



AFRICAN SEXUALITIES: AN OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGES FACED BY HOMOSEXUALS.

Grace Bosibori Nyamongo

Introduction

Anthropological evidence shows that homosexuality was common among indigenous Africans in the pre-colonial period. Heterosexuality is normally encouraged in many ethnic communities due to the influence of religious and African culture beliefs and practices. Therefore, homophobic violence against gays and lesbians may be seen as a therapeutic measure against what Africans may consider as 'un-African' sexual acts, or unreligious practices. As a result, homosexuality is seen as a deviation from heteronormativity thereby leading to hostility towards homosexuals. The degree of violence against homosexuals and the pessimistic manner in which homosexuality is perceived represents a new understanding of African sexuality.

This article presents an overview of homosexuality in Africa, challenges that homosexuals face and the strategies they devise to cope with homophobic violence against them. The article is based on secondary data mainly about the experiences of homosexuals. In this paper the term homosexual will be used to refer to gays or lesbians. I argue that, the assumption that homosexuality is an alien and an 'un-natural' practice has contributed to homophobic violence against homosexuals across the African continent. This paper illustrates the historical patterns and practices of homosexuality in Africa. It also explains the existence of same-sex sexual relationships across Africa and shows that these practices were initially tolerated and how they are perceived in contemporary Africa.

Purpose and Objectives

Much of the debates about homosexuality is mainly reported on social media especially when an individual has 'come out', initiated a same –sex marriage, has demanded for his/her rights or has experienced violence because his/her sexual orientation. Usually the common reaction from the generally based on the assumption that homosexuality is an 'un –African'/ 'un-Christian' or alien practice which should not be tolerated.

This article aims at illustrating that homosexuality existed in the pre-colonial Africa and it is a vibrant practice in the contemporary African societies regardless of homophobic violence meted against homosexuals as well as the legal measures which some countries have put in place to undermine the existence of homosexuality. I will therefore seek to answer the following questions: Does the practice of same sex relationships exist in Africa? What are the experiences of homosexuals in Africa? What are the perspectives of some African leaders regarding homosexuality? What challenges do homosexuals face and what are their coping mechanisms?

Literature Review

Homosexuality, Overview and Challenges

In the following section of the article, homosexuality in Africa is highlighted to understand if the practice existed in Africa or its alien / 'un-African', African leaders' perspectives about homosexuality, homosexuals' experiences, challenges and coping strategies in the volatile world.

Did Homosexuality exist in pre-colonial Africa?

There has been a proliferation of homophobic violence against homosexuals as a result of widespread assumption that the practice is an 'unnatural act' or 'un-African' or 'un-religious' behaviour. For instance, Lamb (1982, p.37) argues that "homosexuality in

Africa is virtually unknown... Africa's tradition is "rigidly heterosexual". However, several scholars (Evans-Prichard, 1970; Geenberg,1988; Moodie et al. 1988; Murray,2000; Neill,2009; Sibuyi,1993; Tamale, 2014) have disapproved Lamb's assertion that homosexuality is unknown to Africa by demonstrating in their studies that the practice actually existed even in the pre-colonial Sub-Saharan African states and more especially among indigenous people.

In *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Societies'* Neill (2009), reveals the existence of homosexuality among the Azande of the Central African Republic, in Southern Sudan, Northern Zaire, and among the mine workers of southern Africa. While Greenberg's (1988 pp.61-2) study shows a diverse existence of homosexuality across the Sub-Saharan African regions including Angola, Kenya, Congo, South Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Senegal, and Uganda. Homosexual relations with young boys in homo-social places such as gold mines, cattle camps or royal places were also reported (Murray, 2000; p.161-167; Neill 2009: pp.52-55). In such cases, boy servants undertook women's/ wives' work. Whereas such practices were tolerated and believed to be African, current homosexuality is considered alien to the Africans. For instance, Besmer (1993) holds that in the pre-colonial Nigeria among the Hausa, homosexuals and male cross-dressers commonly known as *Yan Daudu* did the business of procuring female prostitutes for male customers. Besmer maintains that after a long period of interaction between *Yan Daudu* and Hausa men there was a possibility of consensual sexual relations. Similarly among the Langi of northern Uganda the effeminate males were called *mudako dako* in the local dialect. They were treated as women. Hence, they could marry men (Tamale, 2014). As well, Neill (2009) and Murray (2000) concur that homosexuality was not only practiced by warriors as an element of military apprenticeship but also for consensual relationships. For example, among the Azande of the Central Republic of Congo, Kings, princes and soldiers took young men as lovers. According to ethnographer Evans-Pritchard:

Homosexuality is indigenous. Azande do not regard it at all as improper, indeed it is very sensible for a man to sleep with boys when women are not available or are taboo...In the past this was a regular practice ... Some Princes may even have preferred boys to women, when both were available (cited by Murray 2000, p.161).

