

LGBT AND AFRICAN IDENTITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The researchers aim is not to debunk the notion that there is no trace of homosexuality in pre-colonial Africa. The researchers agreed, but argue that although African culture is no stranger to homosexual behaviors and acts; the recent attitudes towards LGBT in some African countries today, remains unnatural and not part of African identity. LGBT used here describes non-heteroromatic sexualities which involve physical, emotional or sexual intimacy with a member of the same sex. This article explains that colonialism, globalization, culture contact, gender separatism, economic instability and occultism are some factors that engender LGBT in Africa. The researchers also address surrogacy (surrogate parenthood) and the idea of a woman getting married to a fellow woman in some African countries particularly in Nigeria, Igbo land precisely as heterosexual, cultural and generally acceptable. This is because it happens only in a situation when a woman had no son or no child, if unfortunately, the husband died; it is culturally acceptable to get a wife of her choice like in every case of marriage, whom will be impregnated by a man as culture demands. So, refuting the idea of equating the above tradition with Homosexuality and the negative implications of homosexuality in Africa are the problems this article tends to tackle. Employing the method of critical analysis, this article submits that LGBT is alien to being African and should not be allowed to be legalized because it is a western import designed to destroy the African family.

Keywords: Africa; culture; identity; lesbian; gay; bisexual; transgender; homosexuality; heterosexuality; surrogacy

Introduction

African societies today still hold strong beliefs that LGBT is not part of African identity. But this does not mean that the act had never existed in the past. The fact remains that LGBT is an import from the west or rather as Van Klinken argued that Homosexuality is

caused by evil forces, and are a disgrace to African culture which must be condemned. To defend this assertion, digging deeper into African history with regards to LGBT and Homosexual behaviors will go a long way to help justify the assertion that these sexual pervasions are not part of African culture. The research also debunks the notion by Ilesanmi (2013), that since Africa is said to be the cradle of the human race, it can, therefore be logically inferred that Homosexuality started in Africa prior to the human race migrating to other places to spread its branches in different colors, shapes and sizes. In the same line, the research also refutes Zabus argument cited by Mnyadi (2014),... that African continent has always been more queer than is generally acknowledged. However, identifying the factors that engenders LGBT and proffering ways to drastically reduce the act in Africa becomes the main focus of this research.

What is the meaning of LGBT?

LGBTQ: This is an initialism that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual. The term may refer to anyone who is non-heterosexual, non-heteroromantic, or non-cisgender, instead of exclusively to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. (Wikipedia.org) A variant, LGBTQ, adds the letter Q for those who identify as queer or are (questioning) their sexual identity. Also, another variation, LGBTQ⁺, adds a plus sign, which represents people who are part of the community, but for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture their identity.

Gay/Homosexual: The term gay traditionally has been used to describe a diverse group or people who are in a relationship with people of the same gender or are attracted to people of the same gender. Homosexual or gay can be referred to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are mostly for the same gender; that is men who are attracted to men and women who are attracted to women.

Bisexual: Bisexual or “bi” simply refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are for both genders. Those who are bi-sexual are sexually or romantically attracted to both men and women, or to more than one sex or gender.

Lesbian: A lesbian is a homosexual woman or girl. The term refers to a woman who has a romantic and/ or sexual orientation toward women.

Transgender: This is an umbrella term that encompasses a diversity of gender expression including drag queens and kings, bi-genders, cross dressers, transgenderists, and transsexuals. Egbai citing Lobber in her lecture note in philosophy of gender, avers that transgender is a gender chosen by the individual; it is different from the one that comes with birth.¹ transgender often comes with or without surgical and hormonal transformation of bodies. People who engage in the transformation of their sex are called

trans-women or trans-men depending on who is involved. Here, a trans-woman is a person whose sex was formally male but has been somewhat transformed by the transgender technology. These people are also called female to male (FTM).

