Spiritual Content of Yoruba Concept of Sexuality and Sustenance of Family Values through Eko - Ile (Home Training)

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Abstract
This paper examined the spiritual content of the Yoruba concept of sexuality and the implications it has for the sustenance of family values by use of eko ile (home training) which parents are expected to provide for their children as they prepare them for good citizenship. It is observed that most complaints about bad behaviours of young people in the contemporary African society are blamed on the lack of this cherished aspect of parenting. Inability to provide this training either because the parents do not have it or that the challenges of the time make it impossible for them to do so has resulted into a degeneration of family values in the society and almost every aspect of life; spiritual, social and moral. Traditional values and cultural norms are slowly but steadily phasing out with an alternative that permits lose control in family and community structure. The paper therefore recommends for parents to have a rethink and retrace their steps to forestall further degeneration by practicing and teaching their children eko ile that assign responsibilities with sexuality in view for the total development of society.

Keywords: Spiritual content, Yoruba, Concept Human Sexuality, Sustenance, Family Values

1. Introduction
Sexuality occupies a prominent place in the thinking and discussions of human persons irrespective of religious, racial, economic, social and educational backgrounds; it has also been subject of continuous exploration and promotion, particularly with respect to sex. In Africa for instance, most streets and markets in the towns and villages are flooded with salesmen and women who without any fear advertise different kinds of drugs and herbs for improving sexual performance or solving problems associated with malfunctions. Continuously, new herbs and methods are explored to get better expression of sexuality. The continuous patronage of the services of these salesmen and women could only imply the importance which Africans attach to sexuality.

Concerns about sexuality becomes worrisome when it is observed that certain contemporary sexual practices reduce people to be less than the image of God, they are created to be. Situations where for instance, human beings are slaughtered like animals and their bodies offered for ritual activities make discussion on sexuality very relevant. Again, the ways people particularly use their organs for pleasure is cause for concern. As an example, a 44 year old religious leader (deacon) was reported to have slept with a 7 year old girl using his spittle to lubricate her virginial to have his way (Olaluba, 2016). Also, an ex-soldier killed his girl friend because of some text messages he saw on her phone that suggested unfaithfulness in the relationship (Owuamanam, 2016). These developments exert pressure on human conduct and reduced sex to something commonplace.

The focus of this work is the spiritual content of Yoruba peoples’ conception of sexuality and how it contributes to sustenance of family values by use of eko ile (home training) which parents should provide for their children. The question sought to be answered is; how should the spiritual content of Yoruba concept of spirituality influence the fostering of eko ile for sustenance of family values among young people and prepare them for future good citizenship? The paper agrees with the theory expressed in the Yoruba saying that, omo ta a ko ni yio gbe ile ta ko ta meaning a child not given home training would eventually sell the house built as security by the parents. It opines that parents in the contemporary society need to re-examine their expected roles of preparing their wards for good citizenships as it is observed that most complaints of inappropriate conducts by young people in the society are usually traced back to the lack of eko-ile. In this paper, spiritual content refers to ideas and materials within the Yoruba understanding of human sexuality that are intellectually interesting, challenging and worthwhile connected with things non-material but spirit. A description of the Yoruba people and concept of human sexuality are given in another part of this work. Sustenance refers those aspects of Yoruba concept of human sexuality, the application of which supports healthy social interaction while, family values are the acceptable principles and practices that are worthwhile and important among Yoruba people for good living. Discussions proceed with conceptual clarification on human sexuality.

1.1 Conceptual Clarification on Human Sexuality
Human sexuality is an issue which, at least for religious people is believed to have crowned the creative act of God and set in motion the process of procreation through secondary means. It is perhaps the most difficult issue confronting man in all of history due to issues which emerge from man’s thinking and actions about it. It has been like a puzzle and mystery to which man has either attempted to repress, believing its’ too powerful and dangerous or allow freely reign as source of pleasure and a game to play (Cosgrave, 1979). Among the emerging issues from
people’s thinking and actions on sexuality are procreation, contraception, celibacy, marriage, adultery, casual sex, flirting, prostitution, homosexuality, masturbation, seduction, rape, sexual harassment, pornography, bestiality, and abortion; all of which are expressed in fantasies, desires, believes, attitudes, values and practices (Alaba, 2004). A common denominator among these issues is the search for and attainment of sexual pleasure or satisfaction and procreation which are things people naturally use some of their body organs to achieve.

