

## **A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF HOMOSEXUALITY: AN INCURSION INTO AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VALUES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Before the incursion of other cultures and value system into Africa, Africans had their peculiar cultural values. These cultural values are very sacrosanct to an average African. The beauty of African traditional values rest on the import and influence on the moral mores and precepts that guide our social lives, though in discussing sex and sexuality in relation to the African, the question of what sex and sexuality entails needs a philosophical analysis and appraisal. My concern in this paper is on African conception of sex and sexual values which are based on the natural or divine order: male-female copulation-heterosexuality. Any act of perversion becomes a grievous disruption of the sexual values of African people.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

To an outsider and one without African lent, the discussion of sexuality in Africa and the value that is associated with it is a difficult task. But to an average African and those with African Cultural values lent it is an expository and exploratory. Africa is not a mere geographical expression, but a people with a mindset as well as cultural values despite great internal dissimilarities. There is shared cultural heritage and destiny. Therefore, one would be right to conceive African mind here to encompass the beautiful cultures and way of life of the African people, which thus becomes their values. One of such values is the African sexual value. What does sexuality implies to an average African? What does African conceived as a proper sexual orientation and value? What are those incursive sexual practices which are alien to the African? These and other themes are the concern of this work.

### **AFRICAN VALUES AND SEXUAL TRADITION**

Africa like other societies has their interpretation and value for sexuality. And, these values are sacred and imping on culture. Irrespective of the fact that sexual union has become individual affair in other societies, in Africa there is still a level of sanctity. This is because Africa has her unique cultural and traditional norms as well as value system. These values are attitudes, beliefs and actions that are standards of behaviour in interpersonal, group and intergroup communications and relationships among Africans. African cultural or traditional values embrace all aspect of African life. It encompasses every bit of man's life and experience.

According to Awoniyi, Africans have certain standards or norms to be observed. These standards or norms are meant for social cohesion and smooth running of the community. In African Society, there are a set of values that guide the behaviour of every member (s). These social norms and values include sexuality and sexual practices have gained a certain shift from the traditional African thoughts on sexuality. African traditional communities conceive sex as proportionate to procreation, most see sex as a means of pleasure especially for the man.

In Africa, there is sexual identity. Sexual identity refers to how one think in terms of to whom one is romantically or sexually attracted to. The sexual identity may also refer to sexual orientation identity. Hence, sexual identity and sexual behaviour are closely related to sexual orientation, but they are distinguished. Identity refers to the individual's conception of themselves, while behaviour refers to actual

acts performed by the individual and sexual orientation refers to romantic or sexual attractions towards persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or to no one.

For the African the primary function of sexual union is procreation and which naturally occur as a result of opposite sex attraction. The Africans acknowledge and attribute value to sexual union and put measures in place to maintain the sanctity of sexual union. Thus, any attempt to derail from these sexual norms amongst the African is view of offence against even the society as a whole (Okechi, 2). Also, in some other African societies, it is not only an offence against the man but the gods.

These cultural values are series of principles and values passed on from generation to generation by our ancestors. Based on values system the entire cultural community decides their way of life. This ideal decides how a person of African culture will behave and how they will lead their lives.

African culture like other cultures generally, is dynamic. Hence, the cultural values and practices of traditional African has been able to accommodate positive features of cultural dynamicism. In the words of Gyekye, many of the cultural values and practices of traditional Africa discussed, however, can be considered positive features of the culture and can be accommodated in the scheme of African modernity, even if they must undergo some refinement and pruning in order to become fully harmonious with the spirit of modern culture and function most satisfactorily within that culture (174). African traditional cultural values constitute the fulcrum and substratum for ethics, moral laws and constitutions. Traditional African values are fully in harmony with the African spirit and are quite satisfactory to the sustenance of African cultural values.

African traditional values are what the Africans deeply cherish – things they love, live for, and would die for. There are things Africans cannot qualify and would find it impossible to place a price tag on; yet they are part of what life is about to the African (Etuk, 175). Traditional African values are African in heritage and enviably rich full of inspiration and vitality to the African minds and spirits.

Traditional African sexual values do not imply that by any means there are no cultural disvalues or negative features of the African cultures. But as far as the issue of sex and sexual values is concern in Africa, the Africans hold very tenacious to heterosexual behaviour, orientation and identity. For Africans sexual union are for procreation and pleasure, therefore any form of Homosexual behaviour, orientation and identity is not accepted in any society/community in Africa.

#### **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL/CULTURAL VALUES AND SEXUAL PERVERSION**

The debate on African culture and African Traditional values is age long. In a work, *Countries and cultures of the World*, Thelma Xavelda Maluleke, is of the view that,

Culture can be defined as attributes and characteristics that give a community a sense of identity, dignity, continuity, security and that bind it together. It includes beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by its people. Traditional values on other hand are attitudes beliefs and actions that are standards of behaviour in interpersonal, group and intergroup communications and relationships. Therefore, one can say and rightly so that, cultural and traditional values influence sphere of social activity such as family life, health, education, wealth distribution, politics and government (19).

