

Pentecostalism, Media and the Politics of Homosexuality in Contemporary Ghana

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¹SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the role of religion, specifically Pentecostal Christianity, and the media in shaping the public debate on homosexuality. Pentecostal leaders have generally used the media as a main platform for their politicisation of homosexuality. Using the theory of mediatisation, this article examines ways in which religion and the media play a role in sensitising, influencing, and shaping people's perceptions and attitudes towards homosexuality in Ghana. The article argues that the increasing role of the media and the infusion of religious ideas, beliefs, and values in the debate on homosexuality has a tendency of influencing, framing, and shaping people's minds and attitudes towards homosexuality.

KEYWORDS

Pentecostalism; homosexuality; media; Ghana

Introduction: Religion, Culture and Sexuality in Africa

My aim in this article is to discuss the central role played by religion and the media in shaping people's opinions and perspectives on the debate on homosexuality in Ghana. Though literature abounds on the discourse and politics on homosexuality in Africa, what has often been overlooked is the way in which the media is frequently used to frame passions and inspire public sentiments and general panic. Adriaan van Klinken and Ezra Chitando have highlighted how the media in the West have many times represented Africa as one of the homophobic continents in the world, and they critically observe how such Western narratives about "African homophobia" depict a racist and colonialist perception of the "black continent as inherently hostile to sexual minorities."¹ Instead of focusing on Western media narratives about homosexuality and homophobia in Africa, this article focuses on the contribution of the media in

¹ Adriaan van Klinken and Ezra Chitando, "Introduction: Public Religion, Homophobia and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa," in *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*, eds. Adriaan van Klinken and Ezra Chitando (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.

African contexts to the politics of homosexuality.² I aim to take the debate further by highlighting how the media is integrated into the debate on homosexuality and how such politicisation in the media raises awareness and creates different gendered attitudes towards homosexuals in general. In Ghana, for instance, it has been argued that homosexuality only became a major public issue when, in 2006, the media reported of the first proposed gay and lesbian conference to take place at the Accra International Conference Centre.³ This particular instance and the general use of the media as a platform for both anti- and pro-homosexuality activists to channel their views and express concerns regarding the unacceptability of the rights of LGBT individuals, call for academic analysis. There is specifically a need to examine ways in which the media is sensitising and influencing public opinions about homosexuality.

Public debates in Ghana, especially in the media, have often evinced how religious, cultural, and religiopolitical ideologies are used to polarise the issue of homosexuality. In these debates, Christianity, specifically the Pentecostal moral ethos and praxis, are usually used as vanguards against homosexuality. Pentecostal leaders and religious groups repeatedly raise criticism and virulent attacks on homosexual activists, gender advocates, and human rights groups who are in support of gay, lesbian, and transgender rights.⁴ Pentecostals see Christianity and homosexuality as “incompatible bed-fellows,”⁵ while various biblical and ethical philosophies are espoused and marshalled in sermons and public discourses against its decriminalisation on the continent of Africa. Homosexuality is repeatedly constructed in the media by preachers and church leaders as a perverted act and an aberrant lifestyle that deserves extermination and condemnation to eternal damnation. Individuals who

² See, for example, Barbara Bompani and S. Terreni Brown, “A ‘religious revolution?’ Print Media, Sexuality, and Religious Discourse in Uganda.” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no.1 (2015): 110-26.

³ Seth Tweneboah, “Religion, International Human Rights Standards, and the Politicisation of Homosexuality in Ghana.” *The African Journal of Gender and Religion* 24, no.2 (2018), 34.

⁴ Asonzeh Ukah, “Sexual Bodies, Sacred Vessels: Pentecostal Discourses on homosexuality in Nigeria,” in *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Africa*, eds. Ezra Chitando and Adriaan van Klinken (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 21-37.

⁵ Samuel B. Adubofuor, “Christianity and Homosexuality: What Makes them Incompatible Bed-fellows.” Paper presented at Christian Service University College, Department of Theology Faculty Seminar, Kumasi, Ghana, October 2008.

are homosexual are cast as evil and “sick” people who need divine therapy and the deliverance of God to erase the vestiges left in their bodies and lives by evil and demonic forces.⁶

Recently, President Nana Addo Danquah Akufo Addo’s comments on homosexuality during an interview on Al-Jazeera with Jane Dutton, that a sufficiently strong coalition in the future may perhaps push for a change in the law on homosexuality in Ghana, was met with strong opposition, especially from Pentecostal leaders.⁷ The Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), the largest Pentecostal umbrella body in this country, which consists of over 200 Pentecostal and charismatic denominations and claims to represent over four million of the Christian adult population in Ghana,⁸ issued a public statement decrying the president’s comments. The GPCC avowed “the evil nature of homosexuality” and resistance on any attempt on the part of the political leader to succumb to pressure, especially from the West, to decriminalise homosexuality. In their statement, the GPCC argued that homosexuality is evil and could not be legalised in Ghana. Speaking on behalf of the Council, the general secretary, Rev. Emmanuel T. Barrigah argued that the traditionalists, Christians, Muslims, and other religious bodies do not support homosexuality and therefore it could not have any legitimate approval in Ghana, because it is not part of the Ghanaian culture and it is evil. He stated: “It is against our cultural and social norms as a nation which cuts across all religious boundaries, hence government cannot legalize it.”⁹ He further bemoaned personally that “homosexuality can never and ever be legalized in the country because it is devilish, it is demonic, and it is from the pit of hell so I cannot subscribe to it at all.”¹⁰

