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At the Battlefield of Sexual Diversity

**The 7th AASR Conference in Africa,
Legon, Ghana, 26-29 July 2016**

AASR Conferences in Africa

AASR was founded on Friday 18 September 1992 during the concluding session of the IAHR Regional Conference, on 'The Study of Religions in Africa', at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe.¹ At the first AASR meeting, during the IAHR Congress at Mexico City, 5-11 August 1995, in which AASR was admitted to the IAHR as one of its four 'regional' [non-national] members, AASR adopted its first constitution. It stipulated in article 5, b: 'AASR will endeavour to organise a major regional conference in Africa at least once every five years'.² The 1st AASR Conference in Africa, on 'The Religions of East Africa in the Age of Globalization', convened at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya, 28-30 July 1999.³ The 2nd AASR Conference in Africa, on 'The Role of Religion in the Socio-Cultural Transformations of West Africa', was hosted by the Department for the

¹ Cf. Jan G. Platvoet, Jacob Kehinde Olupona & James L. Cox (eds.) 1996, *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects*. Cambridge: Roots and Branches, 393 pp.

² Cf. AASR Newsletter 5 (April 1996): 11. Note, however, also that Prof. Jacob Olupona, AASR President 1995- 2005, organized also a one-day AASR Symposium and Workshop at the Institute of Church and Society, Ibadan, Nigeria, on 15 December 1998. For his report, cf. AASR Newsletter 11 (June 1999): 1, 7-9

³ Cf. AASR Newsletter 8 (November 1997): 13-14; 9 (June 1998): 14-16; 10 (November 1998): 20-21; Jesse N.K. Mugambi & Mary N. Getui (eds.) 2004, *Religions in Eastern Africa under Globalization*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 267 pp. For a report on this conference by Dr. Mary Getui. Local Organizer, cf. AASR Newsletter 12 (November 1999): 4-6.

Study of Religions of the University of Ghana. It met at Legon, Ghana, from 5 to 8 February 2004.⁴ After having met in East Africa in 1999, and in West Africa in 2004, it was therefore meet that AASR organise its next conference in Southern Africa. The 3rd AASR Conference in Africa convened therefore at the University of Gaborone, Botswana, from 8 to 13 July, 2007, on 'Health, Healing & the Study of Religions of Africa', particularly in view of HIV/AIDS then afflicting Africa, and most severely Southern Africa.⁵

Having thus completed its first circumambulation of the academic study of religions in Anglophone academic Africa from 1999 to 2007, AASR returned for its second round first to West Africa by holding its 4th AASR Conference in Africa at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, from 16 to 20 January 2010, on 'Religion, Environment and Sustainable Development'.⁶ The FIFA World Cup Football having been played in South Africa in June/July 2010, the 5th AASR Conference in Africa congregated at Egerton University, at Njoro, Kenya, to discuss the topic of 'Sports, Leisure, Religion & Spirituality in Africa & the African Dias-

⁴ Cf. AASR Newsletter 19 (May 2003): 1-3; 20 (November 2003): 2-4 at:

<http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/AASRNewsletter20.pdf>. For the Minutes of the AASR General Meeting on 6th February 2004 by Dr. James L. Cox, cf. AASR Bulletin 21 (May 2004): 5-8. For reports of this conference by Matthews A. Ojo, Oluwafemi Abosede Okunlola, David O. Ogunbible, and Hajj Mumuni Sulemana, cf. AASR Bulletin 21: 9-14. Though Ojo confidently announced that 'the keynote addresses and a selection of the revised papers are presently being prepared for publication' (AASR Bulletin 21: 10), no such volume has so far been published.

⁵ Cf. AASR Bulletin 25 (May 2006): 3-6 at:

<http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/AASRBulletin25.pdf>. For reports of this conference by Muhammed Haron & Lovemore Togarasei, Damaris Seleina Parsitau, and for its financial constraints by Afe Adogame, cf. AASR Bulletin 27/28 (May/November 2007): 2-9. Despite the assertion in the AASR Business Meeting at Toronto on 17.08.2010, that the publication of selected, peer reviewed papers of this conference is on course (AASR Bulletin 33: 9), no such volume has so far been published. Some of the papers have, however, been published recently in the new electronic open access *AASR e-Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora* 1 (2015) at:

<http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Volume-1-Issue-1-August-2015.pdf>

⁶ Cf. AASR Bulletin 29&30 (November 2008/May 2009): 2-3 at:

http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/AASRBulletin29_30.pdf. Despite the unanimous decision at the AASR Business Meeting at Obafemi Awolowo University on 11.01.2010, that in the next five years top priority must be given to the publication of volumes drawn from past AASR conference (cf. AASR Bulletin 33: 5), no volume of selected, peer reviewed papers presented at this conference has so far been published.

pora' from 18 to 23 July 2012.⁷ This second circumambulation of West, East and Southern Africa was again completed with AASR convening at the University of Cape Town in 2014, from July 30 to August 3, for the 6th AASR Conference in Africa on (again) 'Religion, Ecology and the Environment in Africa and the African Diaspora'.⁸

As this second circumambulation took six years only, 2010-2016, AASR unwittingly established a tradition of having an AASR Conference in Africa every two years. The 7th AASR Conference in Africa, the first of the third round, was announced therefore as the 7th Biennial AASR Conference in Africa, conflating 7th AASR Conference in Africa, and 4th AASR Biennial Conference in Africa.⁹