Similarly, homosexuality was also practiced by rulers during precolonial period. For instance, Kabaka Mwanga the Second of Buganda Kingdom was known to be gay (Tamale,2014).

According to Sibuyi (1993), in the South African mines and prisons homo-social relations existed before the 1900s. Sibuyi argues that while husbands married young men for sexual gratification, boy-wives endured such relationships for protection, and acquisition of property earned from their 'husbands'. Interestingly, the wives of the mine workers preferred their husbands to take young male lovers instead of turning to the prostitutes (Isaac and Mckendrick, 1992). Same-sex relations existed in the Swahili societies during slavery between the slave masters and slave boys (Middleton, 1992, pp. 120-121). Nevertheless, homosexuality became unacceptable after the advent of modern religion.

We should keep in mind that the practice of homosexuality among indigenous communities was not mysterious because the society was aware of its existence. For example, it was common knowledge "*that once a man was on the mines, he had a boy or was turned into a wife himself*" (Moodie et al. 1988, p.56). Moreover, rules governing homo-social relations including fidelity in some African societies indicate that homosexuality was in existence even though it was practised by a specific category of people.

The Basotho women engaged in erotic sexual relationships known as *motsoalle* (*special friend*) with other women (Tamale 2014). This was not only to provide emotional support but also to complement the prolonged absence of their spouses as a result of labour migration. Accordingly to such sexual practices between married women were

overlooked as they were expected to be conducted privately (Spiegel 1991). This was most probably because such relationships did not result in reproduction and replication of kinship which was the purpose of sexual interaction. However, many cases of homosexuality involving affluent foreign tourists and the local males should be seen as sexual exploitation of local males by foreigners mainly for monetary gains. As Greenberg (1988) evidently argues: "*the French, for example found boys readily available in North Africa, where pederasty was commonly practised.*" (p.120).

Although the existence of lesbians has not been widely documented as much as that of the gays, the works of Davis and Whitten (1987) as well as Evans- Prichard (1970) show that lesbianism was common in polygynous relationships where women used non-natural phalli to compensate for infrequent heterosexual sex. Homosexuality was reported among women of the Congo, Nuer of Sudan and Nandi women of Kenya as well (Tamale, 2014; Neill, 2009). A study conducted by Murray and Roscoe (1998) shows that same-sex romantic relationships existed in over 50 societies in pre-colonial Africa and further disputes the assertion that homosexuality was alien and an un-African practice.

Homosexuality in contemporary Africa

Woman to woman marriages among the Shona of Zimbabwe is linked to sexual desire between women. However, in some societies in Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania and Kenyan same-sex marriage was and is practised simply to provide sonless or barren women with future male heirs through female wives. (Amadiume, 2015; Tamale,2014; Oboler, 1980). Hence, sexual intercourse has rarely been cited in such cultural marriage relationships. In some African indigenous societies, homosexuality was associated with some activities such as high crop yields, good health, and rearmanent. Diviners also used homosexuality to protect against evil spirits (Tamale,2014). Whereas, in many modern learning institutions in eastern and southern Africa especially boarding schools, the existence of 'mummy-baby' relationships among older and young girls have been

reported. Gay (1985, p.97) argues that mummy-baby relationships provided both emotional support and “social networks for married and unmarried women in towns or schools” and that older girls in modern schools develop romantic relationship called “mummy-baby,” for emotional support. In 2018 it was reported that homosexuality was rampant in Kenyan boarding schools. Confirming the report, the Kenya Cabinet Secretary for Education stated that homosexuality was a social and moral issue which needed to be addressed with the help of religious institutions, communities, parents and the media (Atieno, 2018).

Similarly, homosexuality in schools in Ugandan schools was of great concern to government. Hence, schools were to devise strategies for identifying homosexuals for counselling (Onyulo, 2017). Agboola (2015) and Oketch (2019) show that homosexuality was pervasive in South African and Kenyan prisons respectively.

According to Agboola, women prisoners engaged in consensual same-sex relationships not only to satisfy emotional and sexual needs but also for companionship. In Kenyan prisons, male convicts ‘married’ other men because of lack of conjugal rights. The existence of homosexuality and lesbianism is justified by Pincheon’s assertion that “whenever there is a social contact between persons of the same sex, there usually exists some homosexual behaviour.” (2000, p.43). However, hardly any study has shown that such relationships led to same-sex marriages as in the case of the controversial homosexual relationships.

African leaders’ perception of homosexuality

The proliferation of homosexuals has been so high that it has significantly influenced how homosexuality is viewed in the contemporary African society. In exploring the situation of homosexuality in Africa, we need to acknowledge that African societies are shaped by strong forces such as African beliefs and traditions as well as various religious faiths which have less tolerance to homosexuality.

The English law against the crime of sexual intercourse between two men or between a man and an animal was adopted and still is firmly entrenched in most African countries

which were former colonies of the British. Such legal forces influence the African perception of homosexuality from different perspectives. This is probably the reason why many Africans consider homosexuality as an alien practice.

