

Unmasking the Colonial Silence: Sexuality in Africa in the Post- Colonial Context

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the silence associated with sexuality in Africa. Aside from examining the false premise that homosexuality is un-African and un-Christian, this article argues that sexuality in Africa was not only socially controlled, but also carried socio-ethical and sacred overtones. Against the belief that sexuality in Africa exists in silence, the essay contends that in the traditional culture, sexuality was highly celebrated until missionaries attached shame to it—thus introducing the silence which is now defended as the default African position on human sexuality. The article concludes with some ethical considerations on sexuality in Africa.

Introduction

The politicisation of human sexuality across the globe continues to attract attention across academic disciplines. In Africa, however, sexuality is highly contested in various spaces—from politics to religion to African traditions. This contestation has attracted both positive and negative media and academic analysis. While Western Christian scholars have wrestled with this issue for decades, in African Christianity, the subject is still developing. For many years, the study of sexuality in Africa has been dominated by anthropologists, historians and public health scholars—detaching it from the wider African Christian theological discourse.

While the advent of HIV/AIDS forced the issue of human sexuality into African political and social discourses, the subject is deeply entrenched in and limited to heterosexual relationships—sex between males and females. In this discourse, sexuality is defined in heterosexual and patriarchal terms—thus leaving out non-heterosexuals. The UNAIDS identification of Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) as among the key populations with the highest risk of contracting and transmitting HIV forced African nations to expand their definition of human

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sexuality.¹ This development, however, led to unintended consequences of stigmatisation, discrimination and violence against sexual minorities. On the continent where the ‘sex talk’ is an assumed taboo, ‘Men who have Sex with Men’ somehow presented a moral case for rejecting same-sex relations—homosexuality increases HIV/AIDS, and it is against our tradition, religions and, of course, our laws.

It is important to note that since the UNAIDS did not speak of ‘Men who have Sex with Women’, but worked within the established heteronormative sexual landscape, defining sexual minorities solely in sexual terms led to organised sociopolitical and religious opposition to homosexuality. African religious and political leaders perceived campaigns to address HIV/AIDS among sexual minorities as Western imperialism—leading to the politicisation of sexuality.

The politicisation of sexuality exists on the premise that homosexuality is un-African, un-Christian, un-Islamic and unnatural. Accepting John C. Caldwell, Pat Caldwell and Pat Quiggin’s heteronormative theory of lineage extension as central to sexuality in Africa, the article argues that sexuality was not only socially controlled but also carried sacred overtones. Against the belief that sexuality in Africa exists in silence, the essay explores the influence of the Victorian era on sub-Saharan African attitudes to sexuality to argue that the christianisation of Africa individualised sexuality—thus attaching shame to it. It concludes with ethical considerations on human sexuality.

Does an African Sexuality Really Exist?

For more than three decades, the question of whether African sexuality can be understood aside from the West has attracted attention from scholars, especially in attempts to address the HIV/AIDS crisis. While many scholars have explored this question, Caldwell et al. are accredited with the controversial theory that African sexuality differs from Euroasian sexuality in many respects. They write, ‘sub-Saharan African population is not a morally backsliding Euroasian population that can be returned by exhortation and education campaigns to a pattern of sex occurring predominantly within marriage’.² In this regard, the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa has more to do with the African lifeworld of sexual permissiveness, which even colonial missionaries failed to transform. ‘Africa may be nudged toward a Euroasian pattern [sex within marriage] not by missionaries but by fear [of HIV/

1 UNAIDS, “HIV and Sex Between Men”, *Policy Briefs*, August 2006. <http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/dataimport/pub/briefingnote/2006/20060801_policy_brief_msm_en.pdf>. Accessed 26 April 2016.

2 John C. Caldwell, Pat Caldwell and Pat Quiggin, “The Social Context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa”, *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 2 (June 1989), 185-234:224.

AIDS]’, they conclude.³

To them, African sexuality exists for lineage expansion, through which ancestors return into the human community. Failure to honour or any attempt to avoid this act is at par with denying ‘ancestors the right to rebirth and condemning them to eventual extinction’.⁴ In other words,

[Africans] put emphasis on the importance of ancestry and descent, usually accompanied by a belief in ancestral spirit intervention in the affairs of the living; a related social system that is, in its most complex form...places greater importance on intergenerational links than conjugal ones and that gives great respect and power to the old;...In keeping with the aim of lineage perpetuation, emphasis is placed on fertility: by society, the ancestral spirits, and even the high gods who are otherwise of a little day-to-day importance.⁵

Since ancestors retain their identity through procreation, one is obliged to meet this duty. In this regard, ‘reproduction has a centrality to African religion...and its overwhelming emphasis helps to keep the focus off sex’.⁶ While they accept the transformation of African worldviews with the coming of colonialism, they nonetheless argue that colonialism and Christianity have done little to transform sexuality in Africa from its traditional role—lineage extension.

The belief in lineage prolongation affects the African conception of sex—it is an act of procreation removed from morals, norms and conjugal bonds.⁷ Since sexuality exists for procreation, Caldwell et al. insist that in many African ‘societies the initiation ceremonies allowing sexual activity to commence are ritually more important than allowing celebration of marriage’.⁸ Even African initiation ceremonies, they contend, legitimise premarital sex rather than discourage it. In sub-Saharan Africa, they assert, sexual relations lack any sacredness or morality—thus female premarital or extramarital affairs are widely acceptable.⁹ It is on this basis that they conclude that unlike in Euroasia, the sacredness and values associated with marriage are absent in sub-Saharan Africa. Since sex is ‘a worldly activity like work or eating and drinking’, the sacredness associated with sexuality in Africa is a result of ‘the arrival of foreign religions, administrations, and educational systems’.¹⁰

Furthermore, the permissiveness of female sexuality manifests in institutionalised prostitution, which they argue is rampant among married and

3 Caldwell et al., “The Social Context of AIDS”, 225

4 John C. Caldwell, and Pat Caldwell. “The Cultural Context of High Fertility in sub-Saharan Africa”, *Population and Development Review* 13, no. 3 (September 1987), 409-437:416.