Pentecostals in the country have also tended to pray against the practice of homosexuality with the aim of seeking God’s divine grace and power against the supposedly evil forces that are behind the push for the

⁶ Seth Tweneboah, “Religion and Law in Contemporary Ghana: Traditions in Tension” (PhD. dissertation, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, 2017), 177.

⁷ Alex E. Koomson, “Nana Addo’s interview on Homosexuality.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rc2rfg1mtsw>.

⁸ Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, *Terms of Reference for Consultants to Develop a Five-Year Strategic Plan 2015-2019*. GPCC, Accra, 2015, 1.

⁹ Admin, “Homosexuality is Evil – Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council.” Gpcc ghana.org, 28 November 2017. <https://gpccghana.org/2017/11/28/homosexuality-is-evil-ghana-pentecostal-and-charismatic-council/>.

¹⁰ Admin, “Homosexuality is Evil.”

legalisation of homosexual rights. For Pentecostals, the act of homosexuality and the idea of same-sex marriage are demonic and must be warded off completely from the affairs of humanity through prayer and deliverance. In a continued effort to fight against homosexual rights, the GPCC organised a three-day nationwide prayer (30 June to 2 July 2018) to pray against the demonic influence and legalisation of homosexuality and to also use their presence to raise the consciousness of the public about the grave social consequences of the acceptance of LGBT rights in Ghana.¹¹

Alongside these developments in Ghana, elsewhere in Africa, literature on the discourses and politics on homosexuality, including Nigeria,¹² Uganda,¹³ Zambia,¹⁴ Zimbabwe,¹⁵ Cameroon,¹⁶ and Kenya¹⁷ points to how the Pentecostal movement has strongly backed calls for laws against homosexuality. In Nigeria, Asonzeh Ukah has highlighted how prominent Nigerian Pentecostal leaders such as Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and David Oyedepo of the Winners Chapel International acted as backdoor forces behind the

¹¹ Adomonline.com, "Pentecostal Council to organize prayers against gay rights," *Ghanaweb.com*, 6 June 2018. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Pentecostal-Council-to-organize-prayers-against-gay-rights-657876>.

¹² Ukah, "Sexual Bodies, Sacred Vessels," 21-37.

¹³ Marcia Olivier, "Transnational Sex Politics, Conservation Christianity and Anti-gay Activism in Uganda," *Studies in Social Justice* 7, no.1 (2013): 83-105. See also Barbara Bompani, "'For God and for My Country': Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and the framing of a new political discourse in Uganda," in *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*, eds. Adriaan van Klinken and Ezra Chitando (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 19-34.

¹⁴ Adriaan van Klinken, "Gay Rights, the Devil and the End Times: Public Religion and the Enchantment of the Homosexuality Debate in Zambia." *Religion* 43, no.4 (2013): 519-40.

¹⁵ Jonathan Connor, "Development for Whom? Homosexuality and Faith-Based Development in Zimbabwe," *Development in Practice* 21, no.6 (2011): 860-9. See also Molly Manyonganise, "We will chop their heads off:" Homosexuality versus Religio-Political Grandstanding in Zimbabwe," in *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*, eds. Adriaan van Klinken and Ezra Chitando (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 63-77.

¹⁶ Frida Lyonga, "The Homophobic Trinity: Pentecostal End-time, Prosperity and Healing Gospels as Contributors to Homophobia in Cameroon," in *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Africa*, eds. Ezra Chitando and Adriaan van Klinken (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 51-64.

¹⁷ Adriaan van Klinken, "A Kenyan queer prophet: Binyavanga Wainaina's Public contestation of Pentecostalism and Homophobia," in *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Africa*, eds. Ezra Chitando and Adriaan van Klinken (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 65-81.

passing of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill by ex-President Goodluck Jonathan in 2014 after the latter had been reluctantly refusing to sign it into law for about three years.¹⁸ In Uganda, there is evidence to suggest that Pentecostals were vocal on the condemnation of homosexuality towards the passing of the Anti-Homosexual Bill.¹⁹

Apart from Pentecostal Christian sentiments on the homosexuality debate in Africa, the cultural trajectories of sub-Saharan Africa are also mounted as a force against the decriminalisation of homosexuality. In Africa, religion and tradition play a very significant role in shaping personhood and subjectivities and, in a larger context, the ways in which people comprehend and experience sexuality. The deeply cultural and family values are bound up with particular normative views on personhood and agency.²⁰ Evidently, there is a strong influence of Africa's dominant religions, and an amalgamation of cultural integrity and moral etiquettes in contesting what is regarded as the imposition of Western homosexual imperialist ideals. In Ghana and most parts of Africa, the belligerent stance against homosexuals' rights cannot only be viewed in religious terms but also as "systematic traditional mechanism of governmentality. That is, traditional regulation on sexuality is a systematic means of what society holds as its rightful ordering of citizens."²¹ As argued by Sylvia Tamale, "contrary to popular belief, sexuality is not only exclusively driven by biology; a very significant part of it is socially constructed through legal, cultural and religious forces driven by a politico-economic agenda."²²