Some critics consider homosexual acts as immoral habits imported from the west. Hence, they are alien to the African culture. As a result, they treat homosexuals with rejection and aggression. Such antagonist response has caused hot debates around the issue of homosexuality.

Additionally, anti-gay statements from both political and religious leaders across Africa have often been made to demonstrate the rejection of homosexuality.

For example, in 1996 President Sam Nujoma of Namibia declared that "*homosexuality deserves a severe contempt and disdain from the Namibian people and should be uprooted totally as a practice*" (Amory, 1997, p.6). Nujoma further declared that "*homosexuals must be condemned and rejected in our society.*" (Kovac,2002,p.90).

In another statement President Nujoma stated that "...*We will make sure that Namibia will get rid of lesbianism and homosexuality ...Police are ordered to arrest you and deport you and imprison you...*" (Hoad, 2007, P.xii). This statement not only demonstrates the magnitude of dislike and hatred for homosexuals but also his perception regarding homosexuality. Such statements from the head of State could obviously incite the citizens against homosexuals. Likewise, in September 1999, Daniel Arap Moi, former president of Kenya denounced homosexuality describing it as a deviant act against Christian religion and African traditions. He then cautioned Kenyans to guard against such precarious practice (BBC News, 30 Oct. 1999).

Similarly, showing dislike for homosexuality, in 1994,The late President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe likened "*homosexuals to dogs and pigs*". (Kovac, 2002, p.90 see also Hoad,2007). In July 1998, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda stated: "*I have told the CID [Criminal Investigation Department] to look for homosexuals, lock them up and*

charge them.” President Museveni also termed the practice as ‘disgusting’ (Hoad, 2007, p. Xii; Rocha,2017, p.2). Both President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe publicly condemned homosexuality arguing that it was un-African and that it was against the African traditional values and culture (Reddy, 2001).

In this regard, people in homosexual relationships in countries where the practice is outlawed have to be vigilant especially when leaders make statements denouncing homosexuality (Hoad, 2007; Murray and Roscoe, 2007; Reddy, 2001).

Another reason for disapproval of homosexuality may be associated with the issue of reproduction. Procreation is the purpose of marriage in the African and religious communities. For the religious believers marriage and reproduction is strongly attributed to the Biblical teachings. For instance, in Genesis 1:26-28 it is believed that after creation of the earth God said “ *Let us make man in Our image... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him, male and female and said to them. Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it..*” (KJV). For this reason,, marriage between opposite sexes and reproduction are strongly entrenched in biblical teachings that's why there is religious disrespect for homosexuality.

Therefore, countries where homophobic violence is rooted in Christianity may use biblical verses to condemn homosexuality and other kinds of sexual immorality. For instance, according to the book of Leviticus: “*If a man also lies with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them,*” (Leviticus, 20:13 see also 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11). Several biblical teachings have warned against various kinds of sexual immorality including homosexuality and bestiality (Deutronomy,27:21) Accordingly, people who are sexually immoral should not only be put to death for abomination, but also for deviating from Christian norms, beliefs and practices. Africans are mainly Christians or Muslims. Likewise, many countries across the African continent whether Christian or Islamic do not tolerate homosexuality.

For instance, in Nigeria the Most Reverend Peter Akinola of the Anglican Church compared “*homosexuals with baboons, lions, dogs or cows.*” Akinola further described “same sex marriage as ungodly, un-cultural, un-African and Un-Nigerian” (Biema, 2007, P.40,42). Consequently, homosexuals are discriminated against by the religious communities where the practice is considered “un-Christian” because homosexuality is well thought-out as sinful and ‘unnatural act’ according to the Biblical teachings (Baraka & Morgon, 2005; Horn, 2006; Polder & Wells, 2004; Potgieter, 2004).

However, in South Africa some Christian Churches which are intolerant to homosexuality perceive the practice as ‘un-Christian’. As a result, individual leaders in the mainline Christian Churches use their pulpits to preach against homosexuality. Even though, there are some churches which specifically put up with homosexuals (Human Rights Watch, 2011, P.22). Besides, fair tolerance of homosexuals in some South Africa Churches various African countries have passed laws against homosexuality.

The Law and Homosexuality

Homosexuals have been treated differently by different countries on the basis of existing legal structures. The Pew Research Centre (2013) survey shows that In countries such as Somalia, Mauritius, Nigeria and Sudan the punishment for homosexuality is death. In Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda the sentence varies from 14 years to life imprisonment; in Malawi, Southern Sudan, Egypt and Libya it is 8-13 years; in Guinea, Ghana, Togo, Gambia, Senegal, Angola, Botswana, and Cameroon the punishment is 3-7 years. While in Liberia, Burundi and Benin the punishment is one month to 2 years. However, in countries such as Namibia, South Africa, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, and Niger there is no form of legal punishment for homosexuality. The survey by Pew Research Centre (2013) further shows that rejection of homosexuality in some African countries like Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria range between 90% and 98%. This survey confirms that some African countries have strongly denounced homosexuality through their legal structures.