Legon, 26-29 July 2016

For the 7th AASR Biennial Conference, 26-29 July 2016, AASR met at the beautiful University of Ghana (UG) campus at Legon, Accra, Ghana. It conducted its sessions there in the ISSER Conference Centre, of the UG Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research. It met there to discuss the hot issue of 'Religion, Sexuality, and Identity in Africa & the African Diaspora'. Though sexual diversity has been a highly controversial issue to various degrees all over the world for the past half century, it has become an explosive issue in most African societies, continental as well as diasporic, since some two decades, because complex and rapid social and cultural transformations, endemic as well as global, caused a formerly

⁷ Cf. AASR Bulletin 33 (November 2010): 3-4 at:

<http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/AASRBulletin33.3.pdf>

⁸For the Call for papers, cf AASR Bulletin 38 (May 2013), 8-10 at:

<http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/AASR-Bulletin.38.pdf>.

For the minutes of the AASR Business Meeting at Cape Town, and reports of the conference, cf. AASR Bulletin 41 (November 2014): 5-7, 23-29 at: <http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AASR-Bulletin-41.pdf>. For my report on this conference, cf. AASR Bulletin 41 (November 2014): 23-29; also at: <https://jangplatvoet.nl/content/uploads/2026/10/CapeTown2014.pdf>

⁹ In addition to these 'biennial' conferences in Africa, AASR has met every five years at the World Congresses of the International Association for the History of Religions since 1995 at Mexico City; in 2000, at Durban, South Africa; in 2005, at Tokyo, Japan; in 2010, at Toronto, Canada; in 2015, at Erfurt, Germany; and in 2020, at Dunedin, New Zealand. In addition, AASR has annually organized panels at the AAR/SBL congresses in November in the USA since 2006 (cf. AASR Bulletin 25 (November 2006): 9-13 (at: <http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/AASRBulletin25.pdf>))

concealed diversity of sexual identities (and practices) to surface also in African societies. Those endowed with them began to actively vie for moral and legal room for them, and for recognition and for acceptance of them on a par with heterosexuality.

However, the field of problems to be addressed in this conference comprised not only this newly manifest diversity of sexual orientations - 'hetero' and LGTB -, but also those of gender, HIV/AIDS, and religion. Gender, with its subsets of masculinities and femininities, refers to the distinct sets of rules, prescribed in distinct ways by each culture, that govern the relationships between males and females. Due to the rapid and fundamental changes in the relative positions of males and females in societies in the past few decades worldwide, these gender rules have become much more fluid, brittle, complex, variable and uncertain, and at times more violent, especially in African societies that have in addition been deeply affected in the past three decades by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The other main focus of the discussion during this conference was, naturally, the role the religions of Africa and its Diaspora played in these three sets of interlocking problems: sexual diversity, gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. The lofty goal of this AASR conference was to 'to dispassionately deliberate, explore and provide informed contributions to the debate in this era of rapid social change'.¹⁰

The structure of the conference

The conference consisted of a keynote address, three plenaries, some sixty papers,¹¹ and an outing. The sizeable (138 pp.) Program and Book of Abstracts of the conference scheduled 111 abstracts of papers that were to be presented by 116 applicants for participation: 59 from Nigeria, 15 from Ghana, 10 from South Africa, 10 from the USA, 6 from The Netherlands, 5 from Zimbabwe, 4 from Kenya, 3 from UK, 3 from Germany, 2 from Canada, 2 from Norway, 2 from Brazil, and

¹⁰ Cf. the Call for Papers for this conference in *AASR Bulletin* 41 (November 2014): 15 at: <http://www.a-asr.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AASR-Bulletin-41.pdf>

¹¹ I regret that the list of those who actually participated in the conference is not yet available. I have therefore not been able to restrict this report to the presenters who actually took part on the conference.

1 each from France, Senegal, Lesotho, Korea and Botswana.¹² 37 The interest in the topic of this conference was therefore great.

However, by far not everyone scheduled to present her or his views on the role of religion(s) in the battle for sexual diversity in Africa and its Diaspora actually managed to make it to the conference. All in all, the conference drew some 80 participants, some 60 of which presented papers.¹³

The keynote address

The subject matter of the conference having three foci: 'religion', 'sexuality', and 'identity', Professor Emeritus John Samuel Pobee, 78, felt free to explore the first and the third item in his keynote address 'Human Families Together Searching for Renewed Identity: An African Theological Contribution'. He left sexuality virtually untouched.¹⁴ Though aware that AASR is a secular association for the academic study of the religions of Africa and its Diaspora, and 'not an assembly of theologians at prayer', Pobee, pioneer of African Theology, craved indulgence to present an explicitly theological reflection on how a ecumenical hermeneutics for banning strife and violence from modern religiously pluralist human societies might be developed by heeding the 'heteronomous call of the other' of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995).

Pobee only briefly touched on sexuality, asserting that 'gender is in the order of creation', and 'fundamentally about companionship and complementarity'. As both male or female bear the *Imago Dei*, neither is inferior or superior. Both are therefore entitled to the same dignity, honour and respect as a human right. As the 'sexuality of preference' was 'influenced by contextual, especially cultural norms', and is 'a person's private matter', and as its discussion was 'fraught with much politics and emotive language', Pobee merely remarked about it that he felt 'uncomfortable when a private agenda is flaunted publicly in a political manner'.¹⁵

¹² 8 proposed papers were to be presented by two or three participants.

¹³ E-mail message from the Conference Organizer, Dr. Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, dd. 17 November 2016. Note that four participants presented more than one paper.

