

Are Gay Rights Right in Ghana?

By Kwesi Atta Sakyi

13th June 2013

In Africa, perhaps only a man who is castrated or impotent may want to be gay so as to derive and experience some sexual sensibilities in the posterior regions. Also, because of poverty, some guys can become gay if that kind of social arrangement can put food on the table and meet their financial needs. Even then, many will not stoop so low.

From another perspective, we have heard of stories whereby some Alhajis sexually abuse their camels, donkeys and other animals. But I bet you, having seen the genital of a stallion or male horse, I am sure no gay or lesbian has ever thought of having a go at that ganglion and Rasputinian gangling pendant, or gargantuan pendulum.

Where is this world coming to? Are we seeing the end of days? Perhaps, it is the beginning of a new era of civilization or the re-enactment of Sodom and Gomorrah in that biblical account of antiquity. Gays or homosexuals are those who get married to the same sex or they cohabit with the same sex. This concept is thought to be dysfunctional and anathema universally. It has created a lot of homophobia.

In the case of men, I hope they do not hit caca or fecal matter in their sodomic orgies, and in the case of women, I hope they do not get into red zones (but one ghanaweb forumer commented in Fantse on my Fante article, Awendadze nsuro mogya! Or in English, The lion has no fear of blood!).

Same-sex marriages have become the in-thing in some parts of the advanced countries in the West, where human rights are thought to have advanced to a higher (perhaps. nadir) pedestal. In 1948, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was unfurled, and it became the flagship, fulcrum and foundation of all subsequent articulation and derivation of human rights.

When we talk of human rights, do we mean natural, inalienable, God-given rights, such as right to life, liberty, property (cf John Locke), or the rights to freedom of speech, association, movement, conscience, among others? Or do we interpret human rights unselectively to include unnatural rights of sodomy, sexual abuse of animals, pedophile, among others?

Haven't we over-interpreted and over-extended the domain of human rights? Recently, we heard of stiff opposition in France against gay rights. Some states in the USA have already endorsed gay rights in their state constitutions, and gay marriages are on the upsurge in most European countries.

The issue has gone very political in the USA, just like the issue of abortion, so much so that presidential candidates in the USA make it a campaign issue to garner votes and harness financial support from gay caucuses. The US Army has fully endorsed the rights of gays, with gays having the right not to tell. In Africa, South Africa has endorsed gay rights, while Uganda and Zimbabwe are the leading countries which are implacably and vehemently opposed to the practice. African countries which brazenly endorse gay rights may experience frosty and cold shoulder treatment from their neighbours or other member countries in the AU. Therefore, they need to tread cautiously on this fractious and fragile issue.

The Christian-Puritan ethics and those of other religious denominations are threatened. However, the ascendancy of the secular state in 1648 (Treaty of Westphalia), and spread of globalisation have strengthened the gay movement. In 1620, when the Pilgrim Fathers set sail from Southampton and Plymouth in the UK, and Harlem in the Netherlands, they were fleeing from the horrors of the Catholic Inquisition and persecution under the hegemony of monarchs, and the papacy, who held sway over all temporal, secular, spiritual, scientific and universal issues. Remember Galiliei Galileo and his heliocentric theory, vis-a-vis those of Copernicus and Johan Kepler?

Religious freedom and the secular state became synonymous and coterminous with the USA. Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that majority of the Founding Fathers who crafted the USA Constitution before Independence in 1776, were of majoritarian Christian origin and orientation. Who are we, mere mortals, now to judge the sexual orientations of other people? Perhaps, gays have to go in search of new colonies to populate, perhaps in outer space.

If, according to our Christian and other religious parameters, they stand condemned in heaven, so be it. Women who engage in same-sex marriages or sexual associations are called Lesbians and Sapphics, so named after the island of Lesbos in ancient Greece (c.600BC), where a lyricist and poetess, by name of Sappho, formed a colony of Lesbians (cf. Wikipedia). The issue of gays was anathema during the Victorian era in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the UK.

A famous Oxford scholar of Irish origin, Oscar Wilde, who was also a famous poet, playwright and ebullient academic, was imprisoned for practising homosexuality. In those days, it was a veritable crime or felony in the UK. Perhaps, we Africans have a hundred years ahead of us before we arrive at the current position of the Western world, including USA and UK.

