

CHRISTIANITY, HUMAN GENDER AND THE RISE OF TRANS-SEXUALITY IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The practice of sex-change and gender-swapping which originated from the western world is widely spreading through the rest of the world through the forces of globalization and cultural diffusion. Religious morality has generally been opposed to trans-sexuality from the very beginning, as most religions believe that God (the Supreme Being) determines, creates, assigns and controls the strictly binary gender of male and female in all human societies right from the stage of human conception. Judeo-Christianity's basic teachings are against sex-change among other aberrations of sexual morality that are practiced in the increasingly secular societies where religious beliefs and practices are on the down turn. Using the secondary source of data gathering and analysis, the researchers established that the rapid progress being made in science and technology in modern times along with cultural exchanges afforded by the gains of globalization have contributed to a more positive attitudinal change to trans-sexuality by the younger generations. This science factor also made the processes involved in the sex-change surgery and hormone treatment less complicated and increasingly available to those who want and can afford them. The in-road being made by the trans-sexual movement is noticeable in all parts of the world even in societies known to be strongly male-dominated, across Africa and Nigeria in particular, which is the central focus of this paper. This progress is aided by the fact that the Nigerian government outlawed only homosexual practices and associations in its recent legislation against orientations and preferences deemed sexually immoral in the society. Because of this gap in law in the country, trans-genders who dare to come out in the open to declare and even celebrate their gender change presently, paradoxically achieve a celebrity status (in the negative sense though) because the practice is still seriously frowned on by the greater majority of the people as a taboo. Considering the stigma that is still attached to such a practice which is also considered in Christianity (one of the major religions in Nigeria) as an immoral act, the majority of those who feel they have been assigned the wrong sex at birth

are reluctant to make their trans-sexual leanings known to the public. This paper observes that Nigeria and other countries of the developing world where trans-gendering is still seen as an aberration can proactively curb its progress through legislation, going by the success recorded through the laws applied against homosexuality, which largely check-mated the practice at least, in the public domain of the Nigerian society.

Keywords: Christianity, Human Gender, Trans-sexuality, Nigerian Society.

Introduction

Trans-gender people are those who feel they have been assigned the wrong sex as either a male or a female at birth and have made effort through surgery and hormone replacement therapy to transition to the opposite sex. This move actually begins when a person psychologically feels that his/her real gender differs from their biological sex cum body anatomy. While orthodox Christian teaching on human sexuality and gender remains strongly tilted towards the natural binary model of male and female, and strictly opposed to sex-change and gender-swapping as in other religions, liberal theologians riding on the waves of secularism and modern enlightenment have over the years made great strides in improvising a theological base for the practice of trans-sexuality through wrong and revisionist interpretation of the Judeo-Christian scripture. This has with time, led to some major Christian denominations validating sex-change as an acceptable gender identity variant. Subsequently, though not without controversy in many churches, some major denominations have accepted and elevated transgender people into positions of leadership in their congregations.

This new flow of modern thought and practice of gender change is spreading to all corners of the globe courtesy of the opportunities afforded by the strong western cultural influence and globalization which greatly enhances the free and faster flow of information on all areas of human socio-cultural and religious life across the continents. In sub-Saharan Africa especially in Nigeria, young people who are obviously disillusioned by the persistent slow pace of both the economic and political development of their society are being more and more attracted to the lifestyles, tastes, freedoms, and sexual preferences obtainable in the developed countries of the West. This factor has birthed the existence of openly-transsexual people in the Nigerian society, a phenomenon previously thought impossible some decades ago.

The Problem of Trans-sexuality

The causes of gender identity incongruence which results in trans-gendering and the resultant bisexuality are not exactly known, but experts believe it can be attributable to a