¹⁴ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 21-22

¹⁵ I am grateful to Prof. Pobee for sending me the full text of his address.

The three plenary sessions

Of the three plenary sessions, two were delivered by invited speakers. They were Prof. Emeritus Kofi Asare Opoku and the ethnoarchaeologist Prof. Kodzo B. Gavua, Dean of the School of Arts of the University of Ghana. Gavua delivered his address on Thursday 28/07, the outing day devoted to a visit by bus to the two most famous stone castles of Ghana, São Jorge da Mina, in Elmina, Portuguese headquarters from 1481 to 1637, when it was captured by the Dutch and served as Dutch headquarters on the Gold Coast for trade, especially in gold dust and slaves, till 1872; and nearby Cape Coast Castle which served as British headquarters for the same trade from 1664 till 1881.

Gavua's address was on the part religion played in identity development in South Eastern Ghana during the slave trade era. He found that those adopting Western European identities by converting to Christianity were deemed inferior to those who elected to maintain indigenous cultural and religious identities. That seems to indicate that, like Pobee, he



did deal with religion and identity construction, but not with religion's role in the battle of sexual diversity.¹⁶

Neither did Professor Emeritus Kofi Asare Opoku (85, and still admirably vigorous and academically active) touch on religion and sexual diversity, nor on religion and identity construction in his plenary address 'The Handle of the Axe: Theology and the African World View' on Friday 29 July. It repeated his oft stated view that the immigrant religions, Islam and Christianity, had unfairly demonized their co-religions, the African indigenous religions, by denouncing them as Satanic and depreciating them as 'a theological wasteland'. African Christian theologians, he asserted, have ignored the 'valid understanding of the world and wise insights into the meaning and significance of life' of African indigenous religions. Thereby they have failed 'to make a distinctive contribution to theological scholarship in general'.¹⁷

The business to be transacted in this conference began therefore to be seriously addressed, as far as the keynote and plenary sessions is concerned, only in the third plenary session, on Wednesday 28 July, in the panel on 'Methodological and Theoretical Issues' in the study of sexual diversity in Africa and its Diaspora, organized by Adriaan van Klinken. It consisted of four paper presentations.

The first was an introductory survey of feminist, postcolonial and queer perspectives in the study of religion and sexual diversity in African contexts by Adriaan van Klinken.

The second paper was read by Nina Hoel on the need for an embodied and relational approach in the ethnographic study of lived religion that critically and self-reflexively problematizes the insider/outsider dichotomy and notions of detachment and non-involvement, takes the body of the researcher seriously as an 'enfleshed lens', and highlights relational aspects in the study of lived religion (and sexuality).

The third contribution was the paper by Damaris Parsitau on the dress of women in the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MRH) church in Kenya. That church

¹⁶ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 23-24. As my wife and I could not take part in the outing, I can only go by the summary of Gavua's lecture.

¹⁷ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 23

regards the body of women as sinful and teaches them to cover it up completely so as not to tempt men to sexual sin.

The fourth contribution to this panel was again by Adriaan van Klinken. He discussed the theoretical and methodological challenges of a new research project he was developing on the relation between religion and queer politics in Africa. It aims to examine how LGTB individuals, activists and communities in Kenya relate to religion.¹⁸ This panel was definitively one of the high points of this conference.

Two more panels

In addition to the methodological panel organized by Adriaan van Klinken, two more panels convened during this conference. One, with four papers, was organized by Kim Kibbe on 'Transnational Religion and Sexual Life-styling: Global Sexuality and its Local Intersections in Africa and its Diaspora'.

One paper was Brenda Bartelink's on how views of sexuality had changed in The Netherlands since the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and by the emergence of secularity as the dominant ideology of Dutch society. She outlined how these secular, 'liberal' views have deeply determined Dutch development policy in respect of notions of sexuality and health, and Dutch views how they were to be implemented in development – 'aid' – projects abroad.¹⁹

The second paper was by Kim Knibbe. It outlined a research program at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands, that will critically examine how the Dutch tend to impose their secular, 'liberal', 'modern' views of sexuality on the views and values of immigrants from Africa living in The Netherlands. In Dutch perception, they espouse outmoded religious and traditional views of sexuality and health that are in need of an 'update'. The aim of this research program is 'to break with this European singularizing view of sexuality' and to approach liberal/secular and traditional/religious views of sexuality as 'the meeting of different cultural trajectories emerging from both sub-Saharan Africa and Europe'.²⁰

¹⁸ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 24-27

¹⁹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 28

²⁰ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 29

The third paper in this panel was by Francesca Mininel, from France, on how *akpema*, the rite of passage of girls into womanhood in Ewe-speaking parts of South Togo, is used now in the struggle against HIV/AIDS by intertwining it with Christian notions of purity and with the notions of individual responsibility and choice as promoted by HIV prevention campaigns.²¹

The fourth paper was by Modi Ndiogou Faye, from Senegal, on her research into the strategies of young girls in Senegal who need to comply on the one hand with the normative, public view of sex imposed by dominant Sufi Islam as wild lechery and therefore a taboo that is covered up in silence, and their own 'need to live fully [their] sexuality' and to have their bodies 'completely free from censorship'²²