Sexuality has been defined variously to mean, the condition of interpersonal relationship between male and female which may be associated with or leading up to, genital union. To a large extent, it is behavioural compatibility, gratification and personality conflicts especially between male and female, as individuals or collectively (“Sexuality” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://www.iep.utm.edu/sexuality). From the Christian perspective however, it is God’s design, a sacred wedding gift to human beings and a divine idea in creation that brings together two spiritual beings (Cosgrave, 1979); a man and a woman into a mutual relationship that is accountable to God. Therefore, expressing it outside marriage constitutes an abuse (“Human Sexuality, http://www.tellingthetruth.org). Humans are created to be relational beings and sexual pleasure is the pinnacle of that relationship. Christianity teaches in sexual acts and condemns immorality in marital commitment. Sex is a human problem as well as a gift of the creator to be seen as invitation to communion; its’ understanding pervades all theology, ethics, and understandings of spirituality (Nelson, 1990).

Human sexuality therefore, is everything that constitutes an individual to be identified as a man or a woman influencing their entire personality and life in many significant ways and conditions individual maturity and social integration. It should be noted that the actual differences between men and women in our culture is not necessarily innate or immutable. They are due partly to social and cultural conditioning that apports certain qualities or characteristics as being typically masculine (strength, initiative, logical reasoning) or feminine (sensitivity, warmth and submissiveness) (Fehlman, 1990). Human sexuality is psychological as a means to express sexual sensation, related intimacy and fullness of love between a man and a woman and biological as the means through which a child is conceived and the lineage is passed on from one generation to the next therefore, it is holistic, involving the body, mind, and spirit.

2. Literature Review

Literatures reviewed cover the areas of Yoruba people, spiritual content in their concept of human sexuality, family values and Eko Ile (home training).

2.1 The Yoruba People

The Yoruba people fortunately have been subject of studies by different scholars. Scholars like Fadipe (1970), Idowu (1974); Lloyd (1974), Gugler and Flamagan (1978), Atanda (1980); Awolalu (2001); Alaba (2004) and Ajayi (2005) have written on different aspects of the Yoruba people to indicate the richness of their traditions, culture and religions in contributing to human knowledge. Yoruba people are largely found in the western part of Nigeria being one of the three tribes that have the largest population in the country; others are the Hausa-Fulani and the Igbo. They could also be found in West African Countries like – Togo, Benin Republic, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Liberia. They are generally agrarian and expressive people who celebrate colourfully major events in their lives (http://www.cometonigeria.com). With a population of about 40 million which constitutes about 21% of Nigeria’s estimated over 186 million people, they have a long history of being urbanized (http://en.wikipedia.org). Among the Yoruba people sexuality pervades practically every aspect of their existential practices.

2.2 Spiritual Content in Yoruba Concept of Sexuality

Yoruba concept of sexuality consists much of spiritual content and this is discussed below.

Only the Supreme Being – God is not sexual - Only the Supreme Being – God who is creator, never procreated directly through sexual intercourse. Every other created being is connected with sex in one way or the other; the deities, Spirits – human, ancestral, natural or ghost are sexual in nature (Familusi, 2009). Of course, Yoruba African Traditional Religious practices provided the hierarchy for worship of beings; first is the Supreme Being -God, next are the Deities followed by the Spirits (Idowu, 1974). God is eternally self-subsisting, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent who at the same time is Olorum (owner of heaven), Eleda Orun oon Aive (The Creator of Heaven and the Earth), Olojo Oni (Owner of today), Awamaridi (One whose origin is unsearchable) (Imasogie, 1985; Awolalu, 1981).