combination of genetic, biological, environmental and cultural factors. Gender identity crisis develops when people develop dislike for their assigned sex (gender) at birth. Russo and Coker (2021) state that the word 'transgender' can be used as an umbrella term to include the broad spectrum of persons who feel that their gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth. Docter (cited by Veale et al. 2010) states that a gender variant identity occurs when a person identifies as a gender other than what they were assigned at birth, and gender variance is used to refer to this new identity. Trans-sexuals are persons who have a sustained gender identity that is discrepant with their birth-assigned sex and have a desire to alter their bodily appearance to match this. Veale also describes a practice closely related to gender identity confusion - the act of cross-dressing (transvestitism) - persons who dress in the clothing of the opposite sex for emotional relief and/or sexual arousal. These persons almost always report a history of heterosexual or bisexual partner preference and although they may experience a gender identity that is at variance with their birth-assigned sex, this identity is not strong or persistent enough to occupy the individual's entire gender identity. Cloud (2021) notes that cross-dressing itself is not considered a mental sickness because if a person is perfectly happy with the practice, has a more or less normal sex life, and no issues with his or her gender, then cross-dressing is not deemed abnormal. If the person's behaviour is leading to distress, psychological harm, or an inability to enjoy sex without cross-dressing, then there may be an issue. According to Cloud, further issues may be present in a patient that attempts to quit the behaviour, but cannot. Some mental illnesses associated with cross-dressing are due to problems with how a person views his or her gender identity, rather than the act of cross-dressing itself.

According to Morrow and Messinger (2006) Gender Dysphoria (GD) is distress a person experiences due to a mismatch between their gender identity – their personal sense of their own gender and their sex assigned at birth. The American Psychological Association (APA) replaced this previous diagnostic label of gender identity disorder (GID) with Gender Dysphoria (GD) in 2013 with the release of the diagnostic manual DSM-5. This manifestation of the inherent problem in the human condition of trans-sexuality was obviously renamed in an effort to remove the stigma associated with the term 'disorder' in modern society. Though no longer regarded as a 'disorder' in the DSM-5, the APA permits a diagnosis of gender dysphoria in adolescents or adults if two or more of the following criteria are experienced for at least six months duration by an individual:

1. A significant incongruence between one's experience or expressed gender.
2. A strong desire to be rid of one's sexual characteristics due to incongruence with one's experienced or expressed gender.
3. A strong desire for the sexual characteristics of a gender other than one's assigned gender.

4. A strong desire to be of a gender other than one's assigned gender.
5. A strong conviction that one has the typical reactions and feelings of a gender other than one's assigned gender.

Giordano (2012) affirms that from the pathological approach to gender disorder in the society, transgender people have often been harassed, socially excluded, and subjected to discrimination, abuse, and violence, including murder. But with this modern trend of de-pathologization of transexuality, the frontier of the definition of gender identity was expanded to further include an individual person's sense of identity as masculine or feminine, or some combination of the two. Even with the change of nomenclature from 'disorder' to 'dysphoria', Leiblum (2006) states that persons diagnosed still receive treatment such as psychological counseling, supporting the individual's gender expression and medical intervention such as hormonal treatment and surgery, suggesting that the goal of the treatment may simply be to reduce problems resulting from the person's transgender status, for example, counseling the patient in order to reduce the guilt associated with cross-dressing.

The Effects of the Progress in Science and Medicine

The modern expression of sexuality has its roots not only in the change in perspective of modern people in our contemporary secular society, but also in the major strides being recorded in modern technology, education, legislation and scientific research. Smedes (1985) points out the effects of the wide studies of human sexuality from the psychological, sociological and neurological studies:

From Freud to Havelock, Ellis to Masters and Johnson, sex has been set on the laboratory table and observers have watched what is going on. Sociologists reassure us that our wild fantasies and kinky inclinations are not off-beat as we feared, and it makes people feel good to know that lots of other people do crazy things (p. 354).

The many theories being propounded have made sex and sex change (gender swapping) appealing fields of experiment in which people who like to be seen as "modern" and not as under-achievers or as backward in the game of sex can participate in. Consequently, the important question for many members of secular society is not whether moral rules on sex are obeyed and gender identities are maintained, but whether people have learned the facts about sex and gender, and mastered the techniques of various acts of the sexual experience and expression. The scientific advances made in medical surgery, the production of contraceptive drugs and devices, and the availability of both more effective preventive and curative drugs for venereal infections have also helped in no small

measure to liberalize people's attitude to established sex and gender morality in modern times.