Data underlying this article was gathered from media sources such as interviews with political and religious leaders on homosexuality in Africa at both international and Ghanaian media houses, online news portals, social media, and press releases by religious groups in Ghana, mainly the GPCC. Some of the data were also gleaned from political and social talk shows on television stations in Ghana on the debate on homosexuality. The article also relied on secondary materials on the subject under discussion. A content analysis was employed in interpreting the extent to which some of the language and expressions used in the

¹⁸ Ukah, "Sexual Bodies, Sacred Vessels", 21-7.

¹⁹ Bompani and Brown, "A 'Religious Revolution?'"

²⁰ Tweneboah, "Religion and Law in Contemporary Ghana."

²¹ Tweneboah, "Religion and Law in Contemporary Ghana," 152.

²² Sylvia Tamale, "Exploring the Contours of African Sexualities: Religion, Law and Power," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14, no.1 (2014), 155.

debate contributed to the framing of sentiments and passions on the decriminalisation of homosexuality as well as the kind of militarised attitude it generates towards LGBT individuals. In terms of theory, the article employs the mediatisation approach in analysing the politics that are implicated in mediatised religious messages on homosexuality, which I will outline in the following section.

Mediatizing the Homosexuality Debate

Much of the debate on homosexuality in Africa takes place in the media. The media, whether print (newspapers, magazines) or electronic (radio, television, social media, etc.), have become the platform through which various actors – whether religious actors, political leaders, or gender and sexuality activists – advocate their concerns in support or against homosexuality in Africa. This means that one cannot downplay the role of the media in regulating, influencing, or shaping opinions regarding the discourse on homosexuality in Africa or elsewhere. As a platform and social environment, the media shape people's opinions on the issues of homosexuality in the larger context of the society. The process through which the media become highly interspersed with discourses on society, be it religious, political, economic, or personal relationships, has been described as “mediatisation.”²³

More generally, the concept of mediatisation has been defined to refer to the processes through which people have incorporated into their perception, sensations, and affects, the way media communication represent reality.²⁴ Thus, it refers to the extent to which the media have become increasingly influential in and deeply integrated into different spheres of society.²⁵ This comes close to what Erving Goffman defines as “frames,” i.e. cognitive and perceptual structures that individuals use to encompass reality, and that the public share what the media frame.²⁶ Mediatisation as theoretical concept has “sensitising” as an ingrained

²³ Stig Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Society,” *Nordic Review* 29, no.2 (2008): 105-34.

²⁴ Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Dictionary of Media Studies* (London: Penguin, 2007), 220.

²⁵ Luis Mauro Sa Martino, *The Mediatization of Religion: When Faith Rocks* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 13. See also Lynn S. Clark, “Theories: Mediatization and Media Ecology,” in *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 85-101.

²⁶ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (London: Penguin, 1974).

characteristic.²⁷ The concept of mediatisation might be partially placed on two different traditions in media research, namely the “medium theory” and the studies of “media effects.”²⁸ From the medium theory point of view, the concept of mediatisation borrows the idea that media communication is a central element in contemporary society, and no social process might take place outside the media realm.²⁹ However, this does not allude to the fact that the media are the unique or even the main cause for social changes: “[T]he medium itself could not be important if it is not articulated with [the] society as a whole.”³⁰ It is the uses of media, not the medium itself, that matters,³¹ for “media effects,” as the name suggests, focus on the alterations and changes provoked by the media. It claims that the media – mainly the “mass media” – would have the power to frame political opinions³² and change the way people see the surrounding reality.³³ “Mediatisation”, thus, generally refers to the processes whereby the media become the fulcrum and a central place for communication in the society, but also its importance to other aspects of the society such as culture, economics, politics, and personal relationships.

Over the last decades, mediatisation has become a popular concept, applied not only to the context of religion and media, but also politics and democracy, and other areas such as consumption, culture, and society.³⁴ In the context of politics, mediatisation has been defined as a “long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over

²⁷ Strömbäck and Esser, “Mediatization of Politics,” 4.

²⁸ Joshua Meyrowitz, “Medium Theory,” in *Communication Theory Today*, eds. David Crowley and David Mitchell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

²⁹ Martino, *The Mediatization of Religion*, 16.

³⁰ Martino, *The Mediatization of Religion*, 16.

³¹ Meyrowitz, “Medium Theory,” 53. See also Harold A. Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London: Routledge, 2001).

³² See for example, Walter Lipmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Pelican, 1946); Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (Boston: MIT Press, 2009); Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda-setting Function of mass media.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 no.2 (1972): 176-87.

