

RELIGION, FEMINISM AND HOMOSEXUALITY: LESSONS FOR THE 21st CENTURY NIGERIA

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Abstract

The discourse on human sexuality is a complex one, and it has been a controversial issue from time immemorial. There have been several connects and arguments by scholars in favor and against sex marriage. The subjects of feminism and homosexuality are very much at the forefront of Christian ethical discussion even in this present time. Feminism means different things to different people and in different places. This work discussed why the act of Homosexuality is condemned biblically and culturally in the Nigerian context. There have been several comments and views from some religious groups as touching same sex marriage. In fact, there are arguments that favor and at the same time oppose same sex marriage with equal rights by these religious organizations. The same view that these religious groups have about same sex marriage is the same with homosexuality. As a result, antagonists of same sex marriage have expressed concerns that limit their religious franchise. Presently, religion has become more visible, therefore, it is important that feminists consider their approach to religion very carefully most especially for the sake of other women if not for their own sake. Historical and analytical methods were adopted in this work. The motivation for this work is that moral values should be protected. The main beneficiaries of this work are the youths and religious organizations in our contemporary society. In conclusion, from the study of Homosexuality, there should be an insight that should begin to change the understanding on which other disciplines are based.

Keywords: Religion, Gender, Lesbians, Gay and Feminism, Homosexuality

Introduction

The main religions of the world contain certain ideas about the appropriate roles for men and women in the society, and traditionally, this has placed women in the home and men in the 'outside' world. This is not true nowadays, where much change is occurring in societies within creasing female labour market participation and changes in attitudes accompanying this. Religions differ to some extent in this regard, but similar normative claims about men's and women's roles are present across all denominations. Based on the normative role of religion and the predominantly gender-conservative teachings of most of the main religions, it can be expected that individuals who belong to a religion will be less egalitarian than people indicating that they have no religious affiliation. Higher religiosity, both in terms of level of religiosity indicated by the respondent

and frequent attendance at religious services, should equally be associated with more traditional gender role attitudes.¹

It has also been established that gender role attitudes are sharply divided across societies depending on majority religion. Gender inequality belongs among the most prevalent forms of social inequality and exists all over the world, with different effects in different regions. These differences are primarily due to cultural legacies, historical development, geographical location, and, last but not least, the religious norms which predominate in a society.² It is deeply rooted in peoples' experiences and influences the socioeconomic and political direction of societies. The role of religion is, obviously, complex and it varies across time and space. We accept the premise that everyone benefits from gender equality. Gender roles and the status of women are one of the areas in which societies continue to differ vastly across the globe, and where clashes are most apparent.³ Religiosity is strongly correlated with gender inequitable attitudes, controlling for a variety of demographic characteristics. In addition, men are found to hold significantly more gender inequitable attitudes than women. The nature of religions as organizational structures, which tend to be hierarchically structured and conservative rule-based institutions, is a more plausible explanation for their inculcation of gender inequitable norms.⁴

Feminist Frameworks

The radical belief of the feminist hinged upon the belief that the male is inherently evil as a result of his genes which make him aggressive. They believe nothing good can come out of the man. This is hinged on the theory that wars, rape, genocides and the likes are all perpetrated by the male. Some feminists have even gone far as advocating test tube fertilisation and extra-uterine birth. The women would thus be released from their childbearing role. Roles they believe contribute to their being looked down upon by the male dominated society.

The liberal feminist however believes in the equality of both sexes. They believe in taking absolute control of their sexuality and reproductive role. The liberal feminist is least concerned of with economic inequality but gender based social distribution of the means of wealth. Socialist feminist based their argument on intersect class division within the society. They believe women are oppressed differently according to the economic and the social class they belong to. They believe in the power of social enlightenment, roles, advocacy, demonstrations etc. in achieving needed reforms.

Lesbian feminism framework considers the fact that lesbianism is a threat to the male dominance this is because the female has no need for men and even procreation (since technology has developed cloning and other means of extra-uterine births). Lesbian feminism believes that oppressive of the female is anchored on heterosexual relationship. Some lesbian feminist made the conscious change from heterosexual relationship to lesbianism in order to deny the male the

sexual support the male desires. This denial, it is hoped, will undermine the oppressive power of the male and therefore lead to a more balanced (gender based) society. They are advocated of matriarchal societies.