The other panel was a doublesized one, of eight papers. It was convened by Benson Ohihon Igboin, of Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo, Nigeria, to critically discuss 'Homosexuality, Religions, African Culture and Western Influence'. They all noted, and strongly agreed, that homosexuality was sinful, for Christians because it is condemned in the Bible, and for all Nigerians because it is contrary, they asserted, to the sexual ethics ruling 'traditional societies'. They all regarded the political and media pressure, internal and external, that gay people be permitted to marry and that LGTB sexual identities be protected by law as a 'human rights', as an unlawful and inadmissible infringement by the West of the sovereignty of modern African nations. They rejected this intrusion as neo-colonialism by means of the politics of aid. As Segun Adebileje, of the Redeemed Christian Bible College, said: 'Western powers colluded to force the hands of the weaker nations around the world, to accept a western interpretation of sexual orientation and identity'. He added: 'Even in the face of [this] tyranny', African nations have remained resolute in their 'defiant denunciation' and 'complete rejection' of Western homosexual ideology.²³

There were two partially dissenting voices in this panel. One was Babatunde Adedibu, Manager of the Central Office of the Redeemed Christian Church of God,

²¹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 20 [30?]

²² Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 31

²³ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 31-38

at Cambridge, UK.²⁴ Though he agreed that there was a need to critically examine 'the imperialistic tendencies of the West that have branded Pentecostal positions on human sexuality as uncivilized and fundamentalist', he also said that likewise the 'reactionary rhetoric' of some leaders of Pentecostal churches from Africa in the Diaspora, who have resisted the redefinition of human sexuality' should come in for critique.²⁵

The other was Patrick Nwosu (University of Ilorin). Though he asserted that homosexual acts cannot be approved, he also pleaded that homosexuals be accepted. In his view, the teaching on homosexuality needs to be balanced with the belief that God is merciful and loving. Nwosu even added that 'in a pluralistic society homosexuals may make the human community richer'.²⁶

The battlefield

The two panels convened by Adriaan van Klinken and Kim Knibbe, each of four papers, and the double-sized panel of eight papers convened by Benson Igboin, represent well the two frontlines of the battlefield of sexual diversity in Africa and its Diaspora as well as worldwide.

Each of these two camps has distinct marks. That of Van Klinken and Knibbe is descriptive, analytical, reflexive, self-critical, and dialogical in as far as it contextualizes its own approaches as time- and place-bound and culturally conditioned academic positions, as well as those of the opposite camp. But it is also proactive and activist by using, and by departing from, feminist, postcolonial, queer, and other engaged perspectives and modern(ist) theories with a young pedigree in humanistic scholarship. These focus on the plight of the 'victims' of 'oppressive' social structures and aim to uncover them as oppressive and unjust in order that their 'oppressive injustices' be alleviated and in the end be removed.

²⁴ He is also a Senior Lecturer at Christ the Redeemer College, London, and Visiting Lecturer at the University of Roehampton, London.

Cf. <http://www.cccw.cam.ac.uk/pages/centre/cccw-research-associates/revd-babetundeadedibu.php>

²⁵ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 33-34

²⁶ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 38

A distinct partisanship, and its inevitable limitations in terms of evenhanded, hardnosed, cold, distanced scholarship, seems inherent in these approaches. The need for them and for their partisanship, however, seems also beyond dispute once they have exposed the oppression suffered.

In the Igboin camp a much more vocal, ideological and inflexible partisanship seems to rule. It is inspired by the 'incontrovertible' view and 'indisputable fact' that homosexuality is morally impermissible, on Biblical grounds and because it is not permitted by the ethics of African 'traditional societies' as postulated by this camp.²⁷ No sexual identity other than the heterosexual one, and no marriage other than that between a male and a female, must therefore be given legal status and protection. As heteronormativity is the one-and-only perennial rule for every human society in this camp, its adherents often do not shy away from the homophobic violence which this inviolable rule engenders when its monopoly is contested, as is the case in many parts of Africa at present.

The 95 individual papers

As I cannot review in this report all the other 95 individual papers, whether proposed only or actually delivered at the conference, I present only a rapid survey of them through an attempt to place them in either the Van Klinken/Knibbe camp, or in that of Igboin, or as distinct from both, either by matter or approach.

I briefly mention those unrelated to either camp first. Four papers were clearly not related to the issue of the conference. One was on Wimbun violent land disputes. Another was on Franz Fanon and Black Consciousness. A third was on Mafi-

²⁷ This is a romanticized, unified, pan-African, immobilizing notion and an 'invention of tradition' for pursuing an interest and/or for founding and legitimizing a (newly invented) identity. This a-historical, generalizing view of African cultures, societies, and their ethics ignores the huge diversity and dynamics that have always marked indigenous societies everywhere in Africa (and throughout the globe) in every age, pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. These societies, and especially those that were pre-literate, easily and usually greedily adopted, and adapted, external cultural inputs. The so called 'traditional' societies of Africa were never static, nor archaic, nor uniform, nor homogenous, but dynamic, different, historical and always modernizing. For an example of a history of sexuality in an African indigenous society in the past that presents data on 'traditional' sexual ethics that modify, and perhaps contradict, the views of the Igboin camp, cf. the paper on Yoruba erotic songs, riddles and proverbs by Ibrahim Esan Olaosun (OAU, Ile-Ife) (Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 98-99).