³³ George Gerbner, “Cultivation Analysis: An Overview.” *Mass Communication and Society* 1 no.3 (1998): 175-94.

³⁴ Jesper Strömbäck and Frank Esser, “Introduction: Making Sense of the Mediatization of Politics,” *Journalism Studies* 15, no.3 (2014): 243-55. See also Jesper Strömbäck and Frank Esser, “Mediatization of Politics: Towards a Theoretical Framework,” in *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*, eds. Frank Esser and Jesper Strömbäck (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 4.

effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors has increased.”³⁵ The increasing effects have been categorised into four essential features which include 1) “the long-term and dynamic process;” 2) “the essence of mediatization as increasing the importance and influence of media;” 3) “mediatization affects all parts of politics including the process of as well as political institutions, organizations and actors;” and 4) “many of the media-related influences may be indirect rather than direct, and result from how political institutions, organizations and actors more or less reactively or proactively adapt to the media and their own needs to communicate through the media.”³⁶ Broadly speaking, the mediatization of politics simply demonstrates how political actors and institutions adapt to media logic in their interaction with the public.

Essentially, the debate on homosexuality in Africa goes beyond the issues of religion and cultural values, but takes added and increasingly political connotations at the governance level of the State.³⁷ The politicisation becomes significant since the debate on homosexuality is meaningfully tied to the democratic process of society and within the context of human rights. In Africa, for example, many political parties are afraid to lose the next elections if they fail to make their stands clear on the practice of homosexuality. This has forced many African political leaders to come out publicly and state their position to the public on same-sex relationships and LGBT rights.

In Ghana, Seth Tweneboah has already examined how the debate on homosexuality is politicised, showing the intricate relationship between religion and politics within the discourse of sexuality.³⁸ He notes how the whole politics of homosexuality is linked to governmentality, power, and influence. This work attempts to further explore this issue by examining how the homosexuality debate is mediated politically and what role Pentecostal actors play in it. Pentecostals constitute a large segment of the religious market space in Ghana and their adept use of the media

³⁵ Strömbäck and Esser, “Introduction,” 244.

³⁶ Strömbäck and Esser, “Introduction,” 244. See also Jesper Strömbäck, “Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics,” *Press/Politics* 13, no.3 (2008): 228-46.

³⁷ See Adriaan van Klinken and Ezra Chitando (eds.), *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

³⁸ Seth Tweneboah, “Religion, International Human Rights Standards, and the Politicisation of Homosexuality in Ghana”, *The African Journal of Gender and Religion* 24, no. 2 (2018): 34-8.

has contributed to a wielding of influence in the public sphere. Pentecostals' engagement of and the use of the media in the discourse against homosexuality help in aligning public discussions on homosexuality more from Pentecostal sensibilities.³⁹ Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors argue that the media create and reinforce "certain modes of religious intervention in society."⁴⁰ For Meyer in particular, "one intriguing aspect of current Pentecostal modes of public appearance is that personal, intimate, or secret matters move center stage, becoming prime matters to be made public."⁴¹ She states further that "in becoming a public force, Pentecostalism turns the personal into a matter of public concern" and as a result, what hitherto remained a private matter, such as a discussion on sexuality, has now become a public concern.⁴²

The increasing integration of the media in the conversation on homosexuality by Pentecostal actors in the public sphere and the influence this has on the public minds and how it shapes their attitudes towards different sexual minorities, cannot be ignored. The engagement of the media has a consequence in framing people's minds. For instance, as highlighted earlier, homosexual practice was a "silent trade" in Ghana until 2006, when the media reported of the first proposed gay and lesbian conference. Thus, the Ghanaian society's consciousness of the practice and prevalence of homosexuality was precipitated by the media which generated a heightened tension regarding the practice of homosexuality in Ghana. Tweneboah documents how this news generated headlines and gained attention in public debates and discussions. For instance, he reports that a radio caller has cautioned: "Let us wait until they gather in Accra and we can cut them in pieces."⁴³ This example shows how the media generates and flames inspired passion and tension on the homosexuality debate in Ghana.

Evidently, in Ghana and other liberal democratic societies in sub-Saharan Africa, the mass media have become part of the environment and are constantly engaged in the discourse of public issues that affect

³⁹ Bompani and Brown, "A 'Religious Revolution?'" 112.

⁴⁰ Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 57.

⁴¹ Birgit Meyer, "Going and Making Public: Pentecostalism as Public Religion in Ghana," in *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, ed. Harri Englund (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 158.

⁴² Meyer, "Going and Making Public," 158.

⁴³ Tweneboah, "Religion, International Human Rights Standards," 34.

the society. In a recent Pew research on the use of social media, it is reported that 32 percent of young adults in Ghana between the ages of 18 and 36 use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp on a daily basis.⁴⁴ Arguably, the extent to which people, especially young adults in most African countries, use these media platforms to engage in national issues, cannot be overemphasised. If it is important to consider the extent to which people in contemporary developing countries and liberal democratic states are immersed in the media as a regular part of their daily lives, it is also equally important to consider looking at how this development contributes and shapes public discourses especially on a topical issue such as homosexuality. The question might be, to what extent do this media usage and its integration into the daily lives of the people help to shape opinion and discourses around the debate on homosexuality?

