in game parks, for gender workshops. Yet many remained unconvinced of the possibility of change. A senior civil servant explained to me that despite these efforts, in his view, things would remain the same, commenting, “Ah, Tony, you have stayed with us long enough. You know what we African men are like!”

Men need to be disabused of this illusion of an abiding gendered self.<sup>45</sup> The recent history of Zambia demonstrates the mutability in constructions of gender and in gender relations themselves. The young Bemba husband, once described by Richards as an isolated stranger in his wife’s village, honoured in his role of *genitor* but not *pater*, would become, under colonialism and later in Independent Zambia, the labour migrant and the “breadwinner” in urban households. The Bemba wife, once the appointed person to approach the Transcendent would see her place usurped by a form of Christianity which appeared to offer little room for women among an all-male leadership. A male God would usurp the place of a genderless deity and Satan would take centre stage.<sup>46</sup> With men’s labour migration to urban centres it was the Bemba woman rather than the man who needed to be married. Urban existence would bring its own tensions in relations between men and women. Examples of bleak portrayals of 1950s married life on the Copperbelt would find echoes in urban ethnographies in

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<sup>45</sup> See J. P. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 140.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, E. Colson, “*Leza* into God: God into *Leza* in B. Carmody (ed), *Religion and Education in Zambia* (Ndola: Mission Press); H. F. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-speaking women in Zambia*.

the 1980s and 1990s. Economic decline and the enrichment of the few would give yet another twist to gender relations.<sup>47</sup>

The cohort belonged to a mission-educated elite, yet after school their life courses took different trajectories. Level of further education, type of employment and unemployment, economic power, foreign travel for work, and various personal attributes, all contributed to where the former students of St. Antony's situated themselves – or found themselves situated - in relation to local hegemonic notions of masculinity. All had lost family members, friends and work colleagues to AIDS. A number of their school contemporaries had died of what were suspected to be AIDS-related conditions. The men had the information and the means at their disposal to protect themselves and their sexual partners from exposure to the HIV virus and to avoid the risk of transmission. That *some* at times chose not to do so must be understood within a context where ideologies of masculinity and the vulnerability of men striving to appear as “real” men put them and their partners at risk in intimate sexual encounters. While the economic, political and social contexts of HIV/AIDS need urgently to be addressed, the recognition, especially by many boys and men, that change is both imperative and possible, and a desire on their part to change, should offer hope for future gender relations in Zambia. The crisis of AIDS might still offer the possibility of liberation for both men and women from oppressive gender regimes.

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<sup>47</sup> See A. Richards, *Chisungu: A girl's initiation ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia*, (London: Tavistock [1956] 1982); H. F. Hinfelaar, *Bemba-speaking Women in a Century of Religious Change*, (Leiden: Brill, 1994); H. Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); A. L. Epstein, *Urbanization and Kinship: The Domestic Domain on the Copperbelt of Zambia, 1950 – 1956* (New York: Academic Press); H. L. Moore and M. Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*, (London: James Currey, 1994); J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press); K. T. Hansen, *Keeping House in Lusaka*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).