- Transvestites has to do with people who like to dress like members of the opposite sex.
- Transsexuals involves people who feel that their anatomical sex does not match the gender with which they identify.
- Bigender involves people who define themselves as having the behavioral, cultural or psychological characteristics associated with both the male and female genders.
- Trans-genderist describes someone who is gender variant or transgresses gender norms as part of their lifestyle or identity. (Mentalhelp.net)

Basically, in the west, this transgender and the likes are very common. In other words, it is legal and normal for certain individuals to change their sex at any given time and equally move freely without being hurt or arrested by anybody; however, these individuals, usually carryout this activity either by opting for the introduction of hormones, or by carrying out surgery to replace their genitals and mammary glands. Egbai maintains that transgender technology does not make a trans-woman to have female reproductive system: ovaries, fallopian tube and the uterus; just as it does not make a trans-man to have testicles and spermatozoa. Although, this is not our major focus here, still we need to know more about these practices. This will go a long way to help us to realize that the acts of transgender, homosexuality and bisexuality are totally un-Africa.

Understanding the term Identity

Identity itself and how it became the central issue in contemporary African Philosophy is itself very historical. Citing Wiredu, Oguejiofor and Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2015) argue that the question of African identity is not an attempt to apply the metaphysical laws of identity and excluded middle. Also, it is not whether Africans are Africans. It is rather a normative question, whether Africans are what they should be. According to Webster's Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus, the term identity means "the distinguishing characteristics of a person and personality". According to Nweke (2018), the nature and essence of a thing refer to its identity, which is what a thing is. He also stresses that identity is about the ontological status and definition of a thing. Nweke (2018) further gave some definitions of identity as;

- a. The state or fact of remaining the same one or ones, as under varying aspects or conditions: the identity of the finger prints on the gum with those on file provided evidence that he was the killer.
- b. The condition of being oneself or itself, and not another. He doubted his own identity.
- c. Condition or character as to whom a person or what a thing is: a case of mistaken identity
- d. The state or fact of being the same one as described.
- e. The sense of self, providing sameness and continuity in personality over time and sometimes disturbed in mental illnesses, as schizophrenia.

He then concludes that a thing is identified by its features and characteristics. In other words, the structural identity of a thing refers to its form. Similarly, in the words of Ndubisi (2013), the identity of a people refers to their cultural, socio-political or national characterization. He further adds that identity is the distinguishing characteristics of a person or being.

According to Mokhoathi (2021), the phrase “I am an African” has a proportional affinity to the notion of identity. (Oyserman, 2012), cited by Mokhoathi avers that identity refers to:

The traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is; identities can be focused on the past-what used to be true of one, the present-what is true of one now, or the future- the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become. Identities are orienting, they provide a meaning-making lens and focus one’s attention on some but other features of the immediate context.

From the various explanations above, it is believed that identity is what defines, characterizes or describes a person, people or group. It has a proportionate dimension that is closely linked to the past, the present and the future.

An Etymology of the Term Africa

Mokhoathi, (2021) puts it that Africa is a paradox. It is both a history and continent that has its own history. He argues thus:

It is a history because it contains the storied chronicles of its discovery, by western world, as a dark continent, infested by lions and savage creatures. For that reason, it has been perceived as marginal, subordinate and wild. It is a place where mines and their profits were discovered and where the native were annexed

as property of the colonizing countries. Africa has its own history because it bears witness to the lived experiences of native people who lived in it and continue to be sustained.

However, in a historical context, the origin of the term “Africa” is difficult to explain. This is because, for Mokhoathi, there are various theories to the emergence of the term. It became an accepted term during the time of the Romans and thereafter. Mokoathi further states that Romans used it as replacement word for the originally Greek or Egyptian word “Libya” which means “the land of the Lebu” or the Lubins. Mokhoathi maintains that by the end of the first Christian century, the word Africa came to be applied to the whole continent instead of the whole continent instead of the North African coast. Now, what was the original meaning of the term Africa? Various answers have been offered to this question. Beginning with the following explanations, Mokhothai has it that the following versions are offered:

The word Africa is thought to come from the name of a Berber people who lived to the south of carthage, the Afarik or Aourigha, whence Afriga or Africa to denote the land of the Afarik. Another derivation of the word Africa is that it comes from two Phoenician terms, one of which means an ear of corn, a fertility symbol in that region, and the other, pharikia, means the land of fruit. It is further suggested that the word comes from the Latin adjective aprica (sunny) or the Greek aprike (free from cold). Another origin might be the Phoenician root faraqa, which suggests the idea of separation or in other words diaspora.

The modern usage of the term “Africa” denotes a vast continent, which embraces a great number of socio-political, economic, and religious heritages and traditions.