Due to the saturation of the media and its driving role in the debate and politics on homosexuality, the consciousness of homosexuality and LGBT issues in African societies can hardly be denied. This has specifically become possible due to the recent heated public and political debates on television shows and interviews of political and religious leaders on radio and television by journalists in both local and international media houses. The media (both print and electronic) as well as films have also become conduits for propagating pernicious attacks on homosexuals in Africa. Consciously or unconsciously, the messages that are constructed and reconstructed through the media by religious groups, social commentators, traditional leaders, and even the sentiments and language tone used by news broadcasters and journalists in reporting on homosexual news items has a potential in contributing and framing people's views and forming attitudes against the rights of homosexuals.

Gender and Sexuality in a Mediatized Society

GAY MARRIAGE BECOMES LAW IN THE UK TODAY...A sign of how "Civilized" the world has become...But if your government gives you the "Right" to break God's law, it doesn't exonerate you from God's judgment...we are all "sinners" but a law to justify our sins is a bad law

⁴⁴ Jacob Poushter, Caldwell Bishop, and Hanyu Chwe, Pew Research Center, "Social Media Use Continues to Rise in Developing Countries but Plateaus Across Developed Ones," *Pew Research Center*, June 2018, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2018/06/19/social-media-use-continues-to-rise-in-developing-countries-but-plateaus-across-developed-ones/>.

and a slap in the face of God...^{1st} John 2:16-17: For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Shalom.⁴⁵

This Facebook post of Bishop Wood (the president of the Concerned Clergy Association of Ghana), posted on the day same-sex marriages became legal in the United Kingdom, typifies how Pentecostal leaders use the media to share their concerns about issues of homosexuality. It illustrates the public presence of Pentecostal leaders and their use of modern media technologies and platforms to engage, initiate, and participate in matters that are of public interest in Africa. It shows how issues that hitherto were considered private, are made public through the media. It also evinces Pentecostal leaders' awareness of global issues and their potential local impact. Above all, it delineates Pentecostal leaders' resolve to make a salient issue of faith part of public discourse.

The perceptibility of an issue can be boosted by its presence in the media, and this is evident in the case of the heightened debate on anti-gay rights in both the local and international media. In the last decade, almost every journalist (from international media houses such as the BBC, Al-Jazeera, and CNN) who has had the privilege of interviewing an African leader, has asked the question on the possibility of decriminalisation of homosexuality in their respective countries. The nature of the response to these questions posed to African leaders has often generated a heated debate and arguments in the media of their home countries. A recent example, which has been indicated earlier, is the interview Jane Dutton had with Nana Akufo Addo on Al-Jazeera. It shows how the media has become a catalyst in the homosexuality debate, and especially, how the Western media, for example, are often used as a backdoor and a platform to exert influence on political leaders in Africa to express their views on same-sex relationships. It further raises the concern of how the media have become a tool in championing or otherwise resisting the rights of LGBT individuals. This, in short, is what I am referring to as the mediatised politics of homosexuality.

With the liberalisation of the media in many African states, individuals and religious groups alike have employed the media in various forms to

⁴⁵ Bishop Prince Benny Wood, Facebook Post. 29 March 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BishopWoodgh/>.

put their messages across to the public. Religious groups, especially Pentecostals, have become very forceful in channelling their views and concerns through the media. Through their messages, Pentecostals initiate public negotiations on matters that concern the morality and purity of the nation. Thus, Pentecostals attempt to “colonize the national public space and reconceptualize the structure and normative basis of the nation through the production and dissemination of a multitude of discourses via the media.”⁴⁶ In Ghana and many parts of Africa, it is evident that the adept use of the media by Pentecostals and other religious groups has made religion a major actor in influencing public opinions and policies. The media has become an agent in shaping the ideologies that seek to regulate the debate on homosexuality in the Ghanaian airwaves, particularly through preaching, and sometimes press statements from Pentecostal churches. Pentecostals’ arguments or sentiments against gay rights are depicted in messages on radio and television. This is likely to influence the consciousness of the Ghanaian populace and reinforce issues that border on human rights and governance.

This is because the debate on homosexuality in Ghana does not remain at the official level, but the public joins in and radio presenters feature special or dedicated phone-in programmes in which religious leaders are called to express their opinions on the subject. The general public are also invited to phone in and express their opinions. One of such programmes was organised by one of the leading Accra radio stations, Asempa FM, during one of its most popular political programmes, *Ekosii Sen*, on Friday 27 April 2018. During the programme, Moses Foh-Amoaning,⁴⁷ raised a sharp rebuttal to the United Kingdom’s Prime Minister Theresa May’s assertion on decriminalisation of homosexuality in Africa during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in April 2018 in London. According to the Prime Minister, campaigners and activists have urged her to intervene and assist former colonial states to repeal their anti-gay rights laws. However, Foh-Amoaning argued that homosexuality is not consistent with Ghana’s cultural values and is a threat to the existence of human life. Through the

⁴⁶ Walter Ihejirika, “Research on media, religion and culture in Africa: Current trends and debates,” *African Communication Research* 2, no.1 (2009), 28.

