

A HISTORICAL ANTECEDENT OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN AFRICA FROM RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Homosexuality is one of the most debated issues in most contemporary societies. Such debate starts with its origin, whether or not homosexuality results from one's upbringing, socio-cultural environment (nurture) or biology and genetics (nature). Religions on the other hand have been used to regulate human conducts in society, including human sexuality. However, in contemporary times, religious narratives have been given diverse interpretations other than the traditional one-pronged analysis perspective. Sexuality and religion are two issues that have elicited strong reactions, dividing expressions and a series of contrasting claims that draw variously upon peoples' experience, sacred writings and traditions. The paper employed an analytically enhanced qualitative research design. In-depth interviews were conducted with adherents from the three major religions in Nigeria: Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs). It was observed that homosexuality is still largely unpopular in Africa with Gambia, Nigeria and Uganda proscribing it owing basically to religious and cultural viewpoints. African religious leaders tend to dissociate the phenomenon from the continent despite anthropological evidence pointing to its practice in history.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Homosexuality, Islam, Religion

Introduction

Sexuality and religion are two issues which have elicited strong reactions, dividing expressions and a series of contrasting claims that draw variously upon peoples' experience, sacred writings and traditions. Although present in African societies for a long period, homosexuality is manifested more and more in recent times due to modern influence from the Western world. In 1990, The World Health Organization delisted homosexuality from its list of diseases. The Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) also does not consider homosexuality as a disease (Traore, 2015). This development has raised the concern of most scholars and theologians. Several theologians in their discussion on homosexuality distinguish between Western and African values referring to Western individualistic ethics of sexual freedom that accepts homosexuality as a morally acceptable lifestyle. They point out that in Africa, sexuality and relationships are not just an issue of the individual but of the general community.

Furthermore, they believe that sexuality and relationships would not just serve for pleasure but for procreation in the community. This cultural position does not permit homosexuality, and thus regarded as opposing conventional living (Kayiga, 2004; Benyah, 2019; Klinken and Obadare,

2018). For this reason, it is said to be objectionable and unacceptable in Africa (Chukwu, 2004). In line with this argument, African woman theologian Constance Shisanya (2002) refers to the cultural taboo on homosexuality to underline the prophetic role of the church in Africa to condemn homosexuality or same-sex relationship.

According to Bujo (2003), the fundamental anthropological conception in Africa is both bipolar: the dual human which consist of man and woman, and tri-polar; man and woman relationship which in some ways give room for triad, that is man-woman-child[ren] which make a full community as men and women continue to reproduce. As such, a man to man or woman to woman sexual relationship would not only be looked on as being informed by self-centredness which dares not take the step of full human existence. It also leads to a sexist discrimination against part of human race and shows an unwillingness to accept the enrichment that comes from heterogeneity.

Contrary to the general belief that homosexuality is un-African, scholars have argued that it has been practiced since the existence of human society. For example, Amory (1997) noted that there is a long history of diverse African people engaging in same-sex relations. In agreement with this stance, Ajibade (2013) further explained that the Yoruba people of West Africa practiced a 'culture of silence' on the presence and practices of homosexuality. Sogunro (2014) opined that the argument about homosexuality and African (Nigerian specifically) culture is weak because of the multiplicity of ethnic groups and myriad of often opposing cultural norms on gender within the country. He argued that the claim that homosexuality is unafrican poses several dangerous implications by presuming that somehow African sexualities are different from the rest of humankind.

Even in the Western world, opinions are divided as to how to understand and assess the status of people who do not belong to the binary category of sexual ordering. More so, the role of religion in this divide is of great concern. Most religious organizations oppose same-sex relationships because to them, it violates traditional understandings of scripture and years of teaching. However, within nearly every religious tradition, there are groups (perhaps not too vocal as a result of legal restrictions especially in many African countries) campaigning for this biological reality to be embraced.

The paper is hinged on creating awareness around the discourse on homosexuality and same-sex relationships. Additionally, it explores the influence of religion and its interpretations on the subject. In addition, it explores the perceptions it cultivates. As such, it is important that people become more enlightened about these issues as this will enable them to engage in constructive debates devoid of prejudice.

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life. It encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. It is experienced in several ways: thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles, and relationships. While sexuality can include many or all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Interestingly, it is influenced by biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (WHO, 2004).