5 Caldwell et al., “The Social Context of AIDS”, 188.

6 Caldwell et al., “The Social Context of AIDS”, 196.

7 Caldwell et al., “The Social Context of AIDS”, 201.

8 Caldwell et al., “The Social Context of AIDS”, 188.

9 Caldwell et al., “The Social Context of AIDS”, 222.

10 Caldwell et al., “The Social Context of AIDS”, 194.

unmarried women. In fact, the fear of one's spouse is the only deterrent to women's infidelity. Among the clientele of institutionalised prostitution are 'migrant laborers, short-term miners, cattle herders, itinerant traders, soldiers, in some locations tourists, and men in urban or mining areas'.¹¹ Here, it is important to note that aside from cattle herders, the clientele for prostitution is largely the product of colonialism as opposed to pre-colonial Africa. Arguably, what Caldwell et al. term 'African sexuality' has much to do with colonial and Christian-informed African value systems in which women were/are economically disadvantaged—forcing some into prostitution.

Lineage perpetuation in sexuality in Africa

According to Caldwell et al., a lineage is 'a descent group stretching infinitely far back and with an enormous spiritual investment in reaching indefinitely into the future'.¹² The extension of the lineage is one of the critical moral duties of an African. As Alfred O. Ukaegbu argues, the Ngwa Igbo of Nigeria view procreation as the only avenue through which 'reincarnation and continuity of the family tree are effected in time and space'.¹³

The opposition to homosexuality in Sub-Saharan Africa is partially due to the intergenerational obligation to procreate—the point theologians have long identified. Dominique Zahan argues that fatherhood makes a man fully human.¹⁴ Due to the emphasis placed on procreation, Roman Catholic moral theologian Bénézet Bujo challenges his Church to reassess its position on celibacy.¹⁵ Elsewhere I argue that Bemba sayings such as '*mayo mpapa naine nkakupapa* (my mother carry me today, and I will also carry you) and *kolwe akula asabilwa nabana* (when the monkey grows old, young ones take care of him/her), point to the instrumental value of children on one hand, and the transmission of life on the other'.¹⁶ Such beliefs explain the number of sexuality-related rites and rituals found across sub-Saharan Africa.

11 Caldwell et al., "The Social Context of AIDS", 220.

12 Caldwell and Caldwell, "The Cultural Context of High Fertility", 416.

13 Alfred O. Ukaegbu, "The Role of Traditional Marriage Habits in Population Growth: The Case of Rural Eastern Nigeria", *Journal of African International Institute* 46, no. 4 (1976), 390-398:393.

14 Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, translated by Kate Ezra Martin and Lawrence M. Martin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 10.

15 Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1992).

16 Kapyia J. Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2013), 69.

Reactions to the Caldwell Thesis of Sexuality in Africa

Caldwell et al.'s claim that sexuality in Africa is devoid of moral and religious values and that it lacks permanent bonds is misleading. To start with, Caldwell et al. employ Smith and Dale's 1920 study on sexual relations among the Ila People of Zambia as evidence of sexual permissiveness and lack of marriage bonds in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁷ They nonetheless ignore the following disclaimer,

To correct an impression that might be conveyed by this chapter, I add a note written by Captain Dale: "There are so many unhappy unions, and so many instances of infidelity come under the official's notice, that [the reader] is apt to conclude they are all of a like character. I believe this to be a mistake; they are many instances of sincere affection and many happy unions of long standing; a number of instances, too, where, when death has severed the tie, the survivor has proved inconsolable and sought relief and oblivion in suicide." With this I agree—E. W. Smith.¹⁸

Furthermore, Caldwell et al.'s study imposed Emile Durkheim's dualism of 'the sacred and profane' on Africans. To Durkheim, the separation of the world into the sacred and profane 'is the distinctive trait of religious thought'.¹⁹ Yet in African ontology, the separation between the two is hard to strike.²⁰ In this worldview, a 'worldly activity' is equally a sacred activity. Besides, how can the act through which ancestors retain their identities among their descendants be void of sanctity and moral norms? Similarly, the claim that Africans never attached morality to sexuality or 'sanctified chastity' is hard to defend.²¹

Moreover, the argument that female adultery is allowed and is regarded less illicit than adultery by males is wrong—the opposite is true. Among the Bemba cultures, it is said, *ubucende bwamwaume, ta bonaula in'ganda* (the man's extramarital affair does not break the marriage). While this saying seems to share much with the Victorian era, Audrey Richards notes that in Bantu cultures adultery is feared since 'innocent people are thought to suffer from the magical results of a sex misdemeanor committed by someone else'.²² Richards further argues that intercourse outside marriage is among the evils (such as witchcraft, shedding blood, and murder), which the Bemba believe to threaten the entire community—thus sexual conduct was spiritually monitored. For example, it was

17 Edwin William Smith and Andrew Murray Dale, *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 35-75.

18 Smith and Dale, *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, 75.

19 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 37.

20 Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: International African Institute in association with James Currey, 1999), 65.

21 Caldwell et al.'s study is based on urbanised Africa—with selective use of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial sources. The study also misrepresents Audrey Richards's work among the Bemba.

22 Audrey I. Richards, *Chisungu: A Girls' Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Zambia* (London: Tavistock, 1982), 36.

believed that sexual misconduct without proper purification rituals can inflict serious illness on innocent individuals, ‘who, since they have died in a state of righteous indignation, will “come back” to haunt the family which did them wrong’.²³ It is thus problematic to define sex ‘as a worldly activity’. Additionally, the argument that initiation ceremonies legitimise premarital sexual activities among the youth ignores that historically, initiated boys and girls were considered to have reached the age of marriage. In most cases, the girls would have been courting (*ukukobekelwa*) their future husbands.

Further, it goes without saying that the permissiveness associated with women in urban areas is partially due to the colonial and post-colonial realities in which women were and are economically disadvantaged. Based on the Victorian model of education, boys were educated, while girls were trained how to be ‘good’ wives to educated husbands. This situation was duplicated in terms of work. Men ‘worked’ and women existed at the mercy of men—a tradition still found in Africa present. In this regard, to associate female prostitution with African traditions is wrong. This is not to say that sex outside marriage never existed—like in any human community, it did. However, traditional Africans existed in compact communities—making it easy for cheaters to be noticed. This level of accountability was nonexistent in urban areas—leading to the business of sex.