⁴⁷ Foh-Amoaning is a private legal practitioner and the Executive Secretary and spokesperson for the anti-gay rights movement, The National Coalition for Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values.

radio he rallied the general public and the President of the republic to reject any attempts by Western imposition to legalise homosexuality in Ghana. According to him, President Nana Akufo Addo has a spiritual mandate to fulfil by rejecting anti-gay rights:

It is God who uplifted him to be president; spiritually he is occupying a Davidic throne. The kingship that God bestowed on David because he called on God, is the same throne our president is occupying. He [Mr. Akufo Addo] went to churches and mosques to say the "Battle is the Lord's...Look at the difference" [in the election results]. Everyone knew that it was God's hand at work...Ghanaians believe he has a higher moral and spiritual obligation...A president who has fought for the presidency for over eight solid years using the name of the Lord, he has a higher spiritual responsibility that when Westerners say things that are against God's word and also our Ghanaian culture, our president must speak...If God gives you something, He expects you to stand for Him. Mr. President, this is your time...It is time to show that you are on the Lord's side.⁴⁸

He further reiterated that homosexuality is not a human rights issue and such individuals need to be helped to reform. Clearly, the views expressed by Foh-Amoaning reflect a range of biblical concerns against homosexuality. Through the media, he appeals to the president and the general public using religious and cultural values of Ghana which have much purchase at the local and national levels. As a result, he charges the president to reject the pressure to consider proposing laws that support homosexuality in Ghana. In his view, the president has a spiritual pedigree as someone appointed by God to externalise his authority and political legitimacy against the rights of homosexuals in the country. In a similar statement at the Church's 43rd General Council Meeting, also calling on the president to reject the UK prime minister's suggestion, the then chairman of the Church of Pentecost, the single largest Pentecostal denomination in Ghana, Apostle Opoku Onyinah said:

[T]he call to legalise homosexuality, LGBT, by some leaders of the Western world must be seen as neo-colonialism and must be condemned at the highest level. We do not accept this as an aspect of civilisation...Africans must see ourselves as people who are matured and

⁴⁸ Classfmonline.com, "Condemn homosexuality – Foh-Amoaning to Akufo-Addo," *Ghanaweb.com*, 27 April 2018. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Condemn-homosexuality-Foh-Amoaning-to-Akufo-Addo-647014>.

know what is good for us and our people. The church in Ghana will continue to reject and oppose this and we are prepared to demonstrate against this if pressure continues to mount on our leaders.⁴⁹

Delivering a sermon at the Agape House New Testament Church, Prof. Emmanuel Martey, a former moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, argued that “it is a disgrace to a nation that sanctions homosexuality.” It should be noted here that the Presbyterian Church is one of the denominations representing what has been called “the Pentecostalisation of the mainline churches” in Ghana.⁵⁰ Martey went on and questioned the idea that homosexuality is something one is born with, a genetic trait, a claim that he argued is without scientific base. According to Martey, one cannot be Christian and still claim to be a homosexual:

...for somebody to call himself or herself a Christian and homosexual or lesbian at the same time. For me I don't want any argument...they say we were born that way, okay, you were born that way but if you say you want to be a Christian there's something, a doctrine in a Christianity called regeneration, being born again if you were born homosexual and you want to be a Christian then you must be born again [regeneration].⁵¹

These narratives, which are also mediated narratives because they are mostly carried as news headlines by media houses on radio and television news as well as newspapers, call on the attention of the general public to reject such acts that are seen as affront to the Ghanaian culture. Clearly, the public discourse on homosexuality, sexual control, and transgressions as argued by Martey, are communicated through narratives about personal salvation and transformation. In the public sphere, mediated politics on homosexuality is often interspersed with religious and cultural ideals which are supported by the “moral” majority. Among religious groups, especially the Pentecostals, the ardent use of the mass media allows them to insert their messages in the public space. The Pentecostal denominations use the media to articulate their

⁴⁹ Ghana, “Church of Pentecost threatens demo if pressure to legalise gay rights continues,” Myjoyonline.com 3 May 2018. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2018/may-3rd/church-of-pentecost-threatens-demo-if-pressure-to-legalise-gay-rights-continue.php>.

⁵⁰ Cephas N. Omenyo, “From the Fringes to the Centre: Pentecostalization of the Mainline churches in Ghana,” *Exchange* 34, no.1 (2005), 39-60.

⁵¹ Emmanuel Martey, “Most homosexuals are satanists,” *Ghanaweb.com*, 4 March 2018. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Most-homosexuals-are-satanists-Prof-Martey-631453>.

values in the public space to their followers and potential followers. The views articulated by Pentecostal leaders become part of the popular views and, by extension, popular religion that regulate discussions on homosexuality in the media. Thus, with the help of the media, Pentecostal leaders alike transcend the space of personal decision-making and reach into that of public discussion to sensitise and influence the public.