The term sexuality can also be seen as how we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings, the awareness of oneself either as female or male which includes the capacity we have for erotic experiences and responses. Moreover, our knowledge of the gender roles in our specific cultural template has a profound influence on us. A concept that shares close affinity with sexuality is sexual orientation. According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2011), sexual

orientation refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one's own sex (homosexuality: gay or lesbian), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuality), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuality). While these categories continue to be widely used, research has suggested that sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories and instead occurs on a continuum. Furthermore, some research indicates that sexual orientation is fluid for some people; this may be especially true for women (Peplau and Garnets, 2000).

Religion on the other hand has been explained by several scholars, many of whom have failed to agree on a single definition. This is due to the nature of the concept that is not peculiar to any single society. Tylor (1871) defined religion as the belief in spiritual beings. He argued that narrowing the definition to mean the belief in a supreme deity or judgment after death would exclude many people from the category of religion. Thus, it has the fault of identifying religion rather with particular developments than with the deeper motive which underlies them. He argued further that the belief in spiritual beings exists in all known societies (Tylor, 1871). For Geertz (1993: 90) religion is a:

system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of general order of existence and clothing these concepts with ambience of facts such that the moods and motivations seem peculiar and realistic at the same time.

This definition to a large extent captures the intricacies of religion, both organized and unorganized. Basically, religious beliefs emanate from the inability of man's faculty to comprehend certain life experiences and the need to cling to some sort of supernatural forces to explain such phenomenon. Whatever understanding we have of religion; it is a concept and experience many people can relate with.

Religion and sexuality often appear in conflicting relationships in public sphere. For instance, religious voices have been at the forefront of opposition to same-sex marriage (Young et.al., 2015). Adamczyk (2017) explained that the general position of most religions towards homosexuality remains negative. Both religion and sexuality stir up strong responses from individuals and groups alike because they are usually understood as core components of identity. Religious groups have witnessed internal controversy and change regarding sexual diversity and religious ideologies related to same-sex marriage, sexual accountability of clergy, birth control, abortion, and violence against women and sexual minorities (Nedelsky and Hutchinson, 2008). In recent times, the discourse on how to best express one's sexuality in the religious domain has continued to grow despite rigid position being held by many religious conservatives on heteronormativity.

History of Same-Sex Attraction and Sexual Behaviour

The sexual orientation towards one's gender provides the existential terrain upon which gay; lesbian and transgender people negotiate their identities and life choices. Same-sex attractions and sexual behaviours is not a new experience. It has often been considered a consistent and normal feature of the human condition (Naphy, 2004). Before the advent of Christianity, there was very little religious or societal concern regarding same-sex sexual behaviour. Sexual choice was bound by two separate parameters, love and the need to procreate (Dahl, 2009). Thus, same-

sex attractions and sexual behaviours did not need to be hidden and were not stigmatized (Greenberg, 1988).

It is believed that the societal values and attitudes towards same-sex behaviours changed dramatically with the rise of Judaism. At this time, a new social construct for sex emerged. The sole purpose of sex would be procreation (Dahl, 2009), and thus, a man should not lie with a man the way he does to a woman. Leviticus 18:22 (KJV) described it as abomination (The Holy Bible). However, other societies maintained different understanding of such sexual phenomenon. For example, in the Eastern Mediterranean and Chinese societies, love and marriage were seen as two different experiences that need to be treated as distinct and possible. While the institution of marriage serves the purpose of procreation, same-sex relationships fulfil the need for love (Naphy, 2004).

As far as Christianity is concerned, the role of religious organisations and their leaders is demonstrated in the debate on homosexuality in the global Anglican Communion where a number of African Anglican bishops are leading the opposition against the ordination of homosexual priests and the blessing of same-sex marriages in American member churches (Hasset, 2007). Moreover, in public and in political discourses on homosexuality in African societies, the bible is found to play a major role. Given the controversy surrounding homosexuality and the role of Christianity in this debate, it is important to identify the various voices and arguments in the world of Christianity where homosexuality still triggers huge debates (Jenkins, 2007).

While religious belief systems and organizations play crucial roles in shaping the viewpoints on homosexuality, it is interesting to note that diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have been present in the continent for centuries. The first homosexual couples in Africa were believed to be Khnumhotep and Niankhnum in 2400 BC (Kerry, 2015). In pre-colonial times up to the early part of Africa's colonial history, group sex and offering of wives and female servants to visitors were normal practices. In Nigeria for example, the Hausa Bori or Hausa Animism was a cultural practice and main stay religion up until the 14th century. Homosexuality and bestiality were commonly practiced as part of the religion that focused on spirituality. The documentation of the Kuruwai (Lesbian guild) Yan Dauda (Homosexual guild) and Dan Daudu (Homosexual wife guild) confirms these experiences.