Deities and Spirits marry and have children - Yoruba believe that deities and spirits exist according to their sexual status. It was stated, “after the arrival of the divinities (on earth, sic) human population increased at Ife in two ways. The divinity married among them and gave birth to the lineage of men who later become the divine ruler” (Wande, 1976). An Ifa corpus that is authoritative on this belief states sinmi titi, lawo sinmi titi; sinmi jinna lawo sinmi jinna; Adifa fun Orumila nlo reefe; Ojunro mi omo Orisa Igbo Waji, (Eluabion, 1998) which translates “Escort me too long; Escort me too far; Ifa priest of too far; Ifa priest of too far; Ifa divination was performed for
Sexuality and spirit of ancestors

Purity is cherished among divinities as honourable just as Apostle Paul admonished in Heb. 13: 4. Sexual infidelity

Sexuality, differences and gender roles

Spirits marry human persons who bear children into spirit world

Parents the basic desire among Yoruba parents that their children give them a befitting burial after death and this

Oluwa yan fobirin

Marry many wives; an idea expressed in the song

Having way to equality in every aspect of life. Female sexuality is often socially oriented toward love and marriage
but for a male it is genital oriented and relief of sexual tension through ejaculation (Fehlman, 1990). This is
because in normal males, sex drive is a powerful biological and emotional force that is often difficult to control
satisfactorily. Often adult males do achieve sexual gratification independent of love and commitment rating sexual
intercourse as the most important feature of marriage but women tend to rank it lower while rating their security,
that of the home and children as most important elements of their marriage.

**Sexuality and vocational choice** - Even though some vocations are done by both sexes still there are those peculiar
to sexes. For instance farming Agbe is practiced by both sexes but the men focus on cash crop cultivation which
are more difficult– cocoa, rubber, cotton and sometime yam while, the women deal more with easier crops like
tomatoes, vegetables, okro and pepper. Traditionally women will not be palm wine tappers ope dida, black smith
agbede, carpenters gbenagbena or hunter ode, but engage in being beauticians’ onidiri, petty traders alate,
travelling –roaming–sellers or trader alajapa and cloth–loom weaving workers alaso hihun, dyeing pipa laro and
sales oja titi. It should be noted that a man will not normally be a beautician –onidiri– as it is a woman’s world,
but all these have given way in contemporary times. People now follow the popular dictum “what a man can do,
a woman can do better.”

### 2.3 Family Values among the Yoruba People and Eko Ile

Family values among the Yoruba people are entrenched in *eko ile* - home training as an inherent parental
responsibility which is also shared by members of the entire community. Trainings can be informal or formal and
it cover cultural greetings and actions, decency in language and dressing, respect for the elderly, knowledge of
cultural norms and practices, history of a persons’ clan and family structure, riddles, stories and proverbs that teach
wisdom, vocational choices and communality; all of which are reflected in sexuality. Informally, it takes the forms
of storytelling, gossips and conversations, folk songs. Formally, sexuality education is carried out through cultural
practices in plays, dances and arts, cultural beliefs, in taboos, in religious practices and involvements in various
performances. Practices like *ekun iyawo* (bride’s praise song/chant) and *idana* (engagement) celebrations are
taught to enhance grasp of cultural distinctive and language proficiency.

Other forms of formal training include greetings when boys are taught to *dobale* lay flat on the floor–
prostrate, while girls are required to *kunle* kneel down. To inculcate a sense of decency little children are jokingly
taught to cover their sexual organs by commenting *ewo idi re nita* meaning ‘look at her/his buttocks outside.’
Little girls are told, *patan re mo oko re nbo* meaning ‘close your thighs your husband is coming.’ Stubborn children
are always threatened by the use of the father figure in the expression ‘ma fi ejo re sun baba re ti won ba de’
meaning ‘I will report you to your father when “they” come.’ It should be noted that “won” is plural but used to
address a single person who is senior and in this case - the father. Such use enhances the masculine authority
figure of the family head, which again is in itself an extension of the concept of sexuality. Educating children for
chastity strives to achieve the objectives of (a) maintaining a positive atmosphere of love, virtue and respect
for God’s gift of life; (b) help children understand the value of sexuality and chastity while, sustaining their growth
through enlightenment, examples and prayers; (c) help children understand and discover their own vocation and
responsibilities in marriage and commitment to sexual purity in harmony with and respecting their attitudes and
inclinations and the gifts of the Spirit (Alaba, 2004).

In spite of context, contemporary parents find difficulties in giving children an adequate preparation for
adult life through *eko ile*, particularly with regard to education in the true meaning of sexuality. Reasons for the
difficulty are many but include postmodern perspectives on society hitherto underplayed but which influence
societal dynamics in various ways like cherishing of value systems generally independent of historical antecedents
and dressing codes (Olanian, 2015). It also include a general decline in laying of emphasis on the cultural respect
for fundamental values that permeated and served to protect and maintain decency in social conducts among people
in communities in the past. This decline of traditional models in larger human communities has left children
deprieved of consistent and positive guidance.