Obviously, there can be no public debate about an issue that everybody ignores. Clearly, in order to gain public support, especially regarding the politics of gay rights, Pentecostals, by declaring their positions on the issues publicly, draw the sympathy of the public who are largely in support of their views. Sometimes, what instigates and fuels the discussion are not even Pentecostals, but media commentators and journalists who, by making their stance public, invoke a public interest in the discussion. These public discussions require the individual to publicly take sides in the discussions. The media debate on homosexual rights by Pentecostals rely on the public oriented engagement with the media as well as socio-cultural values that forbid the act. The more people they are able to convince through preaching on radio and other public events, the more powerful they become in rallying the public against gay rights.

Media, Religion, Cultural Construction and Reconfiguration of Homosexuality

The intersection of religion and media, as dominant actors in the homosexuality debate in Africa, has not only helped in bringing about the awareness of homosexuality but to reconstruct the practice through the lens of culture and religion. One of the contested issues in the debate is the perception that homosexuality is alien and ahistorical in the African context. This popular view has been interrogated by scholars of African sexualities, who have reproduced historical evidence of same-sex behaviours in pre-colonial African pasts.⁵² According to Macharia, the homophobia arrayed by government leaders in countries such as Cameroon, Uganda, and Nigeria have elicited activists to delve into

⁵² Thérèse Migraine-George and Ashley Currier, "Queering Queer African Archives: Methods and Movements," *Women Studies Quarterly* 44, no.3&4 (2016): 190-207; Zackie Achmat, "'Apostles of Civilised Vice: Immoral Practices and Unnatural Vice in South African Prisons and Compounds, 1890-1920,'" *Social Dynamics* 19, no.2 (1993): 92-110; Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Keguro Macharia, "Archive and Method in Queer African Studies." *Agenda* 29, no.1 (2015): 140-6.

queer archival work and this has subtended “sexual minority organizing in Africa: against claims that homosexuality is ‘un-African,’ activists, artists, and intellectuals have attempted to produce archival evidence of same-sex acts in African pasts.”⁵³

The examples of media items such as those highlighted in the previous section demonstrate how the discussion on homosexuality in the media is placed within a conservative and normative way of addressing sexuality in the public sphere. For instance, on a Good Evening programme on Metro TV in Accra, Foh-Amoaning expressed the following concern against homosexual rights in Ghana:

At the end of the day, the bottom line is legally there is no basis. They claim that there is a human rights call. I have asked this question, fundamentally, how can you bring into the whole construct of human rights, a principle that will fundamentally contradict the fundamental human rights which is the right to life? Because *reductio ad absurdum* if all of us became homosexuals...got involved in the lesbian and gay activities then the right to life will be destroyed.⁵⁴

Foh-Amoaning’s argument was premised on the value of procreation as a religious and social responsibility and the continuation of human life and existence. This example shows how discussions on homosexuality are largely aligned and mediated by religious sensibilities and values. In the view of Barbara Bompani and S. Terreni Brown, this makes the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches’ message about sex very powerful and politically appealing.⁵⁵ This is because, according to them, “when sex and sexuality are discussed within the moral framework of normative heterosexual Christian families, they do not contravene codes of moral behaviour or present a serious challenge to the dominant realm of patriarchal power.”⁵⁶ Just like in the case of Uganda, as pointed out by Bompani and Brown, this also helps the media in Ghana to discuss sex in a “nonthreatening and ‘morally acceptable’ way.”⁵⁷ In the public discourse, Pentecostalism emphasise the “adherence to cultural norms that stress the importance of reproduction and moral behaviour.”⁵⁸

⁵³ Macharia, “Archive and Method in Queer African Studies,” 141.

⁵⁴ Moses Foh-Amoaning, “Gays have no rights,” *Good Evening Ghana*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iA5q3nBYDc&t=334s>.

⁵⁵ Bompani and Brown, “A ‘religious revolution?’” 115.

⁵⁶ Bompani and Brown, “A ‘religious revolution?’” 116.

⁵⁷ Bompani and Brown, “A ‘religious revolution?’” 116.

⁵⁸ Bompani and Brown, “A ‘religious revolution?’” 115.

In the context of mediated religion in the public sphere, Meyer and Moors have argued that, in mediated religion in the public sphere, believers or the “publics are not bounded entities but rather are involved in a continuous process of construction and reconstruction, of negotiation and contestation.”⁵⁹ They further assert that “the presence of mediated religion in the public sphere is both constitutive of and constituted by political activism, especially identity politics or the politics of difference.”⁶⁰ They argue that contemporary religion “refuses to be bound” to a particular “religious sphere” and “appears to be intermingled with politics and sometimes violent political action.”⁶¹ Clearly, the cultural values and observance as expressed in the debate by Pentecostals in the media, socialise the public into believing what may be prohibited or desired, and what desires may not be practised, pursued, or even expressed. The stated prohibitions championed in the media are unconsciously internalised by members of the society which produces different gender configurations and gender transgressions as perverted acts. Consequently, these are producing militarised attitudes toward individuals who are seen or perceived as homosexual. Though culture is dynamic, issues of globalisation have evidently resulted in the liberalisation of some sexual ethic on the continent, while politicising others. The use of the mass media to reinforce cultural and religious proclivities has sustained cultural values on sexuality and this continues to make Africa an epitome of how traditional culture continues to influence aspects of sexuality in modern society. The moral argument raised by Africans has continued to enforce a kind of resistance against diplomatic ploys and lobbies towards the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Africa.