Religion and Feminism

This article reflects the increasingly more lively debates on the relationship between religion (religiosity) and gender. It builds primarily on theoretical concepts provided by feminist geographies and the geography of religion, both of which have recently increased their presence in the academic sphere. Furthermore, questions of gender continue to make their way into religious studies.⁵ The status of women within individual religions, most significantly in Islam, has become a research topic for a number of geographers. Feminist geographers of religion mostly focus on gender identities and gender relations in the contemporary religion. It is even possible to speak of the existence of a new paradigm in religious studies, which is tied to the entry of women researchers into the study of religion.⁶

All world religions today maintain male social dominance within societal structures. On the other hand, women are more inclined to participate in religious life. Empirical researches on developments in the individual religions, especially in the case of Islam, indicate a negative shift in society towards a decreased status of women with the emergence of the so-called advanced religion. Also, religious norms and prejudices may reflect patriarchal values, which are characteristic of all societies of the world religions.⁷ The role of God, or a creator of a religion, is always taken by a male and the woman is primarily valued as a mother, especially as a mother to a son. Her place is in the household, less so at religious ceremonies or in public positions. The real status of a woman in a religion is more complicated; however, as in some religions certain women have acquired significant posts.⁸

Homosexuality

One may say that homosexuality is the term used for people that feel sexually attracted to their own sex, but other definitions also exist. When one views homosexuality as the term for people that feel romantically or sexually attracted to their own sex.⁹ Usually, the term is used to view all the people who are romantically or sexually attracted to their own sex, as well as those with such attractions who have not had a sexual relationship with their own sex yet. Nonetheless, the most visible form of homosexuality is the actual relationship. Most 'evidence' of homosexuality in ancient cultures comes from drawings of the men in an intimate relationship or sex, because it's the most obvious. ➤

There are many different words to describe homosexual people. Some of these are used to insult homosexual people. However, the LGBT (Lesbian, Gender, Bisexual and Transgender) community sometimes uses these words to

describe themselves because the word "homosexual" can sound too clinical. This is done to make the words less hurtful. Some words to describe homosexual men are *gay* and *queer*. Words to describe homosexual women are *lesbian* and *dyke*. *Lesbian* is used most often. *Dyke* is used less often and is sometimes used to describe lesbians who are more masculine (act or dress more like men). However, "queer" and "dyke" are sometimes used against gay people as insults, so they can sometimes be offensive.¹⁰

Religion and Homosexuality

The relationship between religion and homosexuality has varied greatly across time and place, within and between different religions and denominations, and regarding different forms of homosexuality and bisexuality. Present day doctrines of the world's major religions vary vastly generally and by denomination on attitudes towards these sexual orientations.¹¹ Among those denominations that generally are negative towards these orientations, there are many different types of actions they may take: this can range from quietly discouraging homosexual activity, explicitly forbidding same-sex sexual practices among adherents and actively opposing social acceptance of homosexuality, to execution. Religious fundamentalism has been found to correlate positively with anti-homosexual bias.¹² Attitudes towards homosexuality have been found to be determined not only by personal religious beliefs with predominant national religious context even for people who are less religious or who do not share their local dominant religious context. Many argue that it is homosexual actions which are sinful, rather than the state of being homosexual itself.¹³

Causes of Homosexuality

The causes of homosexuality and bisexuality are controversial. Some people see homosexuality and bisexuality as a choice that a person makes. However, many modern scientists have theorized that homosexuality is not a choice.¹⁴ The causes of homosexuality are not all understood, but genetics and the effects of prenatal hormones (when a baby is growing in its mother) and environment are sometimes thought to be causes. Scientists also show that homosexuality happens not only in humans. Some animals (like penguins, chimpanzees, and dolphins) often show homosexuality, some even show it for lifelong periods as is the case with human.¹⁵

Doctors used to treat gay people as if they had mental illnesses. However, homosexuality is no longer called a disease by doctors in many countries. There are some religious and non-religious groups who still try to 'cure' homosexuality. This is sometimes called 'conversion therapy'.¹⁶ In therapies like this one,

homosexual individuals have tried to change themselves to heterosexual and have even claimed they were changed, but most people do not believe it is possible.¹⁷

Conversion therapy or reparative therapy aims to change sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. It is condemned by medical and psychiatry groups such as the American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, Royal College of Psychiatrists, National Association of Social Workers, Royal College of Nursing, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. These scientific and educated groups are concerned that such therapy is a violation of the ethical principles of health care, and violate human rights.¹⁸

Many people believe that it is unfortunate to discuss causes of homosexuality and bisexuality without discussing causes of heterosexuality, too. Although it is easy to understand why heterosexuality exists (heterosexual sex produces babies), that does not explain how the brain develops to produce heterosexual people. Heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality all have causes, and some people believe that to discuss only the causes of homosexuality and bisexuality suggests that there is something wrong with people who have those orientations.¹⁹ It is further asked rhetorically whether homosexuality is genetic or the result of upbringing, and whether it is biological or psychosocial problem.