For instance, Article 45(1) and (2) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 states that “*The family is a natural and fundamental unit of society. Every adult has the right to marry a person of the opposite sex, based on the free consent of the parties*”. Section 162 and 165 of the Kenya Penal Code states that “*anyone who has carnal knowledge of anyone against the order of nature is guilty of a felony and is liable to 14 years imprisonment*”.

Same -sex marriage may be seen as an act against life because it appears to counteract procreation which is the outcome of the union of marriage.

Therefore, the Kenya Constitution and the statute do not recognise same-sex marriages. However, the Kenyan Constitution 2010 protects the rights of minorities against discrimination. A report by the Human rights Watch (2015) shows that several homosexuals have been threatened or subjected to mob violence especially at the coastal region of Kenya with hardly any protection from the authorities in charge (Human Rights Watch, September,28, 2015). Nonetheless, in 2018, the Kenya Court of Appeal outlawed anal examination for people suspected to be homosexuals (Grosse, 2018).

This may be considered a positive step towards recognizing gay rights. Conversely, in the neighbouring country Tanzania, forced anal examination is conducted to collect evidence of anal intercourse. This was one of the colonial laws prohibiting carnal knowledge against the order of nature. This practice contravenes the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights Resolution 275 which outlaws violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The Resolution 275 specifically condemns forced anal examination which is considered a human rights violation and calls upon states to protect the rights of sexual minorities (ACHPR/Res. 275 (LV) 2014).

On the other hand, according to the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990, Chapter 77 of the Criminal Code Act, committing carnal knowledge ‘against the order of nature is punishable with 14 years imprisonment. Additionally, the Nigerian Islamic states have enshrined the *Shariah* law on homosexuality which legitimizes the stoning of gays to

death (Ottoosson, 2007) making Nigeria one of the seven countries in the world to prescribe death penalty for consensual same –sex practice (O' Flaherty & Fisher, 2008).

While in Zanzibar, the Penal Code of 1934 which was amended in 2004, sections 132 (1) (2); section 150 (a) (c); section 152 and 153 outlaws various sexual acts such as sodomy,sexual abuse, homosexuality and lesbianism with each offence having its own prescribed punishment.

Similarly, Section 145 and 146 of Uganda's Penal Code (Cap 120 criminalizes 'carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature' and the punishment is life imprisonment. The Anti-Homosexual Bill 2009 which came into force on March 2014 outlaws homosexuality which is punishable with life sentence to homosexuals and criminalizes those who hold acts of homosexuality. Article 7 and 8 of the Bill state that anyone who aids or procures homosexuals will be imprisoned for seven years (Rocha, 2017).

Section 9 of the 1996 South African Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender, sex and sexual orientation. Similarly, South African Labour Relations Act, 1995; Medical Schemes Act 1998; Domestic Violence Act of 1998; Refugees Act of 1998; Rental Act of 1999 and Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 2000 protect the rights of homosexuals as they outlaw all manner of dicrimination, violence and unfair dismissal from work on the basis of sexual orientation. (Human Rights Watch, 2011). This illustrates the extent to which the South African government protects the rights of homosexuals. However, the legal structures put in place agianst homosexuality by some African states show the official position of those countries in regard to the practice. Therefore, homophobic violence against homosexuals should not only be attributed to the existing laws against homosexuality but also to the statements made by leaders about homosexuals.

Violence against homosexuality

In African societies where homosexuality is considered “disgusting” or ‘un-natural acts’, (Rocha,2017; Uganda Anti- Homosexuality Bill,2009) it has been outlawed. Under such circumstances homosexuals rarely get state or non-state protection since the society is generally homophobic. In some cases, violence against suspected homosexuals illustrates the level of abhorrence for homosexuality. In other cases, parents of homosexuals are likely to be humiliated, harassed or blamed for their children’s sexual orientation. Besides harassment of homosexuals’ parents, homosexuals also experience both verbal and physical violence (BBC News,May 4,2009; Karanja, 2009).

Each African ethnic community has a derogatory term which demonstrates rejection and hatred for homosexuals. Despite the existence of homosexuality in pre-colonial Africa,the current emergence of homosexuality appears ‘new’ to the Africans and has not only been linked to immorality but also thought to be a foreign practice. Therefore, communities have used derogatory terms to refer to homosexuals or the practice itself.For example, in the Gusii community of Western Kenya the terms *omonyaka* or *omokayayu* which literally means immoral. These are used to refer to a person who is engaged in acts such as rape, incest, bestiality and homosexuality. Such person is treated with a lot of disrespect in society.