Ewe environmental ethics. And a fourth contended that there was a need to save Yoruba indigenous religion from extinction.²⁸

Four other papers were primarily on the xenophobic violence that immigrants into South Africa from other parts of Africa have experienced in the past decade. Their authors are all four either staff or students of the School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics of the University of KwaZulu/Natal at Pietermaritzburg, but hailed, like those suffering this xenophobia, from other parts of Africa (Rwanda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Ghana). Two proposed that contextual Bible study and feminist postcolonial theory be used as instruments for providing security for these immigrants. A third appealed to the virtue of Christian hospitality. And the fourth added that gay immigrants suffered a 'triple oppression' through being subjected to both xenophobic and homophobic marginalization.²⁹

In addition to these eight (proposed) papers, nine were explicitly on gender and/or sexuality, but could not be unambiguously included in either the Van Klinken/Knibbe camp or that of Igboin. Four were on gender. One outlined the place of female priests in contemporary Akan religion.³⁰ Another discussed the role of women in Christian missions and in AICs.³¹ A third that of African female prophets in diasporic Afro-Christian communities in Korea.³² And a fourth that of female healers in the Afro-Brazilian Quilombo de Coqueiroa in Bahia, Brazil.³³

Of the other five, one investigated the link between the sexual harassment of girls in secondary school and poor academic performance.³⁴ Another paper found that there are significant differences between the perception of male and female teachers of [the need for teaching] Sex Education in secondary schools in Nigeria.³⁵

²⁸ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 106-107; 110-111; 112-113; 125

²⁹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 40-41; 52-53; 84-85; 62-63. I have assigned the fourth paper also to the Van Klinken/Knibbe camp, because it adds homophobia to xenophobia.

³⁰ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 48-49

³¹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 70-71 [AICs: African Independent Churches, a well researched category of indigenous African Christian Churches].

³² Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 103-105

³³ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 108-109

³⁴ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 58-59

³⁵ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 77-78

A third discussed the role of religion in the sex trade.³⁶ A fourth presented a socio-psychological content analysis of the 'exploitation' of female body parts in the Fashion Court column of the Nigerian Sunday Sun newspaper.³⁷ And the fifth compared 'traditional' and Muslim marriage in Yorubaland.³⁸

This left me with 78 individual papers to be assigned to either the Van Klinken/-Knibbe camp, or to that of Benson Igboin.

The Van Klinken/Knibbe camp

Through an analysis of titles and summaries and through chairing two sessions and attending others, 56 papers, i.e. by far the greater number, may be unambiguously assigned to the Van Klinken/Knibbe camp, be it with a question mark for four papers. They discussed, or proposed to discuss, gender notions (48, 61-62);³⁹ their ritual renegotiation (83-84); (structural) gender (in)equality (56, 65, 66, 68-69, 72-73, 91-92, 96-97, 102-103, 114, 115, 124, 131-132); ingrained notions of female inferiority by which household tasks are assigned to young girls 'as a matter of course' (87-88); gender discrimination in the workplace (61-62); female ritual agency hidden in 'patriarchal' [i.e. patrilineal, JP] Kasena society (107-108); gender-based violence (39-40, 56) and biblical texts (109-110, 111-112), and HIV/AIDS (42-43, 48, 80-81, 93-95); and sugar daddies (122-123); hegemonic harmful masculinities (42-43) and the need to contest them and transform them into non-violent masculinities (99, 100-101); sexual identity/identities (118); non-normative sexualities (43-44); sexual liberation (74-75, 116-117); redeemed sexuality (82-83); inclusive biblical understanding of sexuality (88, 96-97); perverse colonial and racist notions of black sexuality, and of Hagar's (85-87, 126); the views of MHR⁴⁰ and ZCC⁴¹ churches on gender based violence as 'the work of the

³⁶ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 59-60

³⁷ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 75. But I wonder whether I ought to add this paper to the Igboin camp, for it qualifies the 'exploitation of female body parts' by the *Sunday Sun* as 'visual terrorism and social violence'.

³⁸ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 75

³⁹ The numbers between brackets refer to pages in the Program and Book of Abstracts.

⁴⁰ The Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MRH) church in Kenya

⁴¹ The *Zviratidzo Zvevapostori* Church (ZVC) or Zion Christian Church (ZCC) church in Zimbabwe

devil' (81-82,105-106); the view of the Kenyan MRH Church that females must cover up completely, because their sinful bodies provoke lustful males to sexual sins (30, 100); cultural, Christian, Rastafarian and Anglican/Evangelical homophobia (62- 63,120-121, 129-130); Yoruba erotic songs, riddles and proverbs (98-99); the paradigm shift in gender, sexuality and marriage styles (117-118); same sex relationships (46-47); their dramatic performance in ritual of deliverance from 'spirits of gayism' in Pentecostal churches (43-44); same sex marriage; reproductive rights and reproductive technologies (69-70, 128); brutal murders of LGTBs in South Africa (71-72); violence against LGTBs during the 2010-2011 Ivorian crisis (123-124); black queer masculine off-centre Diaspora women attempt to dissolve black heteronormativity (121-122, 127).

Four more papers may perhaps be assigned to either the Van Klinken/Knibbe camp, or that of Igboin. One is by Boakye Owusu Ansah (Doctoral Research Assistant at Texas State University). He graphically describes 'Africa' and its religions as homophobic, yet says 'there is a need to separate religious and cultural morality from sexual orientation'.⁴² The second is by Adeola Kehinde Adedayo (Abuja University) who proposes to investigate whether membership of the LGTB community 'constitutes sinfulness or holiness' in order to 'remove misconception of LGTBs', but fails to infer that Christian gays may indeed be 'sanctified'.⁴³ The third is by Silindiwe Zvingowanisei (University of Zimbabwe). She contends that gender based violence is surely not perpetrated by men on women only, for 'cases of women perpetrating sexual violence on men are rampant and increase at an alarming rate', causing men to suffer in silence and at times to commit suicide.⁴⁴ The fourth was by Donatus Pius Ukpogon (University of Uyo, Nigeria). He proposes as an antidote to homophobia that a non-judgmental theology of love be developed that is rooted in the perennial acceptance of maleness and femaleness as determined in creation.⁴⁵

⁴² Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 54-55

⁴³ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 50-51

⁴⁴ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 78-79. I should, perhaps, have included this paper in the Igboin camp.