Nature Arguments

Those who advocate a biological cause have argued that homosexuals possess different hormonal mechanisms, brain structure or genotype. Such biological explanations may not be unrelated as genes lay the blueprint for hormones which in turn influence body structure.²⁰

Nurture Arguments

The pure biological view is that homosexual orientation is programmed in genes, fashioned by hormones and displayed in brain structure. The pure psychological view is that the environment writes upon the developing child as one draws lines on a blank sheet of paper. As with biological arguments, the nurture arguments include the cultural environment, family environment, peer group environment and moral environment with interrelated causes.²¹

Problems Homosexuals Encounter

In many countries, homosexuals are discriminated against. A homosexual person can be fired from a job because he is gay, even if he is a good worker. Homosexuals can be denied renting a home or being able to eat in a restaurant because of their sexual orientation.

In some countries, homosexuals can experience violence. For example, Islamic law is used in some places to kill homosexuals or place them in jail. Some

groups believe over 4,000 homosexuals have been killed in Iran since 1979 because of their sexual orientation. In 2005, after fourteen months of prison and torture, two teenage boys were hanged in Iran for homosexuality.²²

In modern times, homosexuality has become more accepted in Western countries. Most western countries have laws that protect homosexuals from violence and discrimination. In the United Kingdom, homosexuality used to be a crime. Oscar Wilde, the famous Irish writer was imprisoned for it, and as a result, it destroyed his reputation and career as a wit and playwright. Alan Turing, the man who helped the Allies in World War II by breaking the Enigma used by the Germans, was convicted of this crime and ultimately killed himself over the effects of the attempt to cure his homosexuality.²³

Today in the United Kingdom, homosexuals are safer. Homosexual sex between adults is not a crime. Gay and lesbian couples can marry in England, Scotland and Wales. In Northern Ireland, they cannot marry, but they can have "civil partnerships" that have some of the rights and benefits of marriage. Gay people can be in the military. So, although the United Kingdom has changed many things, homosexuals still do not have full equal rights there. In most of the world, homosexuals still do not have the same rights and freedoms that heterosexuals have.²⁴

In the United States, people in denominations who are against same sex relationships are liberalizing quickly, though not as quickly as those in more affirming groups. In Nigeria the summary of the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013 prohibits marriage contract or civil union between persons of same sex and provides penalties for the solemnization and witnessing of same.²⁵ One Bisi Alimi, a gay activist and husband to be, posted an article about homosexuality being part of African Culture contrary to what people think. He said "the idea that homosexuality is 'Western' is based on another western import Christianity. The African Culture celebrates diversity and promotes acceptance." Furthermore, he said in digging up facts I found that, while many Africans say that homosexuality is un-African, African culture is no stranger to homosexual behaviours and acts." He gave example in his local language (Yoruba), a word for 'homosexual' is 'adofuro', a colloquialism for someone who has anal sex. It might sound insulting and derogatory however, the point is, there is a word for the behavior.²⁶ He said it is not a new word; it is as old as the Yoruba Culture itself. He also said in Northern part of Nigeria, homosexual is called 'yan daudu', a Hausa term to describe effeminate men who are considered to wives men.²⁷

Findings

The findings of this work are that sexual morals vary across culture, religion and historical periods. The Biblical view acknowledges that there may be psychological and biological influences in the development of homosexuality.

The framework of Feminism in the Nigerian church does not belong to human conviction but largely to divine intervention. Feminism emerged due to women's resistance to the way they were treated by their societies.

Recommendation

God created Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. It is therefore imperative that a further research is done into the issue of homosexuality. It is recommended that homosexuality, being against the run of nature should be discouraged. Homosexuality can never be at par with heterosexuality (as the proponents are clamoring for) but should be seen for what it is: a deviant perversion of nature. Homosexuals should be empathized with but the tendency should be condemned.

Conclusion

There many religion and belief systems in the world with different religious outlooks on homosexuality, although some of these perceptions may seem to be discriminatory or "anti-gay." In this 21st century many of the religious institutions have been re-evaluating and modifying their tough stance on same-sex or homosexuality so as to be more inclusive and adaptable to modern sexuality in every of its expressions.

Integrating gay identity with other intersectional identity like religion may take some time; nonetheless, it can be extremely fulfilling and successful process. Slow but steady progress is being made as the relationship between sexuality and religion continues to evolve. Religion and sexuality are two aspects of a person's identity and the two can coexist peacefully and provide immense personal fulfillment. Is it really possible to change someone from homosexuality to being straight? Human sexuality is a good gift from God and the church has a great stake in upholding sexual morality as clearly commanded in the Bible. The 21st century Nigerian church should know that homosexuality is a sign of the end time.

Endnotes

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