### 3. Implications of Spiritual Content of Yoruba Concept of Sexuality for Parents in Sustenance of Family

Values

In view of the spiritual content which Yoruba concept of sexuality contains, it is important that parents recognize
the awesomeness of the responsibilities they have toward sustenance of family values within the society. Their
responsibilities extend to God - father of all spirits, to whom the accounts of stewardship of parenting must be
rendered; to the unseen Spirit-beings who participate in moral preservation of society and are interested in its’
continuity; and to the society for raising responsible individuals who can be relied upon for future leadership in
religious, social, economic and every spheres of societal life. Their failure to carry out responsibilities expected
of them is failure of the system and consequently the society. Parents should see procreation of children to bring
new life into the world as a supreme achievement and therefore should not trivialize their responsibilities. It is
when parents properly play their roles that the quality of young person’s characters improve and by extension the
society enjoys the benefits of having more enlightened citizens to contribute to the development strides of the
nation (Olaniyan, 2012).

It is observed that the various training which children should be given are not made available again for lack of time and shifting priorities. As a matter of fact most of the young contemporary parents lack the eko ile expected to be given the children. As consequence, it is now difficult to have a trusting relationship because almost everybody is looking after personal gains. Children and young people now hardly respect and follow advises of elders; many are not interested in honest and hard labours rather, they want quick path to success and accumulation of wealth, preferring pleasure at all cost than having a good name. The fear of God and respect for the opinions, religious views, and right of others to life and fair share of the wealth endowed countries is not respected. There is increasing divorce rate and criminal practices to “make it.”

From a biblical perspective, it is therefore suggested that parents must by example teach their children the fear and worship of God (Deut. 6: 4-9); how to establish personal relationship with members of the opposite sex as a powerful antidote to loneliness, isolation and getting out of oneself into the life of others (Prov. 4: 1-3; 5: 1-6; 22: 6); traditional ways of dressing that avoids nudity; teach profitability in non-criminally infused transactions; decency in public and sexual practices and being selective in media adverts to be watched and group of friends to make because, bad communication corrupt good manners (Prov. 22:6; 1 Cor. 15: 33; Eph. 5: 15-20), and avoid the propensity to be materialistically minded. The aim is to facilitate and promote love as a basic and essential good in human nature and life.

Men and women are to complement each other at all levels (Eph. 5: 25-23), because it is when they love and work together that contributions are made most to their own and society’s development. They should respect the differences between sexes to enrich and enhance each other because it is in a good interpersonal relationship and atmosphere of love that personal fulfillment in life is achieved (Cosgrave, 1979). The traditional mother’s role model of love and homeminess and that of the father as provider and authority figure should be reinforced regularly with acts of prayers, appreciation and forgiveness (Prov. 1: 8-11; 3: 1-5; Eph. 6: 1-4; Col. 3: 1-7). The traditional family patterns of commumality which ensures a person may never be alone for a second from birth to death is to be encouraged through participation in all matters of sexuality like the community betrothal and issues related to marriage. Children should also be taught their history and what the culture determined as sexually essential good in human nature and life.

4. Conclusion
This paper examined the spiritual content of Yoruba concept of sexuality and how it influences traditional parental roles in sustenance of family values by application of eko ile – “home training.” Parents are responsible for preparing children for good citizenship for the society but it is observed that complaints about bad behaviours of most young people among the Yoruba are blamed on the lack of eko ile ‘home training’ which parents are unable to give either because they do not have it or are too busy to do so. There is therefore, the need to have a rethink and retrace steps to forestall further degeneration within the society by practicing and teaching those good aspects of culture that assign responsibilities for total development of society and individuals.

Olaniyan (2016) while commenting on character development says it is an act of God’s grace to the end that people would serve God and humanity. Educational programmes should therefore be a fusion of the objectives of education and lessons drawn from the spiritual content of culture; bearing in mind that education will never change unless the citizens intentionally frame issues and set in motion practical tools and strategies to realign education with the vision they have for their young people.

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