Like Richards, Beth Maina Ahlberg argues that sexuality in Africa was governed by ‘a strict moral order and rules of sexual conduct were strictly observed’.²⁴ Aside from blaming Caldwell et al. for paying little attention to the colonial transformation of African sexualities, Ahlberg argues that taboos and customs were employed in policing human conduct. Breaking sexual taboos was said to harm the family wellbeing. She further maintains that community pressure aided the policing of sexual taboos.²⁵ Ahlberg gives an extended example of the Kikuyu of East Africa’s (the same culture Caldwell et al. studied) *ngwiko*, a ritual ‘of controlled sexual activity for the purpose of achieving sexual satisfaction without penetration’. Although the newly initiated girls and boys shared one room during *ngwiko*, full sexual intercourse was discouraged. During the ritual, girls tightly tied their clothes around their thighs—thus stopping the penetration even when tempted to do so. Without understanding this ritual, missionaries outlawed it. In time, *ngwiko* was replaced with full sexual intercourse, she argues.²⁶

Consequently, Ahlberg contends that ‘it would be inadequate to examine the christianisation process in Africa without first examining the internal changes

23 Richards, *Chisungu*, 36.

24 Beth Maina Ahlberg, “Is There a Distinct African Sexuality? A Critical Response to Caldwell”, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 64, no. 2 (1994), 220-242:231.

25 Ahlberg, “Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?”, 230.

26 Ahlberg, “Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?”, 231

taking place within Christian morality up to the time of colonial expansion'.²⁷ The Victorian era as well as the imperial milieu did not only influence the behaviour and the beliefs of missionaries and settlers, but also their attitudes toward sexuality. The Victorian era treated man's sexual urge as biologically natural, while a virtuous woman was said to be asexual. This belief accepted male unchastity but viewed female unfaithfulness as anathema—something that seems to control Christian views of sex outside marriage. This social context influenced missionary attempts to establish sexual norms detached from perceived values of worldly Europe.²⁸ Okot p'Bitek's perception of colonial activities in Africa shares this observation. The European notion of the *wild man* or the *noble savage*, he argues, was the official lens through which colonial settlers, anthropologists and missionaries alike analysed African cultures. The reason for 'this primitive critique', p'Bitek explains, 'was to make Western man live up to his supposed "civilized nature"'.²⁹

Imperialism and the transformation of sexuality in Africa

Richard Phillips explores the relationship between the Victorian era sexual values and imperialism. Phillips cites Ronald Hyam, who understood European imperialism as beyond religion and commerce. To him, 'the expansion of Europe was not only a matter of Christianity and commerce' but also of 'copulation and concubinage'.³⁰ In his examination of Josephine Butler (1828-1906), a Victorian era feminist who successfully campaigned against sexual practices in England and the maltreatment of sex workers in India, Phillip writes, to 'Butler the sexual activity of the empire spoke of power and of a morally bankrupt imperial order'.³¹

The colonial imperial project was organised around heteronormative sexual arrangements, Phillips argues. Since sex was important to the imperial agenda, "prostitutes were deployed to serve the armies and frontier settlements".³² Moreover, 'the heterosexual nuclear family was the building block for agricultural colonization of large parts of the world'.³³

Arguably, Hyam's argument that 'copulation and concubinage' were part of the imperial agenda led to the transformation of sexuality in Africa. While Ahlberg seems to agree with Hyam, she traces the transformation of sexuality beyond the

27 Ahlberg, "Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?", 227.

28 Ahlberg, "Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?", 228.

29 Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), 38-39.

30 Richard Phillips, "Heterogeneous Imperialism and the Regulation of Sexuality in British West Africa", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 3 (2005), 291-315:291.

31 Phillips, "Heterogeneous Imperialism", 292.

32 Phillips, "Heterogeneous Imperialism", 292.

33 Phillips, "Heterogeneous Imperialism", 292.

Victorian sociopolitical context. She maintains that various sociopolitical, religious and economic forces—from slave trade to colonialism to the christianisation process to post-colonial modifications and now globalisation—aided/aids the transformation of sexuality in Africa. Since the ultimate goal of colonialism and missionaries was the total eradication of African customs, the prohibition of initiation rites undermined the social order in which sexuality was socially and religiously controlled. Ahlberg writes, colonial Christianity ‘drastically transformed [sexuality], from a context where it was open but kept within well-defined social control and regulating mechanism, to being an individual private matter surrounded largely by silence’.³⁴

It is from this position that contemporary Africa negotiates sexuality. To employ Ahlberg’s four moral realms or regimes, an African has four sources of sexual authority: the Christian conception of sex as taught by missionaries/church, the traditional African perspective in which sexuality was communally understood, the administrative/legal view left behind by colonial authorities and finally the more secular ‘romantic love’ promoted by contemporary global cultures. Ahlberg argues that young people are thus expected to live by the traditional, the Christian and the administrative/legal frames of sexual control. Since the adult world considers these frames legitimate, they employ them to discourage premarital sex, use of contraceptives and abortion among the youth. Without sufficient policing mechanisms, however, the adolescents are thrown into ‘a highly paradoxical situation of prohibition, silence and confusion on the part of the adult world’.³⁵ While she argues that young people prefer ‘romantic love’ which is characterised by ‘serial monogamy’ of quick successive relationships with serious implications for HIV infections, this lifestyle is shared by adults in post-colonial Africa. Since these four moral regimes are operating on Africa at once, the missionaries/church and the administrative/legal regimes generally restrict ‘sex education’ to pre-marriage counselling.

Africans love sex—they don’t talk about it

According to Caldwell et al., in sub-Saharan Africa, sexual matters are rarely discussed between generations or among married couples.³⁶ Similarly, Anglican Archbishop Jonathan Hart from Liberia argues that the silence associated with sexuality is the major problem to confronting issues of HIV/AIDS and homosexuality.³⁷ Ahlberg, however, contends otherwise. Aside from tracing this

34 Ahlberg, “Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?”, 233.

35 Ahlberg, “Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?”, 234.

36 Caldwell, et al. “The Social Context of AIDS”, 201.

37 Jonathan Hart, Interview by the Author, Anaheim, California, July 2009.

silence to the Victorian era, she argues that colonial administrators, settlers and missionaries silenced sexual discourse in Africa. Whereas African traditions allowed sexual discourses and celebrated sex during certain life events,³⁸ missionaries attached shame to it.