The Role of the Humanistic Approach Theory

The humanistic approach theory of behaviour patterns argues that people have enormous potential for personal growth without necessarily involving divinity or religion. Matlin (1999) states that this approach gained prominence in the early 1960s when Carl Rogers (1961) and Abraham Maslow (1962) published books on humanism. These two developed the humanist approach as an alternative to other theories on human behaviour. To expatiate on this theory, Rogers uses the term "self-actualization" to capture the natural underlying tendency of humans to move forward and fulfill their true potential. Rogers emphasizes that this active self-development tendency provides the underlying basis of the person-centered approach. Rogers claims that self-actualizing tendencies are frequently stifled by restricting self-concepts which lead to people acting in ways that distort their "true selves" in order to win positive regard from other people in society. He therefore recommends that everyone should be given "unconditional positive regard" which is non-judgmental and genuine love without any strings attached.

In humanism, a great deal of emphasis is laid on the emotions. One is encouraged to explore one's deepest emotions and to face them and accept them as being neither good nor bad. Humanism preaches for people to accept themselves as they are rather than make effort towards what they ought to be. What "ought to be" is seen as an intrusion from outside oneself, an ideal coming from parents, religion or society, a dictate from above, or at least from outside the self. The ideal is seen as more or less unattainable and unreal, with the result that one no longer feels guilty about not achieving it. Golden (1986) argues that the relegation of the ideal to the realms of unreality is one of the major aims of humanism. This removes all guilt from the individual, transfers the guilt to the group, and abolishes the traditional codes of morality which were based on moral absolutes mostly based on religious precepts. In the modern world, sexual practices that were once considered abnormal or sinful such as oral sex, homosexuality, bisexuality and masturbation are today practiced so widely that fewer people are ready to label them as abnormal. Hoose (2000) in corroborating this claim states:

This change in the climate of thought about sex has multiple roots. Since Freud, much public emphasis has been placed on the importance of sexuality as an element of human personality. Sex is no longer seen simply as a way of propagating the species, nor as occasional and potentially enjoyable necessity, but as an essential and defining aspect of each person's character, having an all-pervasive influence on human behavior and attitudes (p. 224).

One is also encouraged to explore and work out all of one's emotions even in conversation. In the end, one discovers that one is like everybody else—a human being. You are what you are. No one can condemn you for being that, even though you happen to be a lesbian, bisexual, homosexual or transsexual. Trans-sexuality thus became one of the major frontiers of the modern sexual revolution.

The strong motivation and influence of the western world on the modern sexual confusion is quite significant. The unprecedented openness and permissiveness in sexual matters have largely been exported to the rest of the world in the cultural context, with grievous results. Muggeridge (cited by Golden, 1986) referring to this factor states:

It is sometimes difficult to resist the conclusion that the Western man has decided to abolish himself, creating his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own vulnerability out of his own strength, his own impotence out of his own erotomania And having convinced himself that he is too numerous, laboring with pill and scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer. Finally, having educated himself into imbecility, and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he keels over, a weary, battered, old brontosaurus, and becomes extinct (p. 37).

Almost all the modern sex and gender-related excesses and the resultant extremes especially in birth control i.e. abortion are all rightly implied in Muggeridge's near perfect poetic appraisal of the situation as it affects human reproduction and gender roles for the propagation and continued existence of the human species on earth, a sacred duty which transgender people who by the fact of their gender readjustment which tampered with their reproductive capacity are obviously bound to impede. This is due to the incontestable fact that transgendered people, for all the advances and claims of modern surgery and hormone treatment are neither naturally fully male nor female. The snag in the humanistic approach part of which motivates gender-identity problems is that it has been proven that permissive parents who allow children to make their own decisions often produce confused and immature offspring with little or no self-control, not knowing whether they were brought up as male or females, and whose unsupervised psycho-social development with regard to gender and sexuality leads to their ending up as deviants, and contributing to the spread of sexual aberrations and other moral problems in the society.

In the modern world where moral issues are most times subsumed in the over-riding interest and need for human rights, transgendered people and their sympathizers have successfully argued and worked for the de-classification of trans-sexuality as a sickness. Bryant (2018) states that the basis of this argument is that the diagnostic approach to trans-sexuality pathologizes gender variance, as well as reinforces the traditional male and female binary model of gender. Ford (2013) however points out that this de-classification could carry implications for healthcare accessibility in the United States of America, as

hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and gender-affirming surgery could be deemed cosmetic by insurance providers, as opposed to medically necessary treatment, thereby affecting insurance coverage for their recipients. Thus, sex-change surgery which comes through human choice is not a medical necessity aimed at correcting and healing any life-threatening health condition of its victim. Corroborating the foregoing, Zakkary (2024) states that gender identity disorder no longer exists as an officially recognized illness because it pathologized being transgender. The American Psychology Association (APA) writes and owns the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which is the official set of diagnoses and treatments in the USA. In the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), the APA changed their approach to transgender people. They now accept that being transgender is a normal variation in human beings and this suits the increasingly secularized, non-religious based thought and morals of the modern world. It then implies that referring to trans-sexuality as a disorder infringes on the rights of transgender people in the USA, and this goes for other parts of societies in the developed western world.