Whereas in Senegal there was a long history of male gender benders popularly called *Goor-jiggen* - a Wolof term which literary means “man-woman” because of dressing up as women. Such men were traditionally tolerated as they played social roles with women. However, this was later associated with homosexuality or ‘un-natural acts or indecent conducts” due to the influence of local Imams. Hence, *Goor-jiggen* is no longer tolerated in Senegal (BBC News, May 4, 2009). While among the Luo community of Western Kenya, a gay person is disparagely described as *jangoth olund chuo* which simply means one who has anal intercourse with other men. On the other hand, among the Yoruba of Nigeria homosexual is called ‘*adofuro*’ which literally means in Yoruba language someone who has anal sex and among the Hausa they are called ‘*yan daudu*’ (Alimi, 2015) In other some parts of Kenya homosexual acts are considered

taboo and immorality that requires ritual cleansing before an individual is accepted by the community (Greenberg, 1988, pp.75-76).

In the Limpopo Province of Southern Africa the term *Monnamusadi* which literary means “man-woman” is used to refer to lesbians. While the term *stabane* which literary means a person with two organs is derogatively used for homosexuals (Human Rights Watch 2011,p. 57). While among the Swahili of East Africa male transvestites also known as *shoga* (Sl., *mashoga* Pl.) acted as women during Swahili festivals.

Even though the term *shoga* means a friend it also refers to a person who is attracted to members of the same sex (in Kiswahili dialect it may be translated as *mtu anayevutiwa kingono na watu wa jinsia yake*). The use of derogatory terms may sound insulting but they refer to the practice and they exemplify people’s attitude towards homosexuality in society and this could contribute to homophobic violence against homosexuals in many African communities especially where homosexuality is still unmentionable.

South Africa, is one of the African countries where gay rights are recognized. However, surveys have shown that lesbians and transgender men have been subjected to ‘corrective’ rape by gangs and all forms of violence ranging from physical, verbal to sexual abuse as well as unwanted pregnancies. The South African lesbians and transgender men are also harassed and physically abused by the police (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

While in some parts of Africa, family members conspire with sexual assailants to abuse homosexuals. In such cases rape is usually used not only as a corrective measure against ‘un-natural’ behaviour but as an aggressive mechanism to ‘teach’ lesbian women the necessity of having intercourse with men. As result “lesbians are raped to supposedly make them real-women” (La Von 2007, p.40; Human Rights Watch,2011). La Von adds that some rape incidents are organized by parents of the lesbian women to

teach them a lesson for bringing shame to the family. Unfortunately, this leads to unwanted pregnancies and other health risks.

In Uganda, the Anti- Homosexual Act 2014 permits life sentence to homosexuals and criminalizes people who tolerate acts of homosexuality including accommodating homosexual tenants. Same-sex marriage ceremonies and gay pride events were also outlawed (Rocha, 2017). Homosexuals have since then experienced various forms of human rights violations including police brutality, physical violence and discrimination in access to basic services.

Moreover, Ugandan homosexuals are often isolated, discriminated against at work and in AIDS treatment clinics and sometimes lynched, subjected to forced anal examination to collect evidence of anal intercourse and other degrading treatments which violate gay people's human dignity. A report by the Human Rights Awareness Promotion Forum (HRAPF,2018) shows that gays and lesbians' are violated by both state and non-state actors.

Senegal is mainly an Islamic state and does not tolerate homosexuality. Hence, violence against homosexuals is vicious. According to the BBC News report (4 May 2009) a body of a man suspected to be gay was exhumed twice and later buried far away from the cemetery. The family of the suspect was also humiliated and harassed by the community.

Acts of violence continued to be meted out on corpses or people suspected to be homosexuals. Preaching against homosexuality in the Friday sermons Diop the Imam of a Mosque in Senegal stated:

During the time of the Prophet, anytime two men were found together, they were taken to the top of a mountain and thrown off, if they didn't die when they hit the ground, then rocks would be thrown on them until they were killed (Callmachi, 4 Oct. 2010).

While in Tanzania, although homosexuality was practised between the slave masters and the boy slaves in the 1800s, the current anti-gay expression by government officers

against the practice is illustrates that homosexuality is no longer tolerated among the citizens as well as foreigners. According to the BBC News (October, 28 2017). Tanzania is reported to have deported foreign lawyers who were suspected of promoting homosexuality in the country. Despite the violence against homosexuality, the proliferation of homosexuals and gay activism in many parts of Africa indicates that the practice will not stop. Persistence of homosexuality has been intensified by some strategies that have been put in place by homosexuals to cope with homophobic situations.

Homosexuals' coping strategies

Due to homophobic violent environment surrounding homosexuality, homosexuals have developed several coping mechanisms to enhance their survival.

For instance, they have development of strong networks for easier communication and moral support which has enabled them to come up with organizations through which they can speak about their status including sexual orientation and raising awareness about their existence. Homosexuals also organize various conferences, seminars, meetings and workshops which not only provide an opportunity for members to interact with each other but also to exchange views and ideas about significant issues concerning homosexuality and to update each other about their movement and opportunities in a volatile world.