Audrey I. Richards's study of the Bemba *icisungu*—the girl's rite of passage in colonial Zambia—is an excellent example. Aside from being presided over by older women (*banacimbusa*, lit. mothers of initiates, and *nangoshe*, lit. the mother of the cobra), sexuality in its fullness was discussed through words, songs and dances as the following song suggests:

Iseni mumone yanga yanga, (Come and see my overflowing joy)
Umwana wandi akulu iye, (My child is now an adult
 [has finally reached puberty])
Iseni mumone yanga, yanga (Come and see my overflowing joy)

This song is sung by the girl's family, while the girl is undergoing the *cisungu* ceremony.

Although some initiation ceremonies can be said to promote patriarchy, during the rite, girls are also taught how to reclaim their powers within marriage. The following song sung during the rite speaks to this point:

Cikala cishasha (Lit. dweller, or penis conqueror and resister)
Somone ifyo bacindila abalume (Come and see how you dance for your
 husband),
Somone ifyo basamfya abalume (Come and see how you wash your husband)
Somone ifyo bamekela abalume (Come and see how you sexually attract your
 husband's attention)

This song is sung before *banacisungu* or *imbusa* (initiates) by *banacimbusa* and other women who dance before *imbusa*—teaching them various sexual skills. In contemporary Zambia, the song is also sung during kitchen parties and marriage ceremonies—accompanied by explicit sexual actions and dances. Ironically, the song starts by presenting the girl as the conqueror of manhood—again pointing to the subversive nature of *cisungu/imbusa* ceremonies.

The word *cikala* has dual meanings—it can mean community dweller or the penis. This dual meaning has made it possible for people to sing it in full view of young people. However, the explicit meaning of this song is hidden—for example,

38 Ahlberg, "Is There a Distinct African Sexuality?", 227. Despite his excellent presentation of African values, even Henry Rowley saw the Chinamwali girl initiation ceremony as evil. After observing the rite in 1861 in today's Malawi, he writes, "I felt that this Niamwali has so much wrong in it, that I presented to the bishop the advisability of preventing it for the future." Henry Rowley, *The Story of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa*, 2nd ed. (London: Saunders and Otley and Company, 1867), 210.

is it speaking about the girl as a community dweller? If so, then she needs to know how to live within her newly created sexual space. On the other hand, if *cikala* means penis, it speaks to the power of the woman over her husband.

That said, it is important to point out that Bemba cultures consider initiation rites as learning points. The following song speaks to this point:

<i>Banacimbusa eyee</i>	(Mothers of the initiates)
<i>Banacimbusa mwangalafye</i>	(Mothers of the initiates you are playing)
<i>Mwafunda umwana eyee</i>	(You teach a child)
<i>Mwafunda umwana mwamusha panshila</i>	(You teach a child, but you leave her by the roadside)
<i>Ukufunda umwana eyee</i>	(To teach a child)
<i>Kunfunda umwana kufikapo</i>	(To teach a child, is to explicitly teach her everything)
<i>Nsenseleni eye, senseleni akasuba kawa!</i>	(Hurry up, time is running out).

Like *cikala*, the word ‘*ukufunda*’ denotes ‘teaching’ or ‘removing the skin of an animal or a tree’. *Ukufunda* is not only about imparting intellectual knowledge, but also socio-ethical obligations. A person who does not respect in laws, for example, is not just wrong, but also ignorant, *tafundwa* (he is not taught). In Bemba culture, *banacimbusa* must explicitly discuss and educate girls in sexual matters without shame.³⁹ It is also *banacimbusa*’s obligation to demonstrate everything sexual—both positive and negative sides of sexuality to the initiates. Therefore, it is misleading to claim that Africans never discuss sexual matters. As already noted, it is Christianity and colonialism that created the silence that surrounds sexuality in contemporary Africa. This colonial silence is now celebrated as the authentic African traditional position on human sexuality.

Sexuality in Africa —It is good and fatal

Suzette Heald criticises Caldwell et al.’s hypothesis for downplaying traditional norms that control sexuality in Africa. Caldwell et al., she contends, wrongly assume that *homo ancestralis* cares only about reproduction, but has no respect for the sexual act itself. In contrast, many African community cultures have strong respect for sex. In East African cultures, she argues, the control of sexuality is at the centre of morality. ‘Coitus’, she argues, ‘is fraught with danger, circumscribed by taboo and subject to restrictions unknown to the West’.⁴⁰ Since taboos are

39 In Zambia, the “*Banachimbusa*.” was played on national public radio to alert and invite adults to radio talk shows that sought to explicitly discuss sexual matters.

40 Suzette Heald, *Manhood and Morality: Sex, Violence, and Ritual in Gisu Society* (London: Routledge, 1999), 132.

meant to protect assumed social values—to question taboos is to violate them.⁴¹

The taboos that surround sexuality in Africa are behind the cult of ancestors and fertility rites. Unless sanctioned by religion, childlessness is abnormal, a curse and the end of one's vital force. Nonetheless, how one gets children also matters.⁴² Among the Bemba, for example, it was believed that sex before marriage would make a girl grow long fingers. Besides, in some cultures, the couple was expected to abstain from sexual intercourse when the child was breastfeeding—in some cultures for a period of two years. It was believed that the husband's sperm would mix with breast milk and poison the child. Further, it was a taboo to have sex with a woman during her menstrual period. In the Bemba, Chishinga and Ushi cultures of Zambia, for example, on the onset of a girl's first menstrual period (*ukuwa icisungu*), she is not allowed to eat with others until certain rituals are performed. *In the absence of such rituals, it is believed that her sacred blood would pollute (ukukowesha icalo) the land.*

In their attempt to defend the 'permissiveness' of female sexuality, Caldwell et al. rightly cite Richards's argument that the Bemba believed that the wife's adultery can pollute the family.⁴³ Like with Smith and Dale, however, Richards also shows that *ukukowesha* (polluting) of the spouse equally applied to both husband and wife—the point they don't mention. It is held that if the husband commits adultery while the wife is expecting, she will deliver a dead baby. In this case, the husband has willingly killed the baby (*aipaya umwana*). On the other hand, if the wife commits adultery when pregnant, it is believed that the woman would die in childbirth 'unless she confesses and gets medicine in time'.⁴⁴ What Richards describes is known as *incila* in Bemba cultures. Richards, however, missed the other side of *incila*. It is believed that the husband's adultery threatens the life of the baby and his pregnant wife at once.