African Culture and Identity

Ike Odimegwu (2006) in his writings presents a two-fold approach to the definition of African identity. What he called, human identity and cultural identity. For him:

Human identity exists at the material level but it further requires the service of consciousness for its definition...This consciousness is characterized by substantiality and rationality, locatedness and relatedness, growth and development, communality and interpersonal influences and evaluations.

Every people have a culture, and culture is changing all the time, whether slowly or rapidly. For these reasons says Mokhothai (2021), it is easy to understand that Africans, also, have a culture. Culture is a social construct that is learnt over time through practice and an entity that gives a particle group an identity that distinguishes them from other groups. Fafunwa (1974), explains how culture is transferable and learnt to newer groups.

For him, culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. This however, implies that each person, who lives in a given society, is likely to be infused by the cultural undertakings. This makes culture a relative practice that is learnt through observation. Within the African context, there are different ways in which cultural components are transmitted. These include: oral history, storytelling, fables and folktales, proverbs, narrations, songs etc. all these components listed are part of an African identity, which distinguish Africans from other ethnic group.

According to Dukor (2010), Africans of the first half of this century have begun to search for their identity because they had the feelings that they had lost it. Nweke (2018) avers that the problem of African Identity consists of the reality that smacks the existential condition of which Africans have been plunged after their experiences of the slave trade, colonialism, apartheid. For him, it represents the situation of a people, whose culture has been infiltrated, diluted, and consequently being coerced out of their existential root. He further maintains that what has come to be known as African predicament is the Africans' struggle for self-definition and reaffirmation in the face of Western coercive apparatus. The blows of the slave trade, colonialism, and apartheid are further sustained by the forces of imperialism and mostly globalization.

Sexuality and sexual relationship in pre-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa

From all perspectives in the explanation of the origin and development of humanity, one thing had remained constant in all analysis, "sex and sexual relationship" (Okafor, 2018). Sexual intercourse and sexual contact in all its forms is the condition of having a sexual nature of experiencing sexual desire. The concept of sexual relationship had layers of meaning in the African context and value system. In the words of Okafor (2018), before the European and Asian assaults on the African traditional system, what was captured in the modern-day intellectual jingles as sexuality, can be found deep in the folktales and other oral traditions of the African societies. Africans generally believe in heterogeneous sexuality, which involves a sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. This does not mean that same-sex sexuality or homosexuality is not practiced in pre-colonial Africa. Homosexuality existed in Africa long before the continent was colonized. But this was not tolerated. These acts were generally seen as taboo in pre-colonial era because it was believed that homosexuality does not lead to procreation, it's unnatural, deviant and without precedent in nature. To confirm that queerness existed in pre-colonial Africa, Kimuhu (2023), states that as far back as 2400BC, tombs have been excavated in Ancient

Egypt with two men's bodies, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, embracing each other as lovers.

According to Brimmer (2020), the practices themselves may not reflect the current practices of same-sex sexual behavior that are becoming more accepted and protected to varying degrees in many parts of the world today. For instance, Kapya Kaoma the author of *“Christianity, Globalization and Protective Homophobia: Democratic Contestation of Sexuality in Sub-Saharan Africa* wrote extensively on the behavior of many pre-colonial African groups. He gives examples varying from the Zulu people of Zimbabwe to Sangomos (traditional healers) in South Africa, suggesting that they were communities in which these minorities were associated with spiritual beings and same-sex marriages were allowed. (Brimmer, 2020) Also, Abadir Ibrahim cites pre-colonial groups, such as the Azande in Sudan (who legally recognized same-sex marriage), the Meru of Kenya and the Bantu of Angola (who allowed “effeminate males” to marry other men), and the Amhara in Ethiopia (who tolerated sexual SSSB but still referred to those who practiced it as “God’s mistake”), as examples of groups that tolerated SSSB (Brimmer ,2020).