Same-sex marriage was also historically obtainable in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria (Keneth, 2012). Female warriors (Amazons) in Dahomey and Congo were culturally accepted and esteemed (UNESCO, 2014). The Chibadi men in Southern Africa dressed like women and behaved as such (Mehra, Lemieux and Stophel, 2019). Gender crossing with males adopting female gender roles were also well documented in the now geometrically carved out state of Angola.

The developmental process of early Judeo-Christianity saw same-sex attractions and sexual behaviour as abhorrent (Dahl, 2009). However, contemporary biblical scholars have asserted that Judaic law prohibiting same-sex behaviours were not intended as a widespread prohibition of same-sex behaviour. Rather, these laws addressed specific social problems: gang rape and sexual violence (Siker, 2007). Despite this claim, the Judeo-Christian ideals of sexuality spread quickly and became the new world order in terms of sexual relationship until recently. As recent as 1973, the APA deemed homosexuality to be a sexual disorder, furthering the impression of same-sex behaviour as "abnormal" in the first and second editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM I and DSM II) (APA, 2011). Individuals who identify as LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer and Intersex) have been targeted and sometimes considered criminals. In Uganda, legislation banning same-sex unions was signed by President Yoweri

Museveni on 29 September, 2005 and penalties for gay marriage were established in 2006. Under current Ugandan law, homosexual acts are punishable by imprisonment ranging from five years to life imprisonment (ILGA, 2015). Also, the Nigerian government on the 29 November, 2011 passed same-sex marriage (prohibition bill) into law. By implication, persons who entered a same sex marriage contract or civil union commit an offence and are each liable on conviction to a term of 14 years imprisonment.

Heterosexism appears to be a form of oppression which asserts that heterosexual relations are the norm and each of us is unquestioningly assumed to be heterosexual. This assumption is embedded in our social institutions and values and thus, heterosexual couples are afforded privileges and advantages which same-sex couples are denied. For many heterosexuals, homosexuality is often strange and new to them and different from their sexual behaviour (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Homophobia, internalized homophobia as well as heterosexism within society have been found to impact the psychosocial development of queer adolescents and young adults (Morrow and Messinger, 2006).

Today, some of the inhibiting factors towards same-sex attractions and social forces of stigmatization are slowly changing. Laws against such experience are no longer consistent. Sexual minority couples can have a marriage performed and recognized in Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Argentina, Brazil, France, South Africa, the United States of America and more. Yet, there are 79 to 81 countries where same sex attraction is illegal (ILGA, 2015). Such countries in Africa include Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Nigeria, Uganda and more. Although discrimination and prejudice persist, Diamond (2005) noted that society is slowly changing, and over the past 30 years, both the visibility and affirmation of same-sex attractions and behaviours have increased.

Religion and Same-Sex Attractions

Sands in Siker (2007) gave an analysis of the diverse interpretations, relationship and contradiction as obtainable in different world religions in their book *Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopaedia*. However, for the purpose of this study, only the three most popular religions in Nigeria which are ATRs, Christianity and Islam are discussed.

African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Same-Sex Attraction

ATR is a way of referring to several beliefs and practices of indigenous people of Africa, especially as these practices have been handed down to successive generations for centuries. It is difficult to know when these religious practices started because they are mostly obtainable in oral history. However, they are often polytheistic in nature and are usually in contrast to Christianity and Islam in both attributes and practices.

In ATR, deities take variety of gender forms. While some are described as both male and female for example, some transform between intervals every year as in the case of the Yaka people of Congo and Angola. Rituals could also defy gender boundaries. Among the Lugbara people of Uganda, the Agules, female-born priests live as males. Among the Yoruba people of West Africa, spirit-possession is primarily the role of women priests even as male priests. The Mugawe dresses as women, complete with women's hairstyle, in preparation for being possessed by spirits among the Meru of Kenya (Murrey, 1998). In Cameroon, Gabon and Guinea, the Fang peoples engage in male-to-male intimacy to promote prosperity and in North-Central Africa, Odoyo (2014) noted that the Azande women have ritual ceremonies for entering premarital lesbian relationships.