Trans-Sexuality in History

There is basically nothing new under the sun. Armstrong (1973) states that after the Grecian Empire was subsumed in the Roman Empire, much of Greek religion and way of life were adopted, with similar negative effects on sexual morality. The Roman philosopher, Seneca writes at that time that lust was the primary satisfaction and its consummation one of the most common factors in social life. Armstrong further lamenting the situation states:

Emperors, supposedly the leaders of the people were perhaps the most depraved of all Romans. Nero, besides having frequent incestuous relations with his mother, once turned a young boy, Sporus into a girl by surgical means. He had a marriage ceremony with this young “it” with bridal veil and all. Caligula committed incest and other perversions.... The Emperor Hadrian married a young Greek pageboy and orgies were common royal activity (p. 18).

Armstrong further posits that the practice of sex-change was also common in ancient Rome as “hybrids of men and women...desired to be completely changed into women and went on to mutilate their genital organs” (p. 19). Goldberg and Beemyn (2021) report about the existence of people seeking gender-confirming surgery (vaginoplasty) going back to the second century AD, such as the Roman Emperor Elagabalus (p. 32). Comer (1995) points out one of the most fascinating disorders related to sexuality as gender identity disorder which eventually leads to trans-sexuality. This is a disorder in which people persistently feel that a vast mistake has been made – they have been assigned the

wrong sex by their designer cum creator. Such persons are pre-occupied with getting rid of their primary and secondary sex characteristics, and finding their own genitals repugnant, seek and acquire the characteristics of the opposite sex. Comer gives more insight regarding trans-sexuality in modern times:

The first sex-change actually took place in 1931, but the procedure did not gain acceptance among practitioners...until 1952 when an operation converted an ex-soldier named George Jorgensen into a woman renamed Christine Jorgensen ... By 1980, sex-reassignment surgery was routine in at least forty medical centers in the Western hemisphere ... Approximately, 1,000 sex-change operations are performed each year in the United States. Studies in some European countries suggest that 1 out of every 100,000 women seek sex-change surgery (p. 512).

This type of sex-change surgery is preceded by years of hormone treatment which culminates in the amputation of the penis and the creation of an artificial vagina for men, and the creation of a penis through the process of phalloplasty for women, and face-altering plastic surgery for both. In the US in 1917, Alan Hart became one of the first trans-gender man to undergo hysterectomy and gonadectomy as treatment of what is now called gender dysphoria, while Dora Richter is the first known trans-gender woman to undergo a complete male-female genital surgery. Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia states that gender-affirming surgery is a surgical procedure, or series of procedures that over time, alters a person's physical appearance and sexual characteristics to resemble those associated with their identified gender. It is also known as sex-reassignment surgery, gender confirmation surgery, and several other names. Feminization surgeries result in anatomy that is typically gendered female such as vaginoplasty, vulvoplasty and breast augmentation, while masculinization surgeries are those that result in anatomy that is typically gendered male, such as phalloplasty and breast reduction. In addition to gender affirming surgery, patients may need to follow a life-long course of masculinizing or feminizing hormone replacement therapy.

In the western world, sexual orientations and practices that were formerly seen as aberrations are now accepted as the norm rather than exceptions. Pett (2010) posits that homosexuality and bisexuality are accepted as valid expressions human sexuality, and homophobia is perceived to be pathological, with the tables being turned against those who abhor homosexuality and its related practices as those to be healed of their "sickness". This also includes the insinuating involvement of the usage of the term "biphobia" (fear of bisexuals) and "trans-phobia" – (fear of trans-genders) as anomalies to be rectified in those who are against gender change. Wikipedia surmises that Sweden became the first country in the world to allow trans-gender people to change their legal

gender after sex re-assignment surgery, and to provide free hormone treatment to them in 1972. Singapore followed suit in 1973, being the first country in the Asian continent. In December 2002, the British Lord Chancellor published a *Government Policy Concerning Transsexual People* document that categorically states that trans-sexuality is not a mental illness. In a similar move in May 2009, the government of France declared that a transsexual gender identity will no longer be classified as a psychiatric condition. However, French transgender rights organizations subsequently lamented that beyond the immediate impact of the announcement itself, nothing changed in the society's perception and stigmatization of trans-sexuals. Denmark also made a similar statement in 2016.