What is also clear in the Pentecostal engagement of the media is the sort of imaginaries they create of the world. Meyer has argued that “imaginaries of the world position self and others in the world conceptually, socially, and politically, mobilize people into mass movement, and determine spaces of action.”⁶² According to her, “this yields imaginaries that organize powerful ways of thinking and feeling and sustain particular

⁵⁹ Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere*, 12.

⁶⁰ Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere*, 11.

⁶¹ Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere*, 11.

⁶² Birgit Meyer, “Pentecostalism and Globalization,” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, eds. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 117.

modes of belonging that thrive on inclusion and exclusion.”⁶³ Pentecostals, for instance, share a view of the world as the site of a spiritual warfare between demonic forces and God. For Meyer, the extensive use of the mass media by many Pentecostal/Charismatic churches is to assert their presence in the public sphere and thereby engage in “an active conversion of the public space into a Christian environment, much in line with the project of world making.”⁶⁴ This project includes winning individual hearts and bodies that are seen as temples of God for the manifestation of God’s power against demonic forces that take control of people’s bodies. In this vain, the act of homosexuality is branded evil, devilish, and demonic in the media campaign. For instance, as highlighted earlier in the discussion, the general secretary of the GPCC, Rev. Barrigah indicated in a press statement that homosexuality is “devilish, it is demonic, and it is from the pit of hell.”⁶⁵ In so doing, he invokes the notion of good and evil and calls on the born-again Christian and the general public through the media to condemn immoral behaviour in the society. Again, the concept of hell as expressed in the statement also evinces how sexual transgressions such as gays and lesbianism are situated in an eschatological narrative about the impending rapture, before which the individual’s body and sexuality are involved in a metaphysical battle between good and evil, and demons have been granted to lead people astray by means of giving themselves to the dictates of the devil.⁶⁶ Pentecostals, especially, have been noted to adhere to a clear-cut conception of gendered divisions.⁶⁷ This “clear chain of command as it were, reinforces patriarchal authority along the notion that gendered roles are divinely ordered” and can therefore not be altered.⁶⁸ Consequently, where there are distortions, they must be corrected, and the proper forum for this reconstruction is within the domain of the divine – through the ritual process of deliverance – because anything that is divinely created can only be divinely reconstructed or restored. In other words, since gender roles are

⁶³ Birgit Meyer, “Pentecostalism and Globalization,” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, edited by Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 117.

⁶⁴ Meyer, “Pentecostalism and Globalization,” 118.

⁶⁵ Admin, “Homosexuality is Evil.”

⁶⁶ Van Klinken, “Gay Rights, the Devil and the End Times.”

⁶⁷ Isabelle V. Barker, “Charismatic Economies: Pentecostalism, Economic Restructuring, and Social Reproduction,” *New Political Science* 29, no.4 (2007), 419.

⁶⁸ Barker, “Charismatic Economies,” 418.

divinely regulated, the reconstruction process to restore the subjects back to their original and proper states should also be divine. In the end, the Pentecostal deliverance ritual provides spiritual freedom and confirms one's status while denouncing the confessed act to ensure the proper restoration and functioning of the self.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Overall, this article has argued that the continuous engagement of the media in the debate on homosexuality has the possibility of influencing and ordering people's attitudes regarding the rights of homosexuals. Through the media, the politics on homosexuality is heightened and the public is inspired in ways that create different gendered attitudes and panic reactions. Religion, technology, and media are essentially among the most powerful elements in the contemporary society that are influencing and framing ideologies of people on many matters in society. The media have enabled personal autonomy in decision-making among the lives of many individuals on matters that border on faith and sexuality. The media can be both constructive and destructive. They exercise a form of control. Communication that potentially reaches society in a large scale, Manuel Castells writes, is shaped and managed by power relations, rooted in the business of media politics of the State.⁷⁰ He states that "communication power is at the heart of the structure and dynamics of society."⁷¹ Thus, the constant use of the media to propagate messages on the fight against homosexuality in Ghana is likely to contribute to the continued rejection of homosexual rights in the society, until the media, with increased liberalisation, come to express a wider variety of opinions on the subject. The current disparaging media attacks on homosexuals as being evil and in need of deliverance to recorrect and reform their sexual transgression, evinces the religious reconstruction and configuration of homosexuality. The aim is to depict and recast homosexuals as repugnant individuals that need to be reconfigured in order to be acceptable for the society.

⁶⁹ Abamfo O. Atiemo, "Mmusuyi and Deliverance: A Study of Conflict and Consensus in the Encounter between African Traditional Religion and Christianity," MPhil thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 1998.

⁷⁰ Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷¹ Castells, *Communication Power*, 3.

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