In the light of this, is it not foolhardiness to be rushed to embrace a concept whose time has not yet come in Ghana and Africa? Besides, we have cultural values and religious beliefs which cannot easily be jettisoned or swept under the carpet. The issue of homosexuality has many political, economic, social, psychological, religious and ethical underpinnings and ramifications. It is often said that there is no smoke without fire. To some of us, the norm or normal trend is for a man to be attracted to a woman or vice versa.

While polygamy is condoned in Africa, polyandry or a woman having many husbands or many sexual partners is unacceptable, except in the Pacific Polynesian islands where it is said that polyandry is accepted. In Africa, westernized and educated individuals stick by monogamy, as bigamy is proscribed by law, and it is illegal. However, some traditional chiefs, conservatives and traditionalists condone polygamy because it is a sign of status, virility and fertility. It has also economic basis and many instances of it is found in the holy tome, the bible.

Polygamy thrives in societies where women have not had much emancipation, liberation and education, mostly in agrarian and pastoral communities. These days, it has been observed that many women are desperately chasing men for marriage, reversing the long-cherished and time-honoured tradition of women being virtuous, demure, chaste, sedate, coy and laidback. Women are chasing men like a bone chasing a dog, with the frightened dog running away at the apparition, with its tail between its legs, and barking in a weird and hysterical manner.

I am reliably informed that gayism and lesbianism are unAfrican concepts and traits. The practice is not only a taboo and anathema, but also an unsocial attitude which would not be condoned by the ancestors who watch over us. A gay person may be declared a family outcast or an osu (cf. Achebe's book, *Things Fall Apart*, an osu is an outcast). It is averred that in the ancient academies of Greece, where Plato, Socrates, Aristotle and the philosophers plied their ware, they used to practise homosexuality. Hence, Plato categorised different types of love as carnal love or Eros, cupboard love or platonic love, true love of God being Agape, among others.

I presume that love between same-sex can be called bi-Eros or biped-cupid or philo-homos. It is thought that the practice of lesbianism and homosexuality is common in our learning institutions in Ghana, where we have boarding facilities, such as the teacher training colleges, senior secondary schools, technical schools and our universities. Such lesbians and homosexuals are known to exchange gifts, letters and to feel so jealous that their association determines their circle of friends. The girls call their sexual partner by the nickname of 'supi'.

It is when they complete their programmes of study that they sever their relationship and go on to marry in the conventional heterosexual relationship. Some marriages flounder on the sands of hopelessness because of earlier backgrounds of lesbianism or homosexuality. It is not uncommon for some university dons to practise sodomy, judging from the demands of their work of academic loneliness and sequestration.

In Ghana, the Criminal Code 1960, amended in 2003, section 104, states that

1. Whoever has unnatural carnal knowledge
 - a) of any person of the age of 16 years or over, without his consent shall be guilty of a first degree felony and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than 5 years and not more than 25 years, or
 - b) Of any person of 16 years or over with his consent is guilty of a misdemeanour
2. Unnatural carnal knowledge is sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner (on quote)

The definition of unnatural is not given, but it may include oral, anal and nasal.

This informs us that despite Ghana being signatory to many international conventions on human rights, our laws, conventions and accepted cultural practices do not recognise the rights of gays as de-facto and de jure. There is, therefore, no recognition or protection against discrimination on the basis of one's sexual orientation. Currently, the government has appointed Nana Oye Lithur (a lawyer by profession) as Minister for Gender Equality and Social Protection. One wonders what the remit of this ministry is, and what motivated its creation in the first place.

We are aware of Gender Based Violence issues on the upsurge and the issue of marginalisation of women. However, one may surmise and infer that the Ministry is ostensibly there to cover gay rights and to be perhaps, a unique selling point for soliciting

or attracting donor funding, or to placate donors and send a message that we are au fait and savvy about the rights of bisexuals, transgenders, lesbians, gays, homosexuals and people whose sexual orientation is challenged, whether they are androgynous, hermaphrodites or transvestites. In Africa, South Africa is the only country which has endorsed gay rights. Uganda has proposed the death penalty for gays.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Australia in November, 2011, our late Head of State, Prof John Atta Mills, categorically stated that Ghana as a sovereign state will not bow to pressure from outside to adopt a practice or concept which runs counter to our cherished heritage, customs, values and received way of life. This statement raised a furore and kerfuffle in diplomatic circles. As of now, the EU, the UN and major world bodies do endorse the concept of freedom of sexual orientation. However, have those advanced countries examined closely their levels of economic, social, technological and political advancement, vis-à-vis those of African countries?