Judeo-Christianity and Trans-sexuality

Stott (1990) writing from the Judeo-Christian approach of religious thought on gender equality states that gender equality and identity are not to be confused, and that male and female complement one another in the distinctive qualities of sexuality, psychologically as well as physiologically. In the context of the influence of human sinfulness on gender change, Jewett (1990) asserts that man as a sinner fallen short of the glory of God his creator uses the powers with which he is uniquely endowed by his creator in an effort to achieve proud autonomy. In this perversion of his true self, he revolts against God and exploits his neighbour, thereby destroying his freedom to choices, and living as though he were not a responsible subject. Within the Christian religion in the modern times, there is a wide variety of views on the issues of gender identity and transgender people. While some Christian denominations explicitly support gender transition, some oppose it, while others are divided or are yet to take any official position on the matter. Also notable is the fact that within any given denomination, individual members may or may not endorse the official views of their church on the topic. Wikipedia states that denominations including the Roman Catholic Church, the Jehovah Witnesses, and the Southern Baptist Convention have expressed official opposition to gender transition, sometimes, citing Bible references to God creating humans as male and female. Other denominations including the Church of England (a part of the Anglican Church), Church of Sweden, the Episcopal Church (the Anglican Church in America), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Presbyterian Church in USA have permitted ordained transgender clergy to serve in their congregations. Frontain (2003) opines that the history of Christianity and homosexuality has traditionally intertwined with the history of Christianity and transgender people, and has been the subject of intense debate. Some maintain that the early Christians deplored transgender people along with homosexuals. From the biblical perspective on surgery and other alterations of the body and with particular reference to the transition-related surgery in trans-sexuality, the Old Testament has specific rules about men's genitalia being intact.

Apart from the religious cult practice of circumcision in Judaism, the Book of Deuteronomy 23 verse 1 rules that men with damaged testicles or severed genitals are forbidden from being admitted to religious assemblies. Gender change invariably incorporates tampering with and removal cum replacement of genitals in both male and female patients suffering from gender dysphoria.

The New Testament of the Bible is more ambiguous about gender variation and otherwise altered bodies than the Old Testament. Eunuchs (Greek *eunochos*, similar to Hebrew *saris*) are indicated as possible candidates for evangelism and baptism, as demonstrated in the story the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:27-39. While answering questions about marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:12, Jesus himself says, “There are eunuchs, who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven”. Rogers (2009) notes that this has sparked discussion about the significance of the selection of the Ethiopian eunuch as being a first Gentile convert to Christianity. Some supporters of trans-sexuality argue that the inclusion of a eunuch represents the recognition of a sexual minority similar to some of those who are included by some churches under today’s category of LGBTQ people, in the context of time. On the recommendation of gender-specific clothing, the Old Testament of the Bible contains prohibitions against men wearing women’s clothing and vice versa, which is cited as an abomination within the context of pagan idol worship practices in Deuteronomy 22:5. In essence, people who change their God-given gender at birth through surgery and take on new sex characteristics, technically, are among the cross-dressers forbidden in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. From the Christian perspective on gender transition, Geiger (2023) states that gender dysphoria is the sense of mismatch between physical sex (body) and the psychological gender identity (mind). Thus, those suffering from gender dysphoria are experiencing a painful war within themselves. For Geiger, human beings including Christians do not necessarily wrestle with a battle over their gender, but have internal wrestles with sin and with living in a world that often feels like a mis-match to who they are. Christians understand the internal struggle as their bodies being at war with their minds according to the Book of Romans 7:22-23. In summing up, Geiger recommends in line with biblical injunction that whereas the transgender movement urges those with gender dysphoria problems to resolve the tension by changing their body, the Christian scripture is urging such people to offer their body to God to allow Him to transform their mind according to the injunction in Romans 12:1-2. This is the right Christian approach to the pressure that sin exerts on people by wrongly making them believe they are having a wrong identity and consequently living a life that is a mismatch to how God created them and what He wants for them. Thus, the very insinuation that

God makes a mistake in gender assignment at birth is even an affront to the very nature of an infallible God and infringes on the established teachings of Judeo-Christianity.