Islam and Same-Sex Attraction

In Islam, homoeroticism as Sands puts it traditionally has been seen as the sin for which Sodom was destroyed, and those who commit it are called “qaum Lot” or “Luti” (Lot’s People). Homoerotic acts are also condemned in sayings (hadith) attributed to the Prophet. According to most Sunni Muslims, religious law (Sharia) sets a fixed punishment which ranges from fine, flogging, imprisonment to death on homosexual practices. Although the Qur’an sets a high standard for religious freedom, most Muslims understand Islam not just as a religion but as a theocratic political process meant to regulate both adherents’ religious and civic duties.

Sharia law has been instituted in many Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Chechnya, Libya, Algeria, and parts of Nigeria, and pressure to institute Sharia exists in other Muslim countries. In countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nigeria and Pakistan, homosexual practices are punishable by stiff penalty, and this penalty has been enforced in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan (under the Taliban regime). Moreover, Islamic condemnation of homosexual practice can have implications for criminal justice system in Muslim countries even when Sharia is not the law of the land such as Mauritania and Egypt where it is punishable by death, or up to five year’s incarceration respectively.

However, Sharia law is subject to a range of interpretations that may mitigate the punishment of homosexual practices. To most Sunni’s, homosexual practices belong to a class of crime for which evidentiary standards are so high that, if not done in public, is highly difficult to prove. For this reason, some scholars concluded that Islam is only interested in the preservation of heteronormativity as a public moral standard. This conclusion if correct thus creates more space for LGBTQI rights at least at the level of private relationship. Whether this is enough is another debate from the legal purview.

Al-HaqqKugle (2010) in his book *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* noted a passage of the Holy Quran which most Muslims cherish reciting to oppose the evils of racial superiority, ethnic chauvinism, and class arrogance. It says:

O people, we created you all from a male and female and
made you into different communities and different tribes So
that you should come to know one another, acknowledging
that the noblest among you is the one most aware of God
(Quran 49:13).

Some Muslims use this verse of the Quran to accommodate issues on same sex attractions and condemn male sexism, gender injustice, and social stigmatizing of homosexuals. This verse is often cited in social media discussions of members of a support group for Muslims who are lesbian, gay, or transgender in the U.S. called Al-Fatiha Foundation. Its members see themselves as a community of people who like the tribes and communities of the Quranic verse are a natural result of human diversity as it is created by God’s divine will.

Same-Sex Attraction and Christianity

Historically, the Church’s stance on sexuality was for procreation only. Celibacy was idealized as a sexual ethos felt to be supernatural in its reliance on grace and its connection with elite spirituality. Non-procreative sex in all forms including bestiality and masturbation was seen as unnatural and thus frowned at. However, Boswell (1980) argued that homoerotic relationships

existed, and were even celebrated for long periods in Christian monasticism. Only in the latter half of the twelfth century did the Christian church systematically persecute people involved in such practice. The Protestant Reformers insisted on procreative marriage and disapproved of celibacy, which they linked with homosexuality.

In contemporary times however, the debate over the rights of homosexuals is very intense. Some Christians believe that same-sex attraction and homosexual practices are voluntarily sinful behaviour, which if embraced assaults the very foundations of society. They are likened to the Sodomites and their activities vehemently castigated with bible references such as Leviticus 18:22; 20:13, Romans 1:27, I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10. There are also others whose perspectives to understanding the phenomenon are more liberal. This group sees homosexuals as an identity group in need of civil right protection. They also believe that citizenship must not depend on religious conviction. This other group remain unpopular in Africa where government legislations have been enacted to restrict such union.

The analysis of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19: 2 (KJV) is a popular premise for the debate of homosexuality or same-sex attraction. The main characters being Lot, a relative of Abraham, and his daughters who lived in Sodom. God had already decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of the wickedness of its people. Abraham had pleaded with God to spare the cities on behalf of the righteous, and God promised not to destroy the cities if only ten righteous people were found there. Unfortunately, this criterion was not met. The story begins with two angels coming in the form of two travelling strangers. Lot being a hospitable person encouraged them to pass the night in his home and continue their journey the next day, a deal they agreed to. However, that evening, the men of the city surrounded Lot's house and called on him to bring the two strangers out to them, "so that we may know them." Lot's response to their requests show that the men of the city were not well intentioned as to "know" the visitors indicates that the men of the city plan to rape Lot's two guests.

What then is the crux of the historical account? Can we conveniently conclude that the experience was a pure case of homosexuality or sexual violence?

Methodology

The study upon which this paper is based is designed as an analytically enhanced qualitative research design. Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with three participants from the three major religions in Nigeria: Islam, Christianity, and ATR. The samples were drawn using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to find interviewees. The data obtained were thematically analyzed.