⁴⁵ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 136-137

The Van Klinken/Knibbe camp consisted therefore of at least 56, and at most 60, individual papers in addition to the 8 convened in the Van Klinken and Knibbe panels; i.e. 64 to 68 papers in total. The presenters of these papers came from all over Africa (Nigeria: 19, South Africa: 5; Zimbabwe: 4; Ghana: 4; Kenya: 3; Lesotho: 2; Senegal: 1) and from all over the globe (USA: 7; Canada: 3; The Netherlands: 3; Germany: 3; New Zealand: 3; Brazil: 2; Norway: 2; South Korea: 1; France: 1).

The Igboin camp

This is in striking contrast to the Benson Igboin camp, the core of which was constituted by the 8 panelists convened by Igboin in the panel on 'Homosexuality, Religions, African Culture and Western Influence'.⁴⁶ I assign 15 individual papers unambiguously to it, and another 5 with a question mark. That camp was therefore at most 28 presenters strong.⁴⁷ They all hail from Nigeria but for one, perhaps two, from Zimbabwe, and another very doubtful one from USA/Ghana.⁴⁸

The themes addressed in the 15 papers may briefly be summarized as follows. The LGTB human rights debate in Africa is an infringement of the sovereignty of African nations,⁴⁹ a secularist Western invasion,⁵⁰ and imposes a theological mandate from outside Africa.⁵¹

As a result Yoruba/African society, which attaches great value to virginity, is now in a moral havoc through pre- and extramarital sex and adolescent illicit sexual life, and also because girls manipulate male sexual weaknesses, as did Tamara trapping Judah (Gen. 38: 12-23).⁵² Which havoc Pentecostal churches curb by severely disciplining lust and adultery and all illicit sexuality in accordance with 1Cor.5: 1-13.⁵³ In 'this sex-perverted era, borrowed from the West', there is there-

⁴⁶ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 31-38; and above p. 10

⁴⁷ Perhaps 30 if two papers discussed above (cf. footnotes 37 and 44) are added to the Igboin camp.

⁴⁸ Cf. footnote 42

⁴⁹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 44-45

⁵⁰ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 49-50

⁵¹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 49-50

⁵² Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 67, 134-135

⁵³ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 53-54, 60-61, 134-135

fore a dire need that African morals be respected again;⁵⁴ that Christians submit to the teachings of scripture on the sinfulness of homosexuality and same-sex marriage;⁵⁵ that the lewd lyrics of Saint Janet parodying gospel juju be censored;⁵⁶ and for Africa to abhor homosexuality and same sex marriage as a biblical and cultural taboo.⁵⁷

I have assigned these 14 papers to the Igboin camp also because they are prescriptive. They enjoin that any sexuality other than that of married male/female couples be banned as immoral and unlawful.

Six other papers lack this prescriptive drive but should perhaps still be assigned to the Igboin camp because they agree with it in substance, or at least descriptively. Boakye Owusu Ansah, e.g., states that LGTB is not acceptable in Africa because it is 'not aligned with the cultural and moral values of the African society'.⁵⁸ Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo pleads that the moral dimension of sexual/-religious identity be stressed in order that the current moral decadence be overcome.⁵⁹ Mercy Agha Onu stresses that Edda (Igbo) traditional religion needs to be studied because it contains the Edda norms for sexual conduct.⁶⁰ Victor T. Odewale suggests that clergy sexual scandals should attract even more coverage by the media than they already do, 'not for entertainment, but to educate people about the side effects' and 'to apply strict legislation against the offenders, regardless of their statuses'.⁶¹ Michael Tokunbo Bankole describes the battle between revisionists and traditionalists in the Anglican communion, with conservative bishops from the global south unequivocally condemning same sex relationships as sinful and satanic.⁶²

⁵⁴ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 79-80, 90-91

⁵⁵ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 95-96, 119-120

⁵⁶ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 76-77; cf. also Adebayo Mosobalaye 2015, 'The Erotic as Rhetoric of Subversion in Saint Janet's Juju Music', paper read the Seminar 'Africa Talks' at the Department of African Studies and Anthropology on Wednesday 18 November 2015

(cf. <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/dasa/2015/africatalks-autumn-2015.pdf>)

⁵⁷ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 97-98, 137-138

⁵⁸ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 50-51

⁵⁹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 78-79

⁶⁰ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 92

⁶¹ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 129

⁶² Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 132-133

Lastly, David Ajewole Adewale, Oyemi Jumoke Jekayinfa, Olajide Emmanuel Bello & Aminat Ozohu Aburime present an exegetical study of Leviticus 18: 22; 20: 13. As these passages prohibit homosexuality and designates it as a capital offence, the claim of modern gay activists that homosexuality is as legitimate a lifestyle as is heterosexuality presents, they say, a formidable challenge to Christian ethics.⁶³