Other examples of homosexuality in Africa before colonialism were showcased in the “The Road to Adwa Music Video”, it was the story of Ancient Africa from Kemet to colonialism, using African, Greek and Sumerian. From the images shown;

1. It was believed that kabaka (King) Mwanga II, who ruled Buganda in the latter half of the 19th century, was gay.
2. Cave paintings of the San people near Guruve in Zimbabwe depicting naked men having same sex intercourse have revealed that same sex sexual relations existed in Bushmen times.
3. The rain queen Modjadji of Balobedu peoples was also believed to be homosexual in her relations as she has many wives’.
4. Among the early Zande Warriors found in Congo and Sudan, homosexual relations were also believed to be commonplace. The warriors were said to marry younger men who performed the duties of a wife until they became Warriors.
5. In Gabon and Cameroun, male sexual relations were believed to transmit wealth between them. (www.africaiswoke.com)

However, in Nigeria, particularly in Igbo society, same-sex marriages exist among the women. But, this does not mean that women had sexual intercourse directly to their fellow women. No! This scenario always occurred when, if a married woman could not conceive, the family would arrange another woman who would be impregnated by either the woman’s husband or another man. This type of marriage is known as (surrogacy), not same-sex because who carried out the act were basically men and not the other way as

believed. In African traditional system, it was a taboo for a man to have intercourse with his fellow man and same applies to women. Those involved in the act does it secretly and it was so rare then. One hardly hears about it, because African culture forbids the practices. Also, it was even a taboo too to even discuss sexual matters in front of children until they were ready for their passage to adulthood. Although these children recognized differences between the genders, they were not supposed to know what the usefulness of such differences was for. They were aware that women brought babies but how those women actually came about was kept a secret. It is also an abomination and wrong for a young girl to give her virginity to a man who was not her husband, this is because, woman's virginity was seen as her pride, which was meant to be kept sacred. But today, globalization and colonial import have bastardized these African values and norms, to the extent that some African countries today, are signing into law bills to legalize homosexuality. No wonder, Okafor (2018), laments that globalization carries with it a numerous confusions and contradictions. What was in the past seen as taboo is now acceptable in Africa due to the introduction of Western culture. Okafor (2018) also observes that cultural globalization, which is being championed by Western Europe and North America, has some of these weaknesses to export to other societies who fall prey to such illicit agenda. All these sexual pervasions were not there in during the pre-colonial era. They are all imported to Africa in the name of globalization. The age of consent to sex which encouraged premarital sexual activity, is moving towards the extreme side. Whipple (2012) in his work on "Homosexuality in Africa: The causes of State Discrimination Based on Orientation" further argues that ...homosexuality as it exists nowadays is unknown to traditional African societies. For him, there was no man to man sex... In contrast, traditional chiefs of priests in the process of their enthronization were known to have lived in isolation and therefore participated in 'recurrent' masturbation to satisfy their sexual desires.

Homosexuality in Religious Perspective

Around 93% of sub-Saharan Africans are either Christian (63%) or Muslim (30%). This makes Africa one of the most religious continents in the world. From religious perspectives, homosexuality is problematic. This is because; it is sinful, sinful in the sense that it offends God and at the same time it is contrary to God's commands. God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire because of their sexual wickedness including rape, child sexual abuse, indecent assault as well as Homosexuality. So, Muslim and Christian leaders are often vocally opposed to gay sex because they know the negative implication of that. They are playing a significant role in shaping negative attitudes to homosexuality. The separation of the Church of Nigeria from Engage due to the signing

into law the practice of gay by the Bishop is a strong indication that shows that most African religious leaders are opposing gay.

Factors That Engender LGBT in Africa

Colonization: It is widely perceived that European colonization was the leading cause of homosexuality in Africa. Colonization came with its destruction and distortion of African value systems. Oguejiofor and Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2015) were right when they argue that Africa became depicted as a dark continent that needed the promethean light from the civilization of Europe. The people were taken as inferior and needed to be raised to the level of 'civilized humanity'. Out of 54 states recognized by the United Nations or African Union, homosexuality is outlawed in 31 African countries. Human Rights Watch notes that another two countries, Benin and the Central African Republic, do not outlaw homosexuality, but have some laws which discriminate against homosexual individuals. (Wikipedia. org) Although several African leaders have spoken out against homosexuality, many of the laws that criminalize homosexuality are colonial-era laws, enacted without the input of the people that currently enforce them. Oguejiofor and Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2015), further assert that colonialism occluded Western self-interest and progressed with complete denigration of all that was African. Ndubisi (2013) also explains that it is clear that African problems of persistent identity crisis and no meaningful development have serious link with bartered and truncated effects of colonialism and neo colonialism. He further states that since the dawn of political freedom from colonial rule, African societies have been disorganized. He argued that the assimilated Western civilization impinged negatively on the society. Ezeani cited by Ndubisi (2013) laments that colonization is a pathological distortion of the mind; a mental state in which a person unconsciously despises what is his or her and who he or she is, and thus instead, an inordinate love or irrepressible desire to be the other person- the colonized.