Furthermore, the Bemba cultures treasure virginity.⁴⁵ Unlike other African

41 Marilyn McCord Adams, "Shaking the Foundations: LGBT Bishops and Blessings in the Fullness of Time", *Anglican Theological Review* (Fall 2008), 713-732: 717.

42 Among the Bemba, incest (*ishiiiku*) is said to pollute the land—it is a crime that demands the expulsion of the party involved. Moreover, the Bemba say, *amaaso yankashi, tayemya mutima* (your sister's puberty hair cannot invite an erection), again suggesting sexual boundaries. Here it is important to note that incest in most African cultures goes beyond the immediate family—it includes various categories of relatives within the clan as well as certain in-laws. Heald, *Manhood and Morality*, 492.

43 Caldwell et al., "The Social Context of AIDS", 199.

44 Richards, *Chisungu*, 35. She documents many other sexual taboos found among the Bemba. 28-36.

45 In the Shona cultures of Zimbabwe, young girls were expected to remain virgins (*mhandara*) before marriage. In these cultures, *atete* (aunties) and specific older women (*chipanga mazano*) were tasked with an obligation of ensuring that young girls abstain from sex before marriage. In fact, specific virginity tests (mostly using fingers) were employed, thus discouraging premarital sex. The girl's virginity was also confirmed on the couple's first sexual encounter—usually the family would look for blood on the beddings. If it is discovered otherwise, the husband's family had the right to withhold some of the *lobola* (dowry).

cultures, the Bemba do not have dowry—they charge only *impiya sha cisungu* (the money for the girl's virginity). If the girl claims to be a virgin and it is discovered otherwise, the husband would not pay *impiya sha cisungu*. If he had paid, he has the right to reclaim it from the in-laws since he is not the one *uwalile icisungu* (lit. who ate the girl's virginity or who broke the hymen)—to the embarrassment of the girl's family. It is also a taboo to claim *impiya sha cisungu* twice—thus only the person who had the first sexual encounter with the virgin is responsible for this payment. In short, sexuality in Africa was not as permissive as Caldwell et al. suggest.

Caldwell et al.'s argument that women's sexuality existed only for the interest of men is equally contested. While this may be true in some African cultures, in pre-colonial matrilineal cultures such as the Bemba, Ushi and Chishinga, women were/are the most important and valuable assets a clan possessed. In Bemba cultures, for example, hens (*inkota*/women) were preferred over roosters (*bamukolwe*/men). This is because *bamukolwe*'s duty is limited to the sexual act—they do not grow the family.⁴⁶ Unlike in many cultures where boys and girls are initiated, among the Bemba initiation is reserved for girls (boys are not initiated); again suggesting the value Bemba cultures place on women. In these societies, children belong to the mother as opposed to the father—hence after marriage, the man was expected to leave his village and join his wife's family. Since children belong to the mother, Bemba people are not obliged to carry their fathers' last names as is the case in patriarchal societies. For instance, my two young brothers do not carry Kaoma, which was my father's name; their legal names are Misheck Nyembe and Dennis Chola.⁴⁷

In addition, the rites of passage such as *ukushanina icisungu* (lit. dancing for girl's virginity) were not just about procreation as Caldwell et al. want us to believe. Rather, the rites and ceremonies sought to alert a girl to her sexual obligations in the community. These rites and customs prepared young people for

46 I am aware of the arguments that view all cultures as tainted by patriarchy. In *Raised Hopes, Shattered Dreams*, however, I employ Alice Lenshina, a Bemba woman who successfully founded the Lumpa Church in colonial Zambia, to dismiss the feminist characterisation of her 'role as that of a ritual male. That position ignores the traditional religious context of the Bemba, which was centred on women.... Aside from attributing their origin to the heavenly mother, Mumbi Mukasa, Lenshina's movement benefited from this cosmology': thus her name Regina (Lenshina). Kapyia John Kaoma, *Raised Hopes, Shattered Dreams: Democracy, The Oppressed, and the Church In Africa (The Case of Zambia)* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2015), 144.

47 Similarly, in Ashanti culture of Ghana, the biological link between generations is through the mother. Peter Sarpong explains, 'An Ashanti traces his physical descent through the female line. [An Ashanti] is a member of the mother's matrilineage which consists of all the descendants of both sexes who trace their genealogy through women to a common ancestress'. He argues that among the Ashanti, the father-child bond is not regarded as biological but spiritual. Peter Sarpong, *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti* (Tema, Ghana: Ghana Pub. Corp, 1977), 4-5.

the adult world of sex—in which adultery, sex before marriage, rape and other sexual evils were tabooed.

The Bemba belief that sex before marriage would make a girl grow long fingers shows the methods Africans employed to police sexuality. In Bemba cultures, a girl who is found to be pregnant without undergoing the initiation ceremony or marriage was expelled from the community. Among the Bemba, Richards observes, the ‘child would then be a creature of ill-omen...who would bring misfortune on any village in which it lived, the child will be a portent of evil. It would stop rain from falling. It would make the granaries empty quickly. It might bring dissension’.⁴⁸ To protect the community, the child’s parents were expelled from the village. Aside from revealing the interconnectedness of African ontology, the linking of sexual misconduct to rain, harvest and social wellbeing suggests the sacred and moral undertones of sexuality. In short, while fertility is desired, it must occur within the established socio-religious and cultural norms.

The respect associated with sexuality in Africa is further reflected in the taboos and customs associated with sexual organs. The willful display of sexual organs by both men and women is highly prohibited. This is because ‘nudity is regarded with abhorrence as a mark of witchcraft; and any breach of the respect rules has the same implications’.⁴⁹

Sexuality En Route—the Other Side of Sexuality

The focus placed on procreation presents the picture that sexuality in Africa is immune to change. But as Heald argues, Africa is rapidly undergoing various transformational processes, hence ‘it is to change and not to continuity we should be looking’.⁵⁰ Heald’s argument can easily distract from addressing the colonial baggage that imperialism left behind. The colonial legislation of sexuality through ‘colonial statute book and of English law’ are now employed to prosecute sexual minorities.⁵¹

Also, the post-colonial contestation of sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa is partially due to the rapid social and cultural changes propelled by globalisation. According to Mohamed Daouas, globalisation is ‘multidimensional, affecting all aspects of life—economic, cultural, environmental, and social—as well as

48 Richards, *Chisungu*, 33-34. Sarpong argues that among the Ashanti, sexual intercourse prior to a girl’s attainment of puberty was punished by death or expulsion. Sarpong, *Girls’ Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 47-55.