The Stand of Some Major Christian Denominations

From the Roman Catholic point of view, gender change is regarded as an aberration of human sexuality. In summarizing the Church's position on the problem of human trans-gendering, a *Document of The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith* released in the year 2000 states in line with the biblical stand that gender is exclusively binary and every person should accept their sexual identity, affirming that sex reassignment surgery does not change a person's sex in the eyes of the God and the Church. For the Church, a transsexual surgical operation is so superficial and external that it does not change a person's gender in the reckoning of the Church. The Roman Catholic Church however states that sex change operation could be morally acceptable in certain extreme cases, but in all cases, transgendered people cannot validly marry in the church. Similarly, another *Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith* issued in 2002 affirms that the gender of a faithful cannot be changed in the *baptismal* record following gender re-assignment. In the same vein, *The Congregation for Catholic Education* published a document in 2019 titled *Male and Female He created them* instructing Catholic schools on topics regarding gender identity. Among other things, the document criticized the idea that people could choose or change their sex, labeling the practice as a "confused concept of freedom" and equally as "momentary desires".

The Anglican Communion is seriously split on the issue of the practice of sex-change and the acceptance of and the assignment of roles to transgendered people in the life and ministry of the Church, along with other sexual aberrations like homosexuality. National Churches in the developed countries of the Anglican Communion mostly in the Western world accept transgendered people even in the ministry of priesthood. Wikipedia states that in 2000, the Church of England which is the administrative headquarters of the Anglican Communion permitted transgendered people to continue serving as pastors, while in 2005 Sarah Jones became the first openly-transgendered person ordained in the Church of England. The Anglican Church in the United States of America (known as the Episcopal Church) welcomes and also ordains transgendered people into the Church's ministry. The Anglican Provinces in the developing world mostly in Asia and Africa (also referred to as the *Global South*) are strongly opposed to trans-genderism, and this coupled with other contentious issues of sexual aberrations have caused a very deep-running and long-standing internal split in Anglicanism that has seriously impaired the communion of the constituent Churches of the Anglican Communion. In the African continent, it is only

in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa that homosexual and trans-gendered priests are allowed.

The Methodist Church as a Christian denomination share an experience similar to that of the Anglican Communion, with some sections in disagreement over the acceptance of transgender people in the church as accepted in other sections. With this polarization of views and attitudes towards transgendered people and their acceptance cum roles in the Methodist Church, the denomination's stand on the issue cannot be said to be clearly streamlined across sections and provinces of the Church.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church which is the largest group in the Adventist denomination issued a document titled *Statement on Transgenderism* in 2017 which affirms that our human gender identity as designed by God is determined by our biological sex at birth. The statement in summarizing the stand of the Adventist Church charges that the desire to change or live as a person of another gender may result in biblically inappropriate lifestyle choices.

Other mainline Christian denominations like the Baptists, Presbyterian and Pentecostal Churches in the Western world have a real experience of polarized opinions for and against the acceptance and inclusion of transgender people in their church life and ministry. It is noteworthy that even in the few church denominations that are officially against trans-sexuality, individual members of such churches often disagree with their church's official stand and feel free to believe and practice what their preferences dictate. In sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the developing world, the stigma associated with LGBTQ people which is also extends to transgender people and their new sex identity change is still very strong and is a factor that helps to slow down the tide of its fast development as opposed to what obtains in the developed countries of the West.

Trans-sexuality in Nigeria

In the Nigerian society the government may have outlawed homosexuality with stringent measures following a legislation criminalizing it in 2005. Though homosexuality and its related practices appear to have been technically placed under lock and key, but the country still has transgender people and cross-dressers. Onikeyi (2024) points out that the law-enforcement agencies in Nigeria lack the legal empowerment to arrest trans-genders and cross-dressers, as the last legislation in the law and constitution covered only homosexuals. There is presently nothing that suggests that transgendered people are out of order and could be arrested. Nigeria presently has a good number of transgendered persons who changed their sex through surgery and hormone therapy. There is a noticeable and gradual progress being made by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and

Transgender (LGBTQ) movement in the Nigerian society. Though these individuals may truly be living on the fringes of the society as many still frown at their orientation, news about their lifestyle always stirs up controversy in the society.