Homosexuals have also created social institutions including gay clubs, bars or discotheques, steam baths, saunas, gym and other collective events such as gay camping and cruising and sports so as to create strong bonds among members. Isaac & Mckendrick (1998.p.9) point out that gay social institutions provide an environment for "gay collectiveness and expression". The other strategy of advancing homosexuality is through provision of bursaries, and funding for gay scholars to assist them in pursuing higher education, conduct research, and participate in conferences so as not only to build more networks in the academic field but also to document and progress gay ideas. The advancement of the homosexuals' philosophy can also be done through social media being one of the most effective channels for communication. La Von, (2007)

maintains that gay people use internet to reach out to many members and to get partners as well as protection from family, church, and police surveillance. La Von further points out that the use of cell phones is a convenient means of communication through which homosexuals can connect with each other even in remote parts of the continent where internet is inaccessible. Therefore, networking via internet, conferences and activism are powerful tools through which homosexuals' voices can be heard.

Finally a number of gay and lesbian organizations have developed human rights debates that have identified lesbian and gay rights as human rights and have become grounds upon which many gay people have sought asylum in western countries due to increased homophobic violence against them (Amory,1997; Onyulo,. 2017). Therefore, most African critics of homosexuality consider homosexual and lesbian acts immoral practices imported from the west and extraterrestrial to the African culture. However, this observation has been challenged by scholars (Neill, 2009, and Murray 2000) who concur that among the Azande of the Central Republic of Congo, Kings, princes and soldiers took young male lovers. A practice cited to have existed even in the pre-colonial period. However, while homosocial practices are thought to be African, the homosexual relationships are considered alien to the African culture. Such contradictions only help to enhance homophobic thinking while concealing the existence of homosocial relations in contemporary society.

Methodology

This article presents an overview of homosexuality in Africa through secondary literature. This was done through desktop research and analysis of both relevant historical and contemporary literature. This was to illustrate that homosexuality existed in pre-colonial Africa and that it is not an 'un-African' practice, to demonstrate the legal position of some African states with regard to homosexuality, to highlight the experiences of homosexuals in some African countries as well as the strategies used by homosexuals to survive in a volatile world.

Implications

Homosexuals experience unrelenting treatment in different parts of Africa. In exploring African homosexuality there is need to recognize that African societies have been shaped by strong forces such as African and religious beliefs and traditional practices. Each of these forces not only influences the society's understanding of homosexuality from different perspectives but also determine people's perspectives about the practice. Nevertheless, homophobic attitudes towards homosexuality in Africa are persistent and may be attributed to African cultural norms and religious influence which strongly consider homosexuality as an alien practice which should be done away with. Yet the practice is said to have existed even in the pre-colonial period.

Violence against homosexuality by state and non state actors may be associated with strong statements made by African leaders who openly denounced homosexuals. Similarly, legal structures which some African countries have put in place clearly demonstrate that the practice is forbidden. Additionally, most religious teachings strongly condemn homosexuality and other acts associated with sexual immorality.

This encourages religious leaders to preach against homosexuality. Therefore, inciting people against homosexuals. Violence against homosexuals may be either physical or verbal. In many indigenous communities across Africa, specific terms were used to describe the behaviour of homosexuals this shows proof that homosexuality existed in the precolonial time. In contemporary society are considered derogatory and insulting to homosexuals. As well, terms not only aid in categorizing homosexuals as unique group of people in society but also as a simple target for persecution. For instance, violence against lesbians in some countries is a sign of revenge for refusing to engage in heterosexual relations (La Von,2007). Although there is brutal homophobic violence against homosexuality in Africa, A few countries still tolerate practice and all kinds of sexual orientation (Pew Research Centre,2013; Human Rights Watch,2011). This indicates that the homosexuality will continue to thrive and progressively move into

countries where it is not tolerated by devising strategies not only to muddle through the volatile world but also for the advancement of homosexuality across Africa.

Conclusions

In contemporary African society homosexual engagements have taken different shapes and have significantly affected how homosexuality is viewed.

The purpose of this article was to illustrate that homosexuality existed in the pre-colonial Africa and it is a vibrant practice in contemporary African societies regardless of the existing homophobic violence against homosexuals and legal measures put in place by some African countries to weaken its existence. The article presented answers to the following questions: Do same sex relationships exist in Africa? What are the experiences of homosexuals in Africa? What are the perspectives of the African leaders about homosexuality? What challenges do homosexuals face and how are they coping in the volatile world?

The article observes that same sex relationships are common in homosocial associations and that from historical facts different countries have derogatory terms which are used to denounce homosexuality. Moreover, various African countries have legally outlawed the practice.

In addition, both political and religious leaders have made public declarations against homosexuality which has also exacerbated violence against homosexuals.