49 Heald, *Manhood and Morality*, 135. Among the Bemba community cultures, it is believed that witches bewitch people naked.

50 Heald, *Manhood and Morality*, 145. .

51 Phillips, “Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism”, 143.

relations between governments and nations on the five continents'.⁵² While it is questionable whether globalisation is simply another word for imperialism, the link between sexual politics in the global North and Africa's social and economic place in the globalised world exists.⁵³ Phillips speaks to this point when he invites a holistic approach to sexuality politics.⁵⁴ As long as the West continues to economically exploit Africa, Africans will perceive its human rights agenda as neo-colonial impositions. Moreover, calls for sanctions against African nations that criminalise sexual minorities will only incite further organised opposition to same-sex relations. Such calls also open up sexual minorities and their allies to the accusation that they are conduits of imperialism.

Is it Sexuality or Sexualities in Africa?

The forces of globalisation are tremendously transforming sexuality in Africa. These forces are challenging the once assumed 'sacred' sexual norms in lieu of the romantic regime—forcing religious leaders, politicians and traditional authorities into socio-political panic in their attempts to defend 'African' sexuality from what I term 'global sexualities'. The web, romantic movies, social media and other media outlets are the vehicles of global sexualities—making it impossible to regulate.

Consequently, the traditional moral regime's demand of lineage perpetuation compels non-heterosexuals to enter into 'heterosexual marriages', as Dan Allman et al. study of MSM in Nigeria shows. They write, 'social mores and cultural pressures surrounding procreation that virtually require all African men of reproductive age to either marry or to have female partners [and vice versa]' exacerbate the under-reporting of same-sex encounters.⁵⁵ This situation explains why many well-known gay men across Africa publicly boast of being happily married to women, but are privately practicing 'homosexuals or bisexuals within the shadows of life and social structure'.⁵⁶

The existence of MSM in the shadows has serious health ramifications on

52 Mohamed Daouas, "Africa Faces Challenges of Globalization", *Finance and Development: A Quarterly Magazine of the IMF* 38, no. 4 (December 2001). <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2001/12/daouas.htm>>. Accessed 9 January 2016.

53 Meredith L. Weiss, "Prejudice before Pride: Rise of an Anticipatory Counter-movement", in *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression*, edited by Michael J. Bosia and Meredith L. Weiss (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 149-173:166.

54 Phillips, "Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism", 149.

55 Dan Allman, Sylvia Adebajo, Ted Myers, Oludare Odumuye and Sade Ogunsoola, "Challenges for the Sexual Health and Social Acceptance of Men Who Have Sex with Men in Nigeria", *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 9, no. 2 (2007), 153-168, 154.

56 Allman, "Challenges for the Sexual Health", 160.

their spouses and children.⁵⁷ As Allman et al. revealed, in Nigeria, not all gays were using condoms despite understanding the risks involved. However, they maintain that ‘many if not the majority of MSM will either get married or have female sex partners in response to the social norms and strong cultural pressure for procreation’.⁵⁸ This study confirms the UNAIDS observation that ‘Men who have sex with men are often married, particularly where discriminatory laws or social stigma of male sexual relations exist’.⁵⁹

If sexuality in Africa is sacred and puts emphasis on fertility, how can same-sex relations fit into this lifeworld? To some extent, this question is behind the contestation of sexuality in contemporary Africa. In terms of Ahlberg’s ‘four moral regimes’, the Church, governments and traditional leaders are agreed—sexuality in Africa is all about procreation. However, this moral assumption is socially challenged by the moral realm of romantic love. Homosexuality does not lead to procreation, but if romantic sexual relationships between two consenting adults are acceptable, can such relationships be extended to same-gender persons?

But the African perception of coitus is also influenced by other social developments. The global North’s acceptance of same-sex subcultures and the sexualised Hollywood and Nollywood movies are equally transforming sexualities in Africa. Whereas this complicates the study of sexualities in Africa, Phillips warns against Western involvement in non-western sexual politics. He argues that sexual politics is ‘embedded in contested imperial power’.⁶⁰ Identities and politics are thus re-appropriated in local contexts—by the very people who exist on the margins of global politics. As already noted, Western intervention against homophobia in Africa, though critical to the global advancement of human rights, is generally framed within the economic exploitation of non-western nations and cultures. This history aids ‘strategic essentialism’ in former colonies—that is, the selective application or disregard of history in order to influence or respond to local political situations within the confines of unequal global relations.⁶¹ But Phillips also warns against Eurocentrism—that is, ‘imposing western assumptions about identity and liberty upon other peoples and places’.⁶²

Phillips argues that historical cases of transcontinental social justice solidarity—such as the involvement of Western nations in fighting apartheid in South—can still provide some lessons for contemporary Western involvement in non-western sexual politics. Using Butler’s campaign against the abuse of sex

57 Allman, “Challenges for the Sexual Health”, 164.

58 Allman, “Challenges for the Sexual Health”, 164.

59 UNAIDS, “HIV and Sex Between Men”, 1.

60 Phillips, “Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism”, 145.

61 Phillips, “Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism”, 145.

62 Phillips, “Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism”, 145.

workers in India, Phillips asserts: ‘Those with the power to intervene in cross-cultural and transnational sexuality politics must be prepared to do so, engaging and where necessary working to change sexual attitudes and behaviors’.⁶³

African Sexualities: An Ethical Outlook and Considerations

The transformation of sexuality in Africa did not end with early missionary activities. Western churches, para-church, and civil society organisations working on HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, sex education and same-sex politics are constantly metamorphosing sexualities on the continent. Telling by the legal acceptance of same-sex marriages in the US, the Christian conservatives’ influence on sexual politics in North America is waning.⁶⁴ In the global South, and Africa in particular, its influence is growing rapidly.⁶⁵ The US Christian Right influence benefits from the shift in Christian centre of gravity from the global North to the global South and Africa in particular. The 1998 Lambeth Conference (the global gathering of bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion) is an excellent example. African bishops in conjunction with the US Christian Right demanded the expulsion of the US Episcopal Church from the Anglican Communion for its acceptance of LGBTI clergy—leading to the three years suspension of the Episcopal Church on January 14, 2016.⁶⁶

Same-sex is African too

In *Manhood and Morality*, Heald accepts the diversity of sexuality in Africa. Speaking about the Gisu of East Africa, Heald argues that transsexuality and homosexuality exist but ‘it was not an issue—at least one never felt it as such

63 Phillips, “Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism”, 147.

64 The 2011 *Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders* who attended the 2010 Evangelical Lausanne Conference in Cape Town showed that 98% of Africans and 87% of American Evangelical leaders are opposed to homosexuality. 55% of global South leaders felt that their influence was growing in their respective countries. In contrast, 82% of US evangelical leaders said they were “losing influence in the United States...”, while only 17% think evangelicals are gaining influence.” Pew Forum, *Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2011).