This is where we can draw the line. In Ghana, we live with the issues of sugar mummies and sugar daddies, whereby some women of say 50 years or 60 years and above, choose young male adults to be their sexual partners. Likewise, some old men who have money, prefer to seduce under-age girls. These associations are frowned upon by society when discovered. In Nigeria, in the 1980s, it was observed that some of the young Ghanaian men were practising homosexuality for money in the posh areas of Lagos or Eko, where the rich Alhajis spent lavishly on them.

It is biologically impossible that same-sex marriages can reproduce children, defying the biblical injunction to multiply and populate the earth. Except that they can, by biological engineering or cloning, like the way Dolly the Sheep was cloned. However, cloning seems some years off in the future, as it faces ethical and moral hurdles. However, it is common for lesbians and homosexuals to adopt children legally or to pay surrogate mothers in poor parts of the world to get pregnant by their semen or seed, through in-vitro fertilization or artificial insemination.

When the surrogate baby is born, the surrogate mother is paid and the child is taken away by the bisexual couple. Such practice has a lot of social, psychological, legal and emotional complications. We may pose the question, why are men getting married to other men, or women marrying their kind? Is heterosexual marriage too demanding?

Does it run a high risk of HIV/AIDS infection? Is it physically, economically, socially, mentally and spiritually challenging? Some people believe that technological advancements in the advanced countries pose many trying and difficult challenges, whereby in a heterogenous marriage, one spouse may not give much attention to the other because of heavy work demands. There is the other spouse at home who may feel denied of sex and may start flirting around. If both spouses are working, they will not find much time for love-making as both come home exhausted and drained.

In same-sex marriage, this loneliness or neglect is not bound to happen, or at least, gays may not easily fall prey or feel attracted to the opposite sex. This may seem some weird logic. Gender-Based violence (GBV) may be less in same-sex marriage. The other argument is that socially, heterosexual marriages in the advanced countries have woefully and massively failed, because of the high incidence of divorces and murders of sexual partners.

There seems to be legal asymmetry in heterosexual relationships in those advanced countries, where women have been granted far too many rights than the men. Fancy that at divorce, the woman is granted permission to live in the husband's dream house, and the man is thrown out into the streets. Therefore, homosexuality is a rebellion of the men against women in the advanced countries.

Women are seen also to be domineering, bossy and exceptionally demanding in all aspects, monopolising the man, and using him as a work-horse, or riding him as her donkey. Women turn into tigresses in heterosexual marriages. In the animal kingdom, some females are more powerful than the males. The lioness for instance does the hunting for the clan.

After mating, some female animal species devour the male to have nourishment to nurture the forming embryo. Our friends in the advanced countries live fast-paced lifestyles, with no time for babies or rather, it is extremely expensive to have a child, pay a housemaid or baby-sitter, among others. Their lifestyles lead them into the motives of competition, achievement, recognition and having unfettered freedom to travel, research, discover and satisfy their ego.

In Africa, we set much store by having children or offspring, because we cherish the status of being a father or mother or a parent, and at death, being worshipped as a worthy ancestor. Childless couples are laughed at. Some people in Ghana and Africa have

become copycats, thinking that everything from the West is good, and forsaking cherished African family values. Culturally, Africans are gregarious and respect or cherish the extended family or communal spirit. Our constitutions and conventions and unwritten laws proscribe and prohibit practices such as sodomy, incest, and other supposedly amoral acts. Some of these acts on the statute books are considered felonies, instead of misdemeanours.

However sad this may be, we have to respect multiculturalism and the beliefs of people. Whether or not homosexuality and lesbianism will be accepted in Africa, it will all depend on time, perhaps not in our time. However, in this highly globalised and seamless world, anything can happen, since the world in general is becoming anomie with erratics all over. Perhaps, history is about to repeat itself, with the plight of the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah staring us in the face like Tantalus, or hanging ominously above our heads like the sword of Damocles.

Homosexuals may sometimes be individuals who are androgynous, who require transgender crossovers through surgery. Are they to blame for their physical challenges? I have listened to many Kweku Ananse stories in my youth in Ghana, which are rich sources of received wisdom and Akan mythology, similar to the Greek mythology and the Aesopian fables.

