

Contribution to a debate on Africa and legislation on Homosexuality on H-Net Africa

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Dear All

I think the dust is settling now on this issue and it may be a suitable time for some reflection. The underlying drivers here are far deeper and more important than some suspect. The fundamental question people in Africa are asking today is: How shall we live? No more urgent or profound a question can be asked.

Our context for these heart rending questions are as follows: Africa suffered several centuries of rape, pillage and slavery. What kind of God allowed this to happen and what if anything did we do wrong to incur such divine wrath? From Western scholars the answers proposed were soul destroying: you suffered because you were let's be frank ...just plain inferior. Depending on the politeness and scholarly discipline of the Westerner the answer could be framed in terms of genetic inferior,(scientific racism), cultural inferiority (primitive people), lack of capitalism (economic underdevelopment), lack of intelligence or modern education (western academia's self interested favourite), corruption (moral decay or lack of democracy). Ironically, the closest modern equivalent to Athenian democracy was apartheid South Africa! Further and particularly insulting, Western academics often turn the story around and ask Africans to praise them along these lines: it was a great moral achievement for us to overcome our natural urges as a superior race to rape and enslave you and it was a supreme achievement for us to abolish slavery for which you should be eternally grateful as this was a case of moral rectitude overcoming our innate superior nature. Even Marxism offered only inferiority as an explanation leaving it to Leninism to offer an alternative i.e. victims of imperialism. Evangelical Christianity came along offering equality before God and insisting God loves you and will help you..leaving silent any explanation for the past cataclysm. However this one hope insists that God will only help if you obey his commands otherwise you will be led back to rape, pillage and slavery again. However challenge any Western liberal academic and 9 out of 10 will in effect say 'why can't Africans just accept their inferiority and adjust? i.e. try to catch up ..though 'sotto voce '.I don't hold out much hope!'

On the Western side the same questions were asked: as one French philosopher in the 18th Century put it- if Africans are human we are not Christians! Looking at the consequences of the slave trade Europeans asked why has no one been punished? Instead of punishment Europe accrued immense wealth. Either there is no God or there is 'hell' to pay! A widespread collapse in faith in religion and rise in faith in social darwinism was a more convenient response . In order to salve the conscience, Africans must be seen as the cause of their own misfortune because if they were human just like us then we have done a heinous crime. Therefore Western culture has a dynamic need to 'otherise' Africans by one means or another as Africans being human just like us is a totally unacceptable position to allow. Liberals finesse the issue of Nazism and outright racism by a nuanced version whereby Africans are 'almost but not quite like us'. Marxism inherits from Hegel who inherited from Kant who inherited from Hume (who for many years managed the slavery of the British Empire) outright unrepentant racism towards Africans, both at the level of theory and at a personal level evidenced in Marx's treatment of his son in law.

Uganda has an ironic place in this story: Obote protested against UK Prime Minister Ed Heath' s

support of apartheid South Africa. Heath outraged instructed SIS to overthrow the democratically elected leader, Obote, who was replaced by Idi Amin and thus followed years of horror in Uganda. Western consensus has since moved to accepting that apartheid South Africa was unacceptable but Uganda paid a heavy price. Westerners giving Ugandans moral lectures may be met with derision. How does the present debate resonate?

On academic responses I must note two matters: in private communication I have been subjected to unqualified abuse; 'mouth-breathing fool' is probably the politest as an example. Secondly, several commentators exhibit a complete disregard of the proper meaning of words. Like humpty dumpty some liberals decide that views they disagree with qualify as 'irrational'. Every wrong view is not irrational (that is absurd!) but I do notice that Western academics tend to misuse language at will in debates with Africans. For liberals on this topic what is known as Voltaire's maxim:

'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it,' has been relegated to the dustbin.

Africans at different times have been told that their traditional tolerant approach to sexuality was offensive to God and a cause of their undoing and they should adopt the literal word of God and become 'civilized'. Now they are told that all that was rubbish and they should adopt the latest Western fashion if they are to be considered 'civilised'.

When the US Supreme Court makes its judgment it takes into account the mood of the nation, the US nation, not the Ugandan nation. The reason there have been such recent changes in the US is that the mood in US on these issues has changed. Demographically the majority in US did not support gay rights but they have stopped being opposed to it which gave the Supreme Court the opportunity to change the law. To suggest that as soon as the mood changes in US, not even the majority opinion, Ugandans should be whipped or ridiculed into shape is breathtaking. Let me quote the UK legislator who introduced gay marriage into the UK (please note her tolerance for differences of opinion!)

'Baroness Tina Stowell , Conservative member of House of Lords, who piloted the legislation to allow gay couples to get married in Uk wrote in The Independent on 29 March 2014:

'Same sex marriage is new and very different from what we have grown up with' ...'Even so, it remains absolutely legitimate and a fundamental right for anyone to believe and to say they believe that marriage should remain only between a man and a woman. And we have made it clear in law that all religions are unable to marry couples of the same sex unless they explicitly opt to do so. No religion can be forced to change its marriage doctrine against its will'

Dapo Ladimeji