65 Kapya Kaoma, *Globalizing the Culture Wars: US Conservatives, African Churches, and Homophobia* (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 2009); *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa* (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 2012); “The Marriage of Convenience: The U.S. Christian Right, African Christianity, and Postcolonial Politics of Sexual Identity”, in *Global Homophobia*, ed. Michael J. Bosia and Meredith L. Weiss, 75-102.

66 Kaoma, *Globalizing the Culture Wars*.

then'.⁶⁷ Heald is right—until the late 1990s, homosexuality was not an issue in African politics. Today, however, it has become a critical subject of global sociopolitical and religious contestations.

On the surface, most Africans perceive homosexuality as un-biblical, unnatural, and definitely un-African. Nonetheless, they hardly provide historical or scientific evidence to back such claims. Even the most notable African anti-gay advocates locate sexual diversity in the continent. Anti-gay Ugandan pastor Martin Ssempe locates homosexuality in the Baganda culture.⁶⁸ Theresa Okafor, a Nigerian recipient of the anti-gay and anti-abortion advocacy group World Congress of Families 2015 *Woman of the Year Award* also claims:

In the 19th Century, we had homosexuality. It has always existed in the pagan society in Africa. In Uganda for instance, the king was homosexual and was making ...sexual advances towards his young pagers in his courts. And it is precisely the missionaries from the West, who stepped in and made those pagers convert to Christianity and told them the righteousness of sexuality and why it is wrong to yield to the advances of the king....If homosexuality was in our pagan society, what is progressive; what is new about it? It was there! And it was the missionaries who came and changed all of that... There is nothing new, it has always been there. And right now, we are fighting it— it is like retrogressive—it is [going back to] where we started—[traditional life].⁶⁹

On the value of procreation, Okafor said: 'We in Africa see the family, as well as marriage, as something divine, and ordained towards life and love, and so we're very protective over anything that seeks to undermine the family, religion, and culture'.⁷⁰ To some extent, Okafor's fear of homosexuality can be termed 'protective homophobia'—that is, opposition to homosexuality as an attempt to protect Africa's traditional heritage, Christianity and children from the assumed homosexual agenda.

Critically, Ssempe's and Okafor's confessions contradict the US Christian Right and African religious and political leaders' claim that homosexuality is foreign to Africa. In line with Phillips's 'strategic essentialism', however, African anti-gay advocates, religious and political leaders uphold the mantra that homosexuality is un-African.

67 Heald, *Manhood and Morality*, 160.

68 Martin Ssempe, "When Faith, State and State-Inspired Homosexuality Clash", *The New Vision*, 3 June 2005, 8.

69 Kerry Eleveld, "World Congress of Families Attendee Explains How U.S.-based Groups spread Homophobia in Africa". <<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2015/11/03/1444045/-World-Congress-of-Families-attendee-explains-how-U-S-based-groups-spread-homophobia-in-Africa>>. Accessed 20 November 2015.

70 Peter Montgomery, "Religious Right Activist At World Congress Of Families: Anti-Gay, Anti-Choice Africans Will 'Save the World'". <<http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/religious-right-activist-world-congress-families-anti-gay-anti-choice-africans-will-save-wor#sthash.Cb6ETXEh.dpuf>>. Accessed 10 January 2016.

Although anti-gay advocates are the most noticeable, sexual rights are slowly making inroads on the continent. Despite its anti-gay record, Senegal released 11 individuals allegedly ‘arrested for participating in a homosexual marriage’ due to ‘lack of evidence’ in 2016. Amidst opposition from Islamic leaders, Senegalese Justice Minister Sidiki Kaba declared, ‘In the eyes of the law, there are no homosexuals in Senegal’.⁷¹

In May 2014, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights took a bold step on sexual rights for sexual minorities. It condemned ‘acts of violence, discrimination and other human rights violations; “corrective” rape, physical assaults, torture, murder, arbitrary arrests, detentions, extra-judicial killings and executions, forced disappearances, extortion and blackmail’ directed on sexual minorities. The Commission further called on African nations to end such acts, ‘ensuring proper investigation and diligent prosecution of perpetrators, and establishing judicial procedures responsive to the needs of victims’.⁷² In 2015, the United Nations followed the African Commission’s call and demanded that all nations ‘urgently end violence and discrimination against’ sexual minorities.⁷³ On 30 June 2015, Mozambique followed South Africa by decriminalising homosexuality.

Global terminologies in local context

Responding to Australian-born British pro-gay activist Peter Gary Tatchell’s argument about the colonial nature of homophobia (the argument that homophobia is a product of nineteenth century British imperialism), Phillips argues that ‘sexualities were and are understood differently in various societies, places and times’.⁷⁴

Anthony Manion and Ruth Morgan share Phillips’s argument. Based on their research experience in Africa, they advocate moving ‘away from western terminology and labels’. Speaking about the 1997 South African Gay and Lesbian

71 *The Latin American Herald Tribune*, “Islamic Organizations in Senegal Ask for Tougher Laws against Gays”, 3 February 2016. <<http://www.laht.com/article.asp?CategoryId=12395&ArticleId=2404845>>. Accessed 10 April 2016.

72 African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, “275: Resolution on Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the basis of their real or imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity”, in *The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (the African Commission), Meeting at its 55th Ordinary Session Held in Luanda, Angola, from 28 April to 12 May 2014*. <<http://www.achpr.org/sessions/55th/resolutions/275/>>. Accessed 3 February 2015.

73 United Nations, “Ending Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender And Intersex People”, September 2015. <<http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/msm/JointLGBTIStatementENG.pdf?ua=1>>. Accessed 26 April 2016.

74 Phillips, “Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism”, 144.

Archives' first oral history project, which sought to document the experiences of LGBTI persons over the age of 60 in diverse black communities, they realised that older African women didn't self-identify as lesbians.