A polite, peaceful conference

Curiously, though my analysis so far shows that the two camps of presenters at this conference could hardly be expected to 'dispassionately deliberate' religion and modern sexual diversity in Africa and its Diaspora, the conference itself, at least in my experience as a non-presenting participant, was quite peaceful and a polite academic gathering. In the two sessions of three papers each I was privileged to chair,⁶⁴ only one paper was reproached in the Q&A for shifting the blame for sexual assault too easily from male teachers committing it to girl students suffering it. In none of the other sessions I attended, or at the coffees/ teas and meals, did I myself meet with the vocal presence of the Igboin camp. Nor did I learn about clashes between the two camps in them in Q&A. Perhaps only a few of the odd 28 Igboin camp presenters actually made it to conference. Those that did make it to the conference delivered their papers in concurrent sessions I could not attend. I may also have heard no 'battle reports', because my wife and I were lodged during the conference at Prof. Pobee's at quite a distance from the UG campus; and because we could not take part in the day long social interaction of the outing. My informal contact with colleagues was therefore much more minimal than at earlier AASR conferences.

Bridging the chasm?

Even so, if no battle, or only a few minor skirmishes, were fought between the van Klinken/Knibbe camp, numerically dominant at the conference, and the much

⁶³ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 133-134

⁶⁴ I remember vividly chairing the paper 'Dying to be Queer' by Zethu Matebeni, and another by Damaris Parsitau on the perception of sex and the female body by the MRH church, each graphically portraying lived experiences of gender-based violence, even deadly violence in Matebeni's paper.

smaller but vocal Igboin camp, the chasm between the two is deep in Africa and its Diaspora at present. Precisely because the battle is on also in academia, I wonder whether an approach can be devised and developed that produces a reflective pause, and perhaps even conciliation between the two camps. I suggest we may try to reach such a 'truce' by an analysis of the historical setting of this battle, be it a very brief one to forestall that I get drawn into a fascinating, but completely new and complex field of research. I know from experience that I will easily get absorbed and drowned in it, and thereby delay the publication of this report and *AASR Bulletin* 45 even longer. So, I can only present a hint of what such a contextualizing approach is about and how it might be developed.

I felt, even before the conference, and especially after it, that a crucial aspect of the problem of sexual diversity has not been addressed at this conference. It is an analysis of the impact of recent demographic dynamics, humankind's population explosion in the 20th and 21st centuries, on gender relations and sexual diversity. That explosion is synchronic with revolutionary changes in sexual ethics, and has, I suggest, causal connections with them. These changes began to take off in Europe in the 1960s at the time of the so called 'sexual revolution', 'flower power', the pill, and (effective) family planning. They clearly have taken off now in Africa also. A cardinal effect of the population explosion of the 20th century worldwide⁶⁵, which is now in full swing in Africa,⁶⁶ is that it has made us aware that sex-

⁶⁵ Cf the plenary address I delivered at the AASR Conference at OAU, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 17-21 January 2010, 'Demography as an Apocalypse?', in which I set out the demographic history of *homo sapiens* from 70.000 BP till now, humankind reaching the 1 billion mark in 1804; the 2 billion mark in 1927; the 3 billion mark in 1959; the 4 billion mark in 1974; the 5 billion mark in 1987; and the 6 billion mark in 1999. Mark the increase in speed: it took mankind 125 years to reach the 2 billion mark; but only 32 years to arrive at 3 billion; only 15 years to reach 4 billion; and only 13 years to pass the 5 billion mark. Then the speed began to level of a bit, for it was after 14 years that it reached the 6 billion mark. But it was again after only 13 years, in January 2012, that the 7 billion mark was passed.

Cf. <http://plaatinfo.nl/begrippen/bevolking.htm>. Even so, the annual growth rate is declining slowly. It stood in 1970 at 2.08 % per year and stands now, in 2017, at 1.11 % per year. Cf. e.g.

<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/#pastfuture>

⁶⁶ The population density of the huge African continent (North Africa included) was quite low till 1950, as was the growth of its population. It stood at 107 million in 1800, at 111 million in 1850, at 133 million in 1900, and at 221 million in 1950. By that time better medical care became available. As a result mortality figures began to drop, and the fertility rate to increase. As a result, Africa's population had grown to 872 million in 2000, to 922 million in 2005, and to 1,2 billion in 2016. It is expected to have grown to 1.76 billion in 2050. Cf. <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wereldbevolking> ;

uality's first and foremost purpose, procreation through female fertility, is no longer only its blessing, lifeline and pride, but also a huge problem for humankind,⁶⁷ economically, environmentally, educationally, in terms of the job market, and of the need for migration to get rid of a demographic surplus, etc., especially for Africa in the decades ahead.⁶⁸

The gradually sinking in awareness of the increasingly problematic nature of procreation, and of the restriction of sexuality and sex to procreation only, triggered significant demographic, social, cultural, economic, political, ethical and other changes, but in particular in gender relations and in the diversity of sexual identities gradually becoming public.

First, very briefly, in gender relations. 'The pill', the condom, and other means of family planning allowed married couples from the 1960s on to choose when to 'take' children and to decide how many children to have, usually just two.⁶⁹ That caused the average female fertility rate (the number of live births per female) not only to drop dramatically, but also made it acceptable, and soon even respectable, for a single woman, and more rarely for a married couple, to decide not take children, but devote their time and talent to a job or academic career.

These changes in fertility ethics therefore also had a huge impact on greater gender equality. Married women were no longer lifelong housewives only but became active and valuable participants in all fields of outdoor society, often

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/africa-population/>

⁶⁷ As I said at OAU: 'Currently, humanity's major problem seems to be humankind itself because of our immense breeding success in the past and present century'.