Nothing of lesbianism or homosexuality is mentioned in Akan folklore. The closest I heard was that, one day, Kweku Ananse went on a trip with his friends to attend a funeral at his in-laws place. Kweku, as usual, used his cunning to outwit and hoodwink his travelling colleagues. He received all the food and drinks and ate all the groundnut soup with a lot of okra or okro in it. In the night, he experienced an attack of running tummy.

Whilst everybody was asleep, he sneaked into the kitchen and went to the earthenware hearth and eased himself in a big and messy way. There was no toilet roll then, not even the husky corn husk was in sight for Kweku to wipe his messy arse. He quickly hatched one of his nasty plots. He decided to go wipe his buttocks on the buttocks of his sleeping colleagues or partners.

Unbeknown to him, they had all resolved to insert some razor blades in the furrows of their buttocks in anticipation of the likely event. They had known Kweku for long as a greedy and intemperate person, who always had bouts and spells of running tummies when his gluttony and gourmandship had had the better part of him.

Kweku stealthily approached one of the guys sleeping on the floor on a wicker mat. He furtively unfurled the clothes near the anus of one of the guys. Of course, he was not going to commit sodomy. He wanted to smear the mess in his buttocks on the buttocks of the innocent sleeping guy. In his assault, unbeknown to him, the sharp razor blade took its toll. Kweku Ananse started bleeding from somewhere near his anus. He looked for some rags nearby to form a swab around the area.

The following morning, Kweku's mother-in-law discovered, to her chagrin, the horrific deed in the kitchen, and called for a roll-call and inspection of anuses.

All of Kweku's friends showed their anuses to be clean. When it came to Kweku's turn, he flatly refused to be inspected, alleging that he was in his menses or menstrual period. Period! Out of utter shame, Kweku turned into a spider and went up the ceiling, in the form of transmutation. That is why today, we find spiders loitering around ceilings of buildings.

It is alleged in Ghana that hard core criminals in confinement in prisons and cells, practise sodomy. This illustrates that when people are constrained and driven to the wall, they adapt in several weird ways, giving credence to the saying, adapt or perish. In the west, many celebrities such as musicians and sportsmen and women, have publicly declared their sexual orientations as gays or lesbians. Does that add to their fame or global acceptance?

Scientists have proved to us that in our DNAs, each human being carries both female and male characteristics in an androgynous state like some plants do. It is proven that, in each human if the XX and XY chromosomes come in a certain order during fertilization, then your sex is determined. These chromosomes are mainly determined during coitus by the man in his sperms or semen, while the women donate the ova or ovum.

Sorry, I am no expert on this as this a recollection of the Health Science I learnt in 1967. In a way, can we surmise that homosexuality is a revolt against family values, against child bearing, against domineering women in heterosexual marriages on the one hand, and abusive husbands on the other hand? If Sappho in 600B,C lived with Lesbians on Lesbos Island in Greece and the Greek philosophers in the Athenian academies condoned and partook in sodomy, who am I, son of a poor fisherman from Ghana, to condemn them? In deed history repeats itself.

Some time ago, it was unheard of that an Akan would be a fanatic of dog meat. I visited Ghana a couple of years ago. My two fishermen nephews, who are in their fifties, paid me a courtesy call. They began admiring my dogs and enquired whether they were mine. I told them yes, they were mine. When they left, my wife and daughter told me that my nephews were hard core addicts and fanatics of dog meat, and that in the fishing quarter of Winneba, dog meat had then become a delicacy among the fishing folk.

I recollected that my brother-in-law had told me earlier on that dog meat was called 404 in Calabar, Nigeria where it is considered a delectable dainty dish. In Ghana, we knew for a long time that among some tribes from Northern Ghana, the dog was a delicacy. Even in Winneba, and among some clans who worship some fetish, they eat dog meat when performing their rituals at certain times of the year.

The import of this is that, nothing is impossible in this world. I do not know for how long homos and gays will continue to be endangered species in Ghana. A new ministry of Gender Equality and Social Protection has been created in Ghana to address the issue. However, Christians and Muslims will have a hard time accepting or cottoning on to the idea of accepting gays.

email: kwesiattasakyi449@gmail.com