Globalization: Globalization without doubt has made positive changes in Africa, but at the same time has done more harm than good to African culture. It has made Africans to see their culture as inferior, and western culture as superior, thereby promoting western culture. All these variants of LGBT are what Africans copied from the western culture. The imposition of western culture to Africans by the west has made Africans to loss their cultural identity and even national identity. It has bastardized African values and culture. Homosexuality is not what our ancestors laid down for us. Africans must strive to retrieve back our true identity. Homosexuality and all its variants are common in Africa today because of western influence and culture contact. Africans learn these attitudes from what the western world push to us, mostly the type of movies, cartoons, pornographies and

nude images posted on social media. Africans, being that they like to copy and imitate anything from the western world will easily be deceived by what they see.

Lack of Family Values: According to (Ajei: 2022), under moderate communitarianism, simply having children is not enough to make you a moral being. It would not be moral to have children and abandon your responsibility to guide these children to acquire virtues that promote communality and human flourishing. In African traditional worldview, identity is rooted in the family and the community. In other words, the training of a child starts from the family which is the smallest unit in the society. The family and the community contribute in shaping individual's life. As Ndubisi (2013) puts it:

In African Traditional worldview, life or existence is not an individual venture, "the meaning of an individual's life is found in and through his relationship with the other or others". Man finds meaning in the idea and reality of the other. And without others he loses his values... In fact, the self is never alone. The individual is never a pure isolated individual. For Africans, no one can be his very self outside the relation with the others and the meaning of life depends on the relationship with others.

The above expression points to the fact that man is held in a web-like relations and interactions with his community. One cannot consider any person without due reference to his family and community. They are indispensable with one another. Today, all these good relationships enjoyed in the traditional African society have been destroyed. Homosexuality *ab initio* was seen as an abomination, but today most African youths see this as a normal way of life. This is because those values that characterized us have been bastardized. That good relationship has been destroyed. Most Africans, basically the young Africans believed that they can survive without the existence of others. We must all fight to stop it by inculcating good values and morals in our children. Parents must rise to their responsibilities. They must fight to ensure that they inculcate good values to these children. Failure to do so, they will reap what they sow at last.

Radical Feminism: It is not an over statement to say that Radical feminism is a great bulldozer of family Values. This group has gone beyond empowerment to subtle dismantle of traditional family values. All these agitations of this brand of feminism are all against African values and identity. The west is looking for strategies to impose their culture and identity on Africa. Separatism is one of the ways they introduce to impose their identity on Africa, which they have succeeded today. Separatism breeds lesbianism and homosexuality. The high rate of lesbianism among African women is as a result of this radical feminism which advocates that women should have control of their bodies due to men's subjugation and domination.

Economic Instability: Poverty and hardship in Africa are major factors that contribute to homosexuality. In fact, so many challenges confronting the continent have taken away the minds of some African leaders in some important things that needed urgent attention. High rate of unemployment and the inability of some African leaders to create a well playing field for their citizens have made some African youths to navigate another reality, all in the bid to get money. Occultism is the order of the day in Africa. Young Africans are been initiated into occultism, where they will be asked to succumb to homosexuality before they will be helped.

Conclusion

Homosexuality that existed in the pre-colonial era cannot be compared to what is happening presently in Africa. The recent attitudes towards homosexuality in Africa reveal that colonialism has distorted the psyche of the African man. It has negated the principle of Africanism. That homosexuality happened in some parts of the continent at the pre-colonial era should not be the reason to label Africa the originator or home of Homosexuality. It is an imported Western evil. Long-term Zimbabwean leader totally condemned the act. He labeled it “un-African” and a “white disease”. This research submits that LGBT is a western import. Africans must liberate themselves from mental slavery of accepting everything that comes from west as superior, thereby limiting their values that characterized them. However, the revival of a true African identity depends on the restoration of values as the beacon of light. All hands must be on deck to influence the thinking and behavior of Africans. All the political leaders, law makers, religious leaders and women leaders, must as a matter of urgency look for possible ways to discourage any marriage that will not lead to procreation and at the same time restore back our lost identity to be fully conscious of ourselves. This is because; the search for identity is a mission back to the root. And, when money is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost. But when character is lost, all is lost.

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