Despite the violence meted out on homosexuality, the proliferation of homosexuals and gay activism in many parts of Africa indicates that the practice will not stop. Persistence of homosexuality has been intensified by some strategies they have been put in place so as to cope with homophobic situations and enhance their survival in unfriendly environments including: creating networks for moral support, establishing social institutions for collectivism and using social media to access each other. With the emergence of many other forms of sexual orientations in contemporary society, it

appears that homosexuality will not be discontinued with violence or legal structures formulated by different states. Indeed the proliferation of homosexuals in various parts of Africa calls for special consideration to establish the reasons for their emergence and continuous progression.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge Rhoda Noureen Kwamboka, Pamela Olivia Ngesa, Prof. Zachary Awino and anonymous reviewers for the assistance and encouragement they provided while writing this article. I take responsibility for any errors.

References

- [1] 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. ACHPR/Res.275(LV)2014, <https://www.achpr.org/sessions/resolutions?id=322> Accessed: 20 Feb. 2020.
- [2] C. Agboola, "Consensual, Same –Sex Sexual Relationships in South African Female Prisons". *African Journals Online*. Vol.13 No2, 2015, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/gab/article/view/127666>. Accessed: 20 Dec. 2020.
- [3] I. Amadiume, "*Daughters of Female Husbands: Gender Sex in an African Society*". London. Zed books. 2015.
- [4] B. Alimi, "If you say gay is not African, you don't know your History." *The Guardian Weekly*. Wed. 9 Sept., 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/09/being-gay-african-history-homosexuality-christianity>. Accessed: 27 Apr. 2020
- [5] P. D. Amory, "Homosexuality in Africa: Issues and Debates". *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, Vol.25, No.1, African Studies Association. 1997, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1166238>. Accessed: 3 March 2020.

- [6] W. Atieno, "PS Say Homosexuality is Rampant in Schools". *Nation Daily Thursday* 12 July, 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/mombasa/PS-acknowledges-homosexuality-rampant--in-schools/1954178-4659698-wq4bc6/index.html>. Accessed: 24 March 2020.
- [7] N. Baraka, and R. Morgan, "I want to marry the woman of my choice without fear of being stoned": Female marriages and bisexual women in Kenya. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 25-50). Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana. 2005.
- [8] BBC News, "Tanzania deports Lawyers accused of promoting homosexuality," 28 October, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-41789118>. Accessed: 20 March 2020.
- [9] BBC News, "Gay man' Disinterred in Senegal." 4 May 2019, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8032754.stm> . Accessed: 20 March 2020.
- [10] BBC News, "President Moi condemns gays". 30 October 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/461626.stm>. Accessed: 15 Apr. 2020.
- [11] F.E. Besmer, "Horses, musicians and gods: the Hausa Cult of possession- trance". Zaria, Nigeria. Ahmadu University Press. 1993.
- [12] D.V. Biema, "Blunt Bishop". *Time International* (South Pacific Edition) 40. 2007.
- [13] R. Callmachi, "Even after death, abuse against gays continues". Associated Press. [Washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com). 4 October, 2010, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/36376840/ns/world_news-africa/t/even-after-death-abuse-against-gays-continues/#.Xoonrr. Accessed: 24 Jan. 2020.
- [14] D. Davis and R. Whitten, "The Cross-Cultural Study of Human Sexuality". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 16. 1987.
- [15] E.E. Evans-Prichard, "Sexual invasion among the Azande," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 72. 1970.
- [16] J. Gay, "'Mummies and babies' and friends and lovers in Lesotho." *JH* 11: 97-116. 1985.
- [17] D. F. Greenberg, "*The Construction of Homosexuality*". Chicago: Chicago University Press. 1988.
- [18] P. Grosse, "Kenya's LGBT Community fight for a place in society". 2018,

<https://www.dw.com/en/homosexuals-in-kenya-claim-a-place-in-society-court-legalize-homosexuality/a-4315>. Accessed: 24 March 2020.

[19] N. Hoad, "Neoliberalism, homosexuality, Africa, the Anglican Church". In B.Weiss (ed). *Producing African futures: rituals and reproduction in neoliberal age* (54-79). Leiden: Brill. 2004.

[20] J.Horn, " Re-righting the sexual body". *Feminist Africa*, 6, 7-19.2006.

[21] HRAPF, "The Uganda Report of Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity". 2018, <https://hrapf.org/index.php/resources/violation-reports/100-report-of-violations-based-on-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-2018/file>. Accessed 19 Apr. 2020.

[22] Human Rights Watch, They want us exterminated. 2009, [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iraq0809webwcover.pdf\(20February](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iraq0809webwcover.pdf(20February) Accessed: 20 Feb.2020.

[23] Human Rights Watch, "We'll show you you're a woman": Violence and discrimination against Black lesbians and transgender men in South Africa. 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/southafrica1211.pdf>. Accessed: 23 March 2020.