In relation to a study made about the prevalence of HIV among homosexuals and transgender people, Ikani et al. (2022) state that global data show that transgender people are on the average 13 times more likely to be HIV positive than the rest of the adult population. In Nigeria, transgender identity is not widely understood or accepted, and as a result, transgender people face a high rate of violence in their communities, which mostly force them to hide their gender identities so as to retain employment, and they also fear seeking health care and other services. Ikani et al. (2022) also postulate that while there are no reliable national estimates of the transgender population in Nigeria, the EpiC (Epidemic Control) initially estimated a total population of 3,477 transgender people across Bayelsa and Niger States. Ikani also intimates that in providing service for transgender and HIV patients, the *Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control* project devised how to use the two-step question method to identify individuals as transgender. Because gender identity is not easily observed in many cases because of the inherent stigma against transgenders, best practice recommends that individuals be identified through two data options: sex assigned at birth and gender identity.

Most societies in Nigeria, Africa and other developing parts of the world are generally male-dominated and masculinity is regarded as superior and more desirable to femininity in the cultural milieu of the people. Ordinarily, one wonders what would ever make a man to desire to be made into a woman in such a setting. If gender change is to be desired and practiced in Nigeria and in other male-dominated social settings, it is naturally presumed that it is women mostly that would aspire to change into men. But the reverse has been the case as some men have transitioned into the female gender and are proud to be publicly identified with their new gender identity, claiming to have achieved a more fulfilled life, having transitioned to their real sexual/gender identity as opposed to what their creator has assigned them at birth. Onikeyi (2024) commenting on the rise of transexualism in Nigeria surmises that looking at four of the most popular transgender persons in Nigeria, and given the country's criteria for measuring success, it is impossible not to agree they are living the dreams of many Nigerians in terms of popularity and material prosperity. He concludes that Bobrisky, Jay Boogie, Devaah and James Brown who have abandoned their manhood and transitioned to the female gender have achieved rather astounding results, stating that even if their parents may be heart-broken and concluded they have behaved badly if not sinfully, it is hard to argue God has not blessed them both financially and as 'celebrities' in Nigeria. The paradox of being transgender in Nigeria is that the few transgender persons in the country who have made their sex-change known to the public

ironically take on a celebrity status though in the negative sense, because the stigma attached to transgender people and trans-sexuality as a gender distortion and other acts deemed as sexual aberrations still runs deep in the society.

Some Prominent Transgender People in Nigeria

It must be noted that the range of transsexuals includes those who strongly feel that they have been assigned the wrong sex at birth and those who have actually taken action to change their natural gender. While the former may be lurking in the fear of the people's stigmatization and possible reprisal (especially in African societies) and may lack the means to obtain the sex transition surgery and subsequent hormone treatment which do not come cheap, the latter can afford the cost and have decided to declare and flaunt their new gender in the public. Wikipedia has the names of the prominent transsexual in Nigeria as follows:

1. Miss Sahhara:

Real name: Clifford Oche. A native of Benue State; a former male and a graduate of Benue State University. Miss Sahhara is the first Nigerian transgender to come out publicly on the international stage during a press conference in the International Queen beauty pageant in Pattaya, Thailand, in 2011.

1. Stephanie Rose Adaralegbe:

Real name: Oladapo Adaralegbe. He dropped out of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife due to an identity crisis because he considered himself a woman. This made the school authorities to expel him. After the expulsion, he travelled to Europe and underwent extensive gender reassignment surgery to become Stephanie Rose.

2. Noni Salma Lawal:

Real name: Habeeb Babatunde Lawal. He graduated in Theatre Arts from the University of Lagos and became a script-writer, film-maker and an entertainment journalist. He changed name after undergoing sex transformation surgery.

3. Bobrisky:

Real name: Okuneye Idris Olarenwaju. Born in 1991 he graduated from University of Lagos in accounting and transitioned into a woman and has since become a controversial but prominent social media personality in Nigeria.

4. Deevah:

Real name: Buchi Alexandra Okeke. He was born in 1987. He transitioned to the opposite gender and has blazed a trail as a social influencer, transgender rights activist and a prominent figure in the Nigerian fashion industry. She studied linguistics in the university.