Presentation of Findings

In considering the viewpoint of religious leaders on the issue of sexuality and same-sex marriage in Nigeria, respondents believe that sexuality is an issue people never want to discuss or rather shy away from although it is a reality of life. A Pentecostal Christian cleric believes that the idea of homosexuality or same-sex relationship is as old as African society itself. He believes that homosexuals are normal human beings who have decided to express their sexual orientation. In his words:

Homosexuals are normal human beings like any other person. It is just that they tend to identify themselves the way they see themselves. We should just not castigate them and we just let them be (sic). As a pastor, I believe when the

word of God finds a way in their hearts they can change.
They are accepted in the Western world and even in some
African countries.

However, the opinions of the other Christian clerics were a departure from the above perhaps liberal viewpoint. To them, these practices are totally un-African. They are imported cultures brought in through colonialism which has allowed Africans to imbibe and express strange cultures and ideas. These strange cultures now include how young people dress and make their hair. One of the instruments they identified to be promoting these trends of sexual experience is the new or digital media. Basing their argument on a biblical premise, they referenced the experience of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who engaged in these acts and were destroyed. They pointed to the propagation of this sexual phenomenon as a sign of end time when strange things would happen. One of these clerics stated further that:

Homosexuality is a practice of the highest state of madness.
Though it is practiced in some societies, but it is not
accepted. The Church can accept anybody as member, but
you would not encourage it. It is an abnormal way of life and
those people who practice it do react abnormally and they
exhibit a lot of fear because they know they are not
accepted.

This viewpoint was buttressed by the three adherents of ATR who also believe that homosexuality is not African. In the words of one of the ATR adherents:

Homosexuality as a concept is not African and even as a
practice it is alien and not conceivable. It is a desecration
and a taboo and has no place in African traditional religion
for anything that affects equilibrium would not be allowed
to survive.

He stated further that homosexuality is an influence and product of modernity, and thus, a distortion of African cosmology. In the history of the Yoruba race which he belongs, it is absent and traditional religion would not allow it to exist because the Yoruba people are always very concerned about maintaining social equilibrium and normalcy. In his words: “aye Yoruba, o tuba, o tuse, osi gun.” [Sic: The world of the Yoruba is calm and tranquil]

In an interview with three Muslim clerics on their views on sexuality and same-sex relationship, the first cleric, identified as Alfa believes that it is normal for a living and healthy person to have erotic feeling but heteronormativity must be maintained as public moral standard, the reason God created human beings as male and female. In his words:

As a Muslim, ni igba ti Olorun se eda wa, o se wa ni t’ako t’abo.
Bi Olorun se fe niyen, ti koba je be ni, ko ni da wa ni tako tabo.
Eni ti o ba nwa se oun ti o yato si eleyi nkuna si ofin Olorun ni”.
[Translation: When God created us, He created us male and
female. That is the way God wants it. If not, he wouldn’t have
created us male and female. Whoever does things contrary to
this is transgressing the law of God]

Another Islamic cleric identified as Alhaji strongly believes that sexuality is an essential human behaviour. To him, anyone that is normal will have sexual feelings because it is the commandment

of God. Once the desire comes, it goes to the brain and then to the body. He however emphasized that heterosexuality should be the normal and ideal practice in any human society.

As to whether these practices are obtainable in African culture, Alfa believes that although they are, they are never sanctioned by the African [Nigerian] cultures which he knows of. He further stated that such practices wherever they happened are always enshrouded in secrecy because they bring about shame and stigmatization on anyone involved. Alhaji in his words believes that the practice of homosexuality and bestiality is obtainable in northern Nigeria dominated by the Hausa. He emphasized it not to be for pleasure but for spiritual purposes like money rituals and other forms of spiritual fortifications. In his words, “Ti won ba so pe o wa, won o puro. Won ma fi nse ogun owo ni ile Hausa. Asa yi wopo laarin awon okunrin, kosi fun obirin.” [Translation: If they say it happens, they have not lied. They use it for the purpose of money ritual in Hausa land. This practice is common among the men; it is not for the women].

However, he noted that these practices are being embraced in some parts of Africa not because they want it but owing to pressure from Western countries like the United States of America and some European Union member countries for economic benefits and other assistance that might come their way. The Christian Pentecostal cleric also believes that same-sex relationship is being practiced in some African societies but not as approved cultural sexual practices. To him, sexual relationships in African culture are mainly tied to procreation and not necessarily pleasure.