⁶⁸ Cf. <http://www.ageing.ox.ac.uk/blog/Is-fertility-stalling-in-sub-saharan-africa>: 'in sub-Saharan Africa women are still bearing over five children on average. This rises to over six or even seven in countries such as Chad, Mali and Niger. This rapid population growth and high fertility threaten the well-being of individuals and communities across sub-Saharan Africa'.

⁶⁹ In less than a decade, families shrunk from having any number of children between five and fifteen to two, at most three, in The Netherlands. By the 1970s, the standard nuclear family consisted of husband and wife and two children, in stark contrast to Dutch families before 1960, which grew large due to improved sanitation, better food, housing and healthcare conditions. In the absence of easy and effective means of fertility control, women used to be pregnant as long as they were fertile and restricted to the home for giving birth, nursing and rearing their numerous children. As a result, they became so used to being housewives only, that activity or a job outside the household was not only hardly possible, but also came to regarded as unbecoming and 'unnatural'.

outperforming males,⁷⁰ gradually breaking through the 'glass ceiling' into male bulwarks, and slowly but steadily achieving top positions too in academia, civil service, politics, corporations, etc.

I should add that this development towards greater gender equality is not merely pure progress. Like any other major change in socio-structural relations, it also has unwelcome effects, in this case, a stiff increase in the divorce rate. In The Netherlands, one in three marriages is breaking up now. On the other hand, the high divorce rates common e.g. in Akan pre-colonial matrilineal societies, signal that women had a much stronger position in them than women have in patrilineal societies in Africa then and now. Which much stronger position they now gradually have acquired, and increasingly continue to acquire in societies in the West.

But modern Western high divorce rates also caused households types to vary. In addition to the fewer but still large numbers of 'classical' lifelong monogamous family of a male/female couple with, or without children, there are now the households of divorced single mothers with children, of couples who remarried with each partner bringing children from an earlier marriage and adding perhaps another of their own union, and an increasing number of singles, who divorced and did not remarry, or who had remained celibate throughout, being absorbed in a profession or an academic career, as well as same sex households, gay as well as lesbian, the latter often with their biologically own children, the former at times with adopted children.

Therefore, secondly and equally brief, what changes did and does modern demography effect in sexual ethics all over the globe, and now also in Africa? When the population explosion exposed the problematic nature of fertility and procreation, it made more room in sexual ethics for sexuality's other purposes, e.g. male/female companionship complementing each other, in a (heterosexual) marriage with or without children, and for the pleasure of sex for its own sake.⁷¹ In addition, it permitted the till then well hidden and thoroughly tabooed human

⁷⁰ As girl students nowadays do in secondary schools and universities in The Netherlands.

⁷¹ Sexual pleasure for its own sake has, of course, always been an integral and essential part and purpose also of monogamous hetero marriages, not only after the woman had entered menarche and could no longer bear children, but also during her fertile years of childbearing.

sexual diversity⁷² to cautiously emerge into the open - 'from the closet' -, to gradually become more tolerated, and very recently to become even legally permitted and protected, as a 'human right', in a few but increasing number of nations.

Resistance against this emancipation from heteronormativity is, however, quite fierce virtually everywhere, either from small pockets in societies in which sexual diversity has been generally accepted and legally permitted as a human right, or from large sections of societies in which there is as yet little leeway for tolerance of sexuality other than the hetero one of hegemonic masculinity. In the latter resistance is more fierce, when it is felt that heteronormativity's ethical monopoly is under serious threat. When it engenders gender and homophobic violence, it may take 'dying to be queer'.⁷³

Even so, the global movement towards greater gender equality and tolerance of sexual diversity seems a largely autonomous process, precisely because it is a side effect of humanity's ongoing population explosion. It seems that engaged feminist and LGTB activism can contribute little to speed it up, and hegemonic masculinity to retard it, let alone to stop it. It also seems that either way, religion plays only a very minor part in it, despite this conference and all the papers that were read in it. As Danoye Oguntula Laguda writes: 'religious beliefs do not regulate sexual engagements of Nigerian youths but rather it is the social environment that determines it'.⁷⁴ This analysis may therefore constitute a middle ground between the two camps, and perhaps serve as a bridge across the gap between them.

⁷² In addition to LGTBs (lesbians, gays, transgenders, and bi-sexuals), there are also 'a-sexuals', males and females who never engage in sex with another male or female partner (though some of them engage in 'auto-eroticism'). They may comprise 1% of the world's population.

Cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asexuality>. Note also that 0,1 to 0,2% (i.e. one or two in a thousand) children are born as neither fully male nor female but as 'intersexual', formerly called hermaphrodite. Intersex is again not a uniform biological condition but consists of several subtypes.

Cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersex>

⁷³ Cf. Zethu Matebeni's paper, Program and Book of Abstracts, pp. 71-72

⁷⁴ Cf. Program and Book of Abstracts, p. 116

In conclusion

Despite this sobering, perhaps too minimalistic final statement, I trust that my report shows that this was a magnificent , well organized AASR conference in a great setting in which we all felt most welcome.

The Conference Organizer, Dr. Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, and her Local Organizing Committee, are to be applauded for, and congratulated with this big feat: this conference on the hot issue of gender inequality and lack of protection of sexual diversity in Sub-Saharan Africa and its Diaspora. Hopefully, quite a number of the papers presented will be submitted after careful revision for a strict peer review and be collected in one or more volumes of high academic quality that move research in these important areas forward.

Bunnik, 11.02.2017