This experience was repeated in the 2003 Africa women oral history project, when potential African interviewers denied the existence of 'lesbians in their countries'.⁷⁵ But when challenged to think beyond the Western labels of LGBTI, they successfully documented same-gender loving women in their respective countries.

Regardless, the acceptance of sexual minorities' rights demands the decolonisation of sexualities as well as power on the continent. It invites the transformation of global economic relationships, 'and, most fundamentally, the transformation of sexualities and sexual subjectivities'.⁷⁶ Decolonising sexuality will also mean rejecting the Victorian silence associated with sex in Africa. Until Africa is able to talk about sex as a theological, ethical, pastoral and social justice issue, the continent will remain captive to the Victorian/colonial era silence.

Sexuality and gender justice in Africa

Gender based violence remains the darkest cloud on the continent that needs confronting. African Christianity should not continue to ignore the tears of the abused; the dark scars and dark spots of battered women and the coffins of the victims of domestic violence. In light of the oppressive structures of patriarchy, there is need to liberate sexuality from the shackles of heteropatriarchy.

There is a danger, however, in conflating sexuality with heteronormative assumptions of patriarchy, colonialism and Christianity. Sexuality is not just about procreation or homosexuality, but about gender justice, domestic violence, rape and child molestation among many issues. Fulata L. Moyo's challenge to the African Christian family applies to sexuality: 'How can faith-based communities transform the concept of headship so as to encourage mutuality and communion of partners who complement each other?'⁷⁷ But Moyo's question raises another critical point—is sexuality limited to heterosexuals—what do we do with intersex people? Moreover, what is the place of the girl-child in sexuality?

The African initiation ceremonies such as *icisungu* though important are not the best guide to the maturity of the girl-child to enter marriage; neither is the onset of the menstrual period (as was the case in pre-colonial Bemba cultures).

75 Anthony Manion and Ruth Morgan, "The Gay and Lesbian Archives", *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* no. 67 (2006), 29-35:31.

76 Phillips, "Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism", 149.

77 Fulata Lusungu Moyo, "Religion, Spirituality and Being a Woman in Africa: Gender Construction Within the African Religio-cultural Experiences", *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* no. 61 (2004), 72-78:75.

Just as genital mutilation (female circumcision) is rejected; marrying off minors is not only immoral but also a violation of the child's rights. In various African cultures, the abuser is only asked to pay some money called 'damage', and in case of pregnancy, he is forced to marry the victim. *The infamous 'child rape sanitised as 'child marriage' cannot be defended on the premise of Christian morality or sexuality—it is sinful.*

Sexuality in Africa and childlessness

Traditionally, Africans considered childlessness as a curse. A person who dies without a child is believed to become an 'alien spirit'. The fear associated with alien spirits compounds the stigmatisation of childless persons. Unlike in the West where barrenness or impotency is acceptable, in Africa, it is a community quandary. In most cases, the barren woman would have a child through her sister—that is, by allowing her husband to have sex with her sister; if the problem lies with the man, a brother or a cousin would father a child for him through his wife.

Due to the embarrassment and silence associated with infertility, some families deny its existence. Among the Bemba, for example, an infertile man is called *cibola* (something rotten). Accordingly Dominique Zahan argues that infertile persons 'are compared to the unproductive earth, having no value'.⁷⁸ These observations explain the Caldwell's findings that women attempting to limit families through family planning are demonised.⁷⁹ If infertile heterosexuals were considered as rotten and family planning demonised, non-heterosexuals are considered worse. Yet the liberating love of Christ demands upholding the dignity of every human being; it invites human participation in the *missio Creatoris Dei*, planted in divine-justice and sacramental-accompaniment.

Concluding Remarks

The assumption that Africans never discuss sexuality is a myth. The silence that currently surrounds sexuality in Africa is a sad consequence of colonialism and Christianity. African Christianity still finds it hard to speak openly about sexuality with adolescents. Since the Church's involvement in sexual discourse comes very late in the child's development—mostly at the time of marriage, the youth learn about their sexualities from one another, school and the web. By learning how traditional societies handled sex education, the Church can unmask this silence and direct young people into celebrating their diverse sexualities.

78 Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, 10

79 Caldwell and Caldwell, "The Cultural Context of High Fertility", 414.

Consequently, the study of sexuality in Africa must pay attention to gender justice issues. The issues of domestic violence, sex workers, corrective rape, and girl-child sexual abuse ('marriages') need confronting. In many traditional societies, puberty was taken as the legal age for marriage. Advances in women's rights and sciences show the negative effects of such marriages on the girl-child. Aside from denying girls the chance to compete and contribute fully to nation building and development, early marriages do not just risk the lives of minors but also condemn them into perpetual poverty—robbing them of their *ubuntu*, while making them slaves and properties of their husbands. The girl-child is not just a body; she is a sacred image of God, with rights to be respected, defended and protected by all Christians, governments and the entire human race.

The question whether we should be speaking about African sexualities as opposed to 'African sexuality' is critical. The emphasis placed on procreation can deceive us into thinking that all human beings are born as heterosexuals. But Jesus taught otherwise: 'There are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it' (Matt 19:12).⁸⁰

In addition, the question of intersex and transgender individuals demands pastoral responses. To claim that God does not make mistakes, while ignoring the biological realities of families of intersex and transgender individuals is a pastoral insult to God's people. If some people are born eunuchs, transgender and intersex, then sexual diversity is a natural aspect of God's Creation. The Church should acknowledge these realities—sexuality in Creation is diverse. Regardless of our sexual orientations and gender identities, we are one sacred family of God, created, loved and redeemed by our Creator.

Finally, the issue of childlessness among heterosexual couples needs theological and ethical responses. By over-emphasising procreation, we ignore that only some people are born with the ability to procreate. The over-emphasis placed on lineage perpetuation puts pressure on infertile couples to seek children through extramarital affairs—exposing them to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. By unmasking the colonial silence, African Christians can adequately address various issues associated with human sexuality while celebrating the sacredness of sexual diversity.

⁸⁰ For the wider discussion of the diversity of human sexuality in the Bible, see Kapyra Kaoma, "Beyond Adam and Eve: Jesus, Sexual Minorities and Sexual Politics in the Church in Africa", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 153 (November 2015), 6-27.