The viewpoints of the representatives of the three religions were very similar and point to the unpopularity and unacceptability of this sexual phenomenon especially in Nigeria. The Pentecostal cleric made it clear that such practice is frowned at by the Christian faith. He described it as a grievous sin that made God destroy the people involved in it by referring to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament.

Alfa analysed the story of Prophet Lot in the holy Quran and how God frowned at and proscribed same-sex relationships by revealing stern warning to the people through his prophets. Alhaji believes that such acts express itself in the natural disasters including tsunamis and earthquakes that usually occur to humans in the course of history and in recent times. He warned that such disasters will continue as long as people do not desist from these acts which he describes as ungodly and abominable.

Adanwo ti o wa nbe ni ko da. Ki lo nje Tsunami, awon earthquakes
ati bee bee lo? Ilu ti oba tin se ni o ma ma ri awon adanwo yi nitori
won kuna si ilana Olorun” [Translation: The attendant tribulation
is not good. What is Tsunami, the earthquakes and so on? Any
country that embraces this will always experience these
tribulations].

In the attempt to know whether the respondents have seen any member of the LGBTQI community before, their answers were no. However, they confirmed that they do hear about such people and of such acts from people and through the print and electronic media. For the first Christian Pentecostal cleric, he confirmed that he has gotten information about their existence in different places including schools. In his words, “I have heard that they are so many in different places at schools and they even have social clubs, but I have not met anyone”

Can we then conveniently say that the expression of this sexual orientation comes naturally, and members of the LGBT community are only expressing their biological sexual make-up or the expression of these sexual orientations are diseases that needs to be medically or psychologically treated or better still, spiritual help be sourced to correct it if it is truly a mal-adjustment?

For Alhaji, he believes that it is not a disease but desire of the people who indulge in such acts. Alfa however believes that it is madness or actions perpetrated by evil spirit. He advised that anyone having this orientation should seek God in prayers to be healed or delivered. The Pentecostal cleric believes that those indulging in such practices need spiritual attention. He advised that such people should not be condemned but be preached to and led to Christ. The two other Christian clerics supported this position.

However, an adherent of the ATR suggested that such act should be restricted by all possible means, including very severe punishment to forestall its rise anywhere. This to him would be necessary in order not to invoke the wrath of the gods.

Discussion

As the debate on homosexuality and its place in the society rages on, religious institutions in Africa appear to have aligned and asserted their positions in strong terms. In the context of this study, two lines of arguments can be deduced. The first which is that, although homosexual practice does not conform to the societal standards of sexual expression, it is not alien to Africa, and as such, more spiritual and not legal measures should be activated to correct the 'maladjustment'. The second line of argument suggest that this practice should never find expression in African society and every action, including stringent legal restrictions would not be out of place to contain it, if necessary.

For example, while some prominent protestant churches in the United States and some parts of Europe have advocated for LGBTQI inclusion, several African churches have maintained a strong stance of refusing to recognize homosexuality or ordain LGBTQI clergy, even if this would require them breaking away from some international church affiliations (Heneghan, 2013; Arimoro, 2021). In the specific case of Nigeria, leaders of major churches have united in denouncing homosexual practice as perversion and are usually quick in endorsing legislations that proscribes it.

This debate appears to be less controversial from the data gathered from both the Muslim clerics and the adherents of ATR. To them, homosexuality distorts natural ordering of sexual relations and could attract severe punishment on human beings. For the former, only heteronormativity conforms with the law of God. Therefore, homosexuality would be "an adversary bearing a denaturalised vision of the gender-related sexual order" (Garbagnoli and Prearo, 2017: 10) and directly challenging the will of God over human. In the final analysis, despite anthropological evidence pointing to homosexual practices in Africa in history, the study reveals very little corroboration of this claim.

Conclusion

The debates on sexuality and sexual orientations in the religious circles have been very controversial especially in the more developed part of the world. While some see it as purely an issue within the scope of human rights essential to every individual, the idea of right or absolute freedom to live as you choose still appears to be religiously and culturally stupid to others. Many individuals are caught in the middle and are unsure of what to believe and how to place those who belong to these non-binary categories of sexual classification. The analyses as given by this study have shown a big divide between what is obtainable in literature analysis and what people choose to believe. Within the scheme of this discourse, religion has continued to play a significant role in the cultivation of perceptions. However, homosexuality and same-sex relationship as forms of sexual orientation are still largely unpopular in Africa with countries like Nigeria, Uganda and the Gambia enacting legislations to proscribe it.

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