5. Jay Boogie:

Real name: Daniel Nsikan, a social media personality. Born in 1998 in Port Harcourt as a male, he changed into a woman. He hails from Akwa Ibom State and schooled in both Rivers and Akwa Ibom State universities. She is in the modeling and beauty consultancy businesses.

6. Fola Francis:

A Nigerian transgender model, LGBTQIA activist and entrepreneur. He was born in 1994. After his sex-change, she became the first transgender model to walk the Lagos Fashion Week runway in 2022. She died in December 2023 after drowning in a Lagos beach.

7. Veso Golden Oke:

Born as a male in 1993 to a Nigerian father and a Ghanaian mother, he changed his gender. She is model, hair-style and make-up artist and transgender rights activist. She is the first Nigerian openly-transgender woman to compete in a beauty pageant in Africa in 2019.

It is noteworthy that all of these famous transgender people in Nigeria (a male-dominated society) changed from male to female instead of the other way round. This partly makes nonsense of the male chauvinistic presumption (which is not limited to Africa) that most females envy the state of being a male and would rather opt to become men if given the opportunity. Worthy of emphasis also is the fact that majority of the outstanding transsexuals in Nigeria mentioned in this paper originally bore Christian names. In doing what they did – changing their God-given gender, they demonstrated non-belief and compliance with the tenets of their religion, lending credence to the fact of the steady decline of religious beliefs and practices ravaging societies of the so-called post-modern world. Kola (2021) a self-confessed transgender person commenting on the challenges of being transgender in Nigeria affirms that while homosexuality is criminalized and considered morally unacceptable in the Nigerian society, little is said about transgender identities mostly because there is a misconception that these identities are non-existent. As a result, transgender people are often erroneously considered gay and many exposed to the dangers inherent in homophobia. Kola (2021) also intimates that the practice of cross-dressing which is almost inseparably identified with sex change is also criminalized in

Section 405 of the Penal Code which applies in the mainly Muslim northern Nigeria. The Shar'ia Penal Code which has been adopted by 12 northern states also prescribes prison terms for cross-dressers.

Conclusion

The effects of the unrelenting ravages of the modern sexual revolution across the cultural and social strata of peoples of different races and climes are hard to deny. New cultural patterns and sexual preferences and orientations which are the products of modernism are made easily available to millions of young peoples of up-coming generations through the agency of the so called 'global village'. This new development has effectively shrunk the boundaries between peoples of different societies and cultures through the greatly enhanced communication and free flow of information. The enlarged horizon for the exchange of ideas also affords people the opportunity to experiment with new tastes and experiences in sexual morality which may not be prevalent in their own culture. This is a major factor for the rising cases of gender identity confusion and the consequent sex-change surgeries across the globe. In the economically-developed societies of the West, the acceptance and social integration of transgender people has been greatly aided and by strong and sustainable legislation on human rights which protects transgender people from social stigma and discrimination and ensure their acceptability, moving on to further enforce their relevance in both the religious and social spaces available to other citizens. This has made transgender people increasingly more accepted and/or tolerated as the case may be, with the obvious consequence of emboldening the emergence of more and more transgender people and their supporters and sympathizers elsewhere in the developing countries of the world.

In Nigeria's case which is the central focus of the paper, the scenario that presently obtains – of people changing their sex and celebrating it in public was unthinkable some two decades ago. But with the rapid gains being made by the transgender movement and people, it becomes too obvious that more and more young people who may have been keeping their transgender identity in the closet for fear of social discrimination and persecution from both parents and the larger society are likely to become more vocal and make bold moves to acquire the gender identity they think they desire and crave. Some may also invoke their right to the freedom of doubting the gender assigned to them at birth and consequently seek to change it.

In conclusion, this paper opines that since human rights legislation has significantly helped to sustain the tempo of trans-sexuality in the West and other parts of the developed world, prohibitive legislation on gender-swapping and its related activities can as well be employed to curtail their spread in Nigeria and other parts of the world where changing of

one's assigned sex at birth is still regarded as an act contrary to nature and capable of creating a demographic confusion, as well as an aberration against the moral and religious principles of the people. This paper also strongly suggests that cross-dressing in the public should be regarded as an act akin to impersonation with the aim to deceive, and should be outlawed as a sex and gender anomaly in the society.

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