[24] Human Rights Watch, "The Issue is Violence: Attacks on LGBT people on the Kenya's Coast." 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/28/issue-violence/attacks-lgbt-people-kenyas-coast>. Accessed: 27March 2020.

[25] G. Isaac, and B. Mckendrick, "*Male Homosexuality in South Africa: Identity Formation, Culture, and Crisis*". Cape Town. Oxford University Press.1992.

[26] M.Karanja, 'A family scarred by homophobia' The Nation 22 October 2009, <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/1056675940.jko6pjz/index.html>. Accessed:20Apr. 2019.

[27] A.L. Kovac, "African's Rainbow Nation." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol .28. No.2. 2002.

[28] D.Lamb, "*The Africans*" New York: Random House.1982.

- [29] La Von, B. D. 'Blunt Bishop'. Time 6 40-42. Feb.19,2007.
- [30] J.Middleton, "*The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization.*"*New Haven: Yale University Press.*1992.
- [31] T. D. Moodie; N.Vivienne and S. British, "Migrancy and Male sexuality in South African Gold Mines." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 2, Special Issue in Southern Africa 228-256. Jan. 1988,
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2636630> . Accessed: 20 Dec.2019.
- [32] S. O.Murray, 2000 *Homosexualities*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.2000.
- [33] S. O. Murray, and W.Roscoe, *Boys-wives andFemale Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.2007.
- [34] J. Neill, "*The Origins and Roles of Same-Sex Relations in Human Societies.*" Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- [35] R. S. Oboler, "*Is the Female Husband a Man? Woman/Woman Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya*" *Ethnology*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), pp. 69-88. USA: University of Pittsburgh-
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3773320>. Accessed: 24 Jan. 2020.
- [36] O' Flaherty & J. Fisher, "Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and International Human Rights Law: Contextualising the Yogyakarta Principles" *Human Rights Law Review* 208, 2008.
- [37] A.Oketch, "HIV negative prisoners become positive within months in jail". *Daily Nation Online*. 13 August 2019, <https://www.nation.co.ke/health/How-gayism-in-prisons-sabotages-war-on-HIV/3476990-5233930-iii6go/index>. Accessed: 10 Feb. 2020.
- [38] T. Onyulo, "Uganda's Other Refugee Crisis: Discrimination Forces Many LGBT Ugandans To Seek Asylum." *USA TODAY*. 2017.
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/07/13/uganda-other-refugee-crisis-lgbt-ugandanss/475353001/>. Accessed 27 Apr. 2020.
- [39] D. Ottosson, "State Sponsored homophobia: A World Survey of Laws Prohibiting Same-Sex activity between consenting adults, an ILGA Report.2007.
- [40] Pew Research Center, "The Global Divide on Homosexuality." 2013.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on->

homosexuality/. Accessed:23 March 2020.

- [41] B. S. Pincheon, “ An Ethnography of Silences: Race (Homo) Sexualities & Discourse of Africa”. *African Studies Review*, 43(30): pp. 39-58. 2000.
- [42] I.Polders, and H.Wells, “ *Levels of empowerment among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] people in Gauteng, South Africa*”. Research initiative of the Joint Working Group conducted by OUT LGBT Well-being in collaboration with the UNISA Centre for Applied Psychology. 2004.
- [43] C.Potgieter, “Sexualities? Hey, this is what Black, South African lesbians have to say about relationships with men, the family, heterosexual women and culture”. In M.van Zyl, & M. Steyn (Eds.), *Performing queer: Shaping sexualities 1994- 2004:Vol.1*, pp. 177–192.2004. Cape Town, South Africa: Kwela Books.
- [44] V.Reddy, “Homophobia, human rights and gay and lesbian equality in Africa”. *Agenda*, 17(50), 83-87. 2001.
- [45] M.Rocha, “Anti- LGBT Culture and Legislation in Uganda”. Issue Report and Policy Paper. 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332494772_Anti-LGBT_Culture_and_Legislation_in_Uganda. Accessed : 26 Apr. 2020.
- [46] M. W, Sibuyi, “*Tinoncana etimayinini: The wives of the mine.*” In *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay Writing from South Africa*,ed.M.Krouse,pp. 52-64. 1993. Johannesburg: Cosaw.
- [47] A.D. Spiegel, “Polygyny as Myth. Towards Understanding Extramarital Relations in Lesotho” . *African Studies*. 50 (1-2) 145-66,1991, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12285290>. Accessed: 20 Apr. 2020.
- [48] S.Tamale, “Homosexuality is not un –African: It is legalized homophobia, not same - sex relations, that is alien to Africa”. 26 Apr. 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/4/homosexuality-africamuseveniugandanigeriaethiopia.html>. Accessed: 27 Feb. 2020.
- [49] The Constitution of Kenya 2010. Nairobi, Kenya Government Printers.