The above definition by Maluleke, suit the definition in comparison of both African culture and African Traditional values. In the same Veren Chuba Okadigbo (4) opines that Africa as a total geographical concept does exist. And this is what some African philosophers like Kwame Coyekye, Kwasi Wiredu, John Mbiti Innocent Asouzu and other African consider themselves as brothers and sisters, sharing the same heritage and the same destiny. Hence, by African mind or African spirit, it encompasses the beautiful cultures and ways of life of the African people which in essence is their values.

Africans, like other races have unique traditional/cultural value for sexuality. Sexuality in our context here refers to the way people experience and express themselves sexually. According to Wikipedia, this involves biological, erotic, physical, emotional, social or spiritual feeling and behaviours.

Sexual is basically a way to describe a feeling you have for someone you fancy or attracted to. Some of the most common definitions are as follows:

Hetero sexual/straight: A person physically and emotionally attracted to a person of opposite sex, so a male attracted to a female or a female attracted to a male.

- Gay: A male physically and emotionally attracted to another male.
- Lesbian: A female physically and emotionally attracted to another female.

- Homosexuality (Gay/Lesbian): People who are homosexual are attracted to same sex. Homosexual men can also be called gay and homosexual women can also be called lesbian.
- Bi-Sexual/Bi: People who are bisexual are attracted to both males and females.
- Pan Sexual: People who attracted to other people regardless of their sex and gender identity.
- Asexual/Acc: People who are asexual Acc don't feel sexually attracted to anyone and feel no desire to have sex (marksivesexualhealth.org).

The above are typologies of sexual identity and orientation in our contemporary society. Prior to European colonization, sex, human sexuality and all the pleasures, are viewed as part of human nature in African society. The right of individuals to sexual explore were maintained in collective conscience for the good of the society.

For the African, the sexual values of individuals are geared towards procreation and pleasure. Hence, the sexual identity and orientation is heterosexuality as against homosexuality. Like earlier stated, somewhere in this work, sex is the physical and emotional attraction to a person of opposite sex. Homosexuality as a sexual orientation is seen as an incursion into African traditional/cultural sexual values. Africa attaches a sense of sacredness to sexuality and upholds it as a means through which the community is sustained.

Homosexuality (lesbian, gay, trans, intersex) and other forms of sexual behaviour do not conform to heterosexual norms of African sexual orientation, identify and values. Despite the agitation and advocacy for approval of all forms of homosexual behaviour and relaxed attitude towards gender fluidity, Africa is the most difficult continent to be homosexually oriented.

According to Annabel Sowemimo (seven ), recent years have seen the emergence of worrying trend: the adoption of tougher legislation coupled with clamp down on homosexuals. An argument frequently used in support of discriminatory legislative and other measures targeting homosexual person is that non-conforming sexual orientations and gender identities were brought to Africa by Western colonizers and contrary to the 'African Values' (9).

This is quite true because in African communities any form of homosexual behaviour had always met with great intolerance, discrimination and violence. Hence, the claim by some researchers and commentators on African sexual values, that African traditional/cultural value has tolerance for homosexual behaviour is fallacious. The African mind or spirit does not tolerate homosexual behaviour in its entirety. In recent times, attempt by some African countries recriminalize sensual sex conduct has been met with stiffer penalties and resistance, especially exclusion and discrimination based on all form of homosexual orientation.

In Nigeria for instance, all the religious (African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam) practices forbid all form of homosexual behaviour and orientation. Therefore, this religious value is part of what influences homophobic legislation in the country. The hope of recrimination of homosexual law in Nigeria – Africa is a wishful thinking and illusion, in fact a wild grose chase. Because this not part of Africa traditional/cultural behaviour and orientation, as such not part of the value system.

## **EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

In African, the issue of sexuality sexual orientation, identity and values are very straight. African has their unique sexual values which are for procreation and pleasure. The sexual orientation and identity is heterosexuality. Therefore, any sexual identity that is contrary to the heterosexual sexual identity is generally frowned at in every community and those who engaged in such acts are regarded as social misfits. Some scholars are of the view that heterosexuality is an ideology instill in African minds by Western colonizers and their religious influence. Their argument is based on the fact that, some ancient African arts depicts genderless or homosexual underpirings in the African pre- colonial sittings. This is again very fallacious, African traditional/cultural values are mind and spirit implanted in Africa. All forms of homosexual behaviour, orientation and identity are extremely repugnant to the African minds and spirits.

Many Africans still hold that any other, sexual identity and orientation apart from heterosexuality is abnormal both to nature and the original African culture and therefore, condemnable.

In conclusion, Africans as endowed people both in human and natural result resource and, having pass through the holocaust of colonialism and imperialism at different stages which has affected her culture in one way or the other still attach so much value to sexuality. All form of homosexual behaviour, orientation and identity are seriously unacceptable. These principles and values are serially passed from one generation

of African to another. African has stood out as cultural people that have preserve nature and her heritage despite the strong interences from other cultures.

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