

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CRITIQUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY BY THE XHOSA CULTURE¹

N Mtshiselwa (UNISA)

Abstract

The clergy and the laity of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) are of opposing views in their attempt to deal with the phenomenon of homosexuality in the church. Scripture says, "Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin" (Lv 18:22). Leviticus 20:13 reinforces the above commandment. Scripture, according to some people, is associated with colonialism. This paper argues that legitimizing homosexuality among societies is in conflict with the ideology of Africanizing and enculturation of Scriptural texts, and tends to violate certain cultural values of other African societies, with specific focus on Xhosa ethnic group². The question of morality is critical within the Xhosa cultural belief system. In this study, biblical teachings, cultural tenets of the Xhosa people and modern feministic concepts are highlighted in an attempt to explore the heated debate that surrounds homosexuality.

Key words: Homosexuality, Xhosa culture, constitution, colonisation, feminism, marriage.

1. INTRODUCTION

The terms *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality* are often used together. "Homosexual" refers to a feeling involving sexual attraction to people of the same sex, only; hence,

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homosexual person (*Pocket Oxford Dictionary* 1994: s v “homosexual”). “Heterosexuality” is a feeling, or involves, sexual attraction to the opposite sex; hence, heterosexual person (*Pocket Oxford Dictionary* 1994: s v “heterosexual”). Thus gays and lesbians are traditionally referred to as “homosexual persons.” There are areas of conflict within MCSA as far as the subject of homosexuality is concerned. Acceptance and/or rejection of homosexuality by the MCSA should not be based on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. An African dimension, especially the Xhosa² culture is not considered in the discussions of homosexuality in the MCSA. Biblical interpreters of ancient sacred texts have not only disregarded actualizing Scripture in today’s context, but could also not allow space for dialogue between faith and life to engender commitment to personal and societal transformation (Ukpong 1999:325).³

This paper focuses on problems associated with the

² Hereafter, this term refers to the Xhosa ethnic group in the Republic of South Africa. A Xhosa is a person who subscribes and or embraces Xhosa culture and beliefs. The Xhosa worldview and approach to life is influenced by culture and indicates that their perception of homosexuality is shaped by their culture and beliefs. Unless otherwise mentioned, allusions about Xhosa culture in this chapter derive from self–experience of the culture; I am a Xhosa and bred within the culture.

³ Ukpong (2000:10) further argues that biblical themes are to be interpreted against the background of African culture, religion and experience. An African interpretation and understanding of Scripture is achieved through this approach. Schoonhoven (1989:13) suggests that reinterpretation and contextualization should take place in the context within which people find themselves.

reception of homosexuality in Africa in general, and in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) in particular, with specific reference to the Xhosa. In this paper, questions of how Scripture is received and interpreted by readers in Africa are explored. Ukpong (1995:3–13) advocates for a hermeneutics of enculturation; a paradigm that seeks to read Scripture through African lenses.⁴ The Xhosa culture perceives homosexuality as an *anathema*. According to Xhosa cultural belief systems, acceptance of homosexuality denigrates their values of Africanization and enculturation.

In the following section, an Article in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is tabled and engaged in the discussion of homosexuality with a view of shedding light on its implications. Attention is directed to the manifestation of homosexuality in the cultures of the RSA and traditional religious experiences, with a specific focus on the Xhosa ethnic group. It is further argued that cultural constructions of marriage and the ideological contestation that underlies the objection to homosexuality is crucial to this discussion.

⁴ In line with this contestation a hermeneutical approach that is rooted in African culture and traditional religious experiences is recommended by Mugambi (1994:9–16) in the interpretation of sacred texts. Substantiating the discipline of interpreting the Bible through African lenses, Kalu (1999:1) suggests that African traditional lenses give correct indigenous readings concerning what occurred before the advent of Western, Islamic or other external influence into Africa.

2. CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Being Xhosa is to some extent enshrined in the constitution of the RSA. On the 7th of May 1996, the RSA parliament ratified a constitution that declared that “everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law,” and that neither the state nor any other person may “unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds that include race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth” (Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996 (Clause 9.9)).⁵ The inclusion of “sexual orientation” in the legislation is a transformative and liberative endeavour, since it protects the rights of homosexuals.

By the same token, the provision that “everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion” (Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996, (Clause 15.1) in the Bill of Rights protects the position/s of the churches and Xhosas. Farlam (1997:135) raises the interesting point that “all rights in the Bill of Rights are capable of being limited, provided the limitation satisfies the requirements set out in the limitation clause of the Bill

⁵ See Openshaw (1997:124).

of Rights.” The clause specifies that all limitations be reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom (section 36 of the constitution). This suggests that if gays or lesbians are religiously and/or socially discriminated against, they can lodge a complaint to a competent court based on the provision of the Rights to Equality and on the provision of enforcement of rights (section 38 of the constitution). The religious community can then argue their case based on the provisions that “everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion” (Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996, (Clause15.1). At this point such a gays, lesbians or the state can argue that the deemed violation of the right to freedom of religion is justifiable based on the limitation clause in the Bill of Rights.

South Africa is a democratic state and its policies are shaped and informed by this democratic dimension. The democratic dispensation led the South African community to a commitment in ensuring that discrimination is eliminated: the acceptance of all people in RSA irrespective of their social identity and orientation. The constitution of the RSA reflects the diversity of the people, as enshrined in the Bill of Rights, which seeks to embrace the dignity of all. The constitution of the RSA directs that

the Xhosa perception of homosexuality should not be characterised by discrimination; yet it must be authentic and reflect such a cultural identity.

3. COLONISATION AND FEMINISM IN THE DISCUSSION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The influence of colonisation in Africa has left its mark even amongst the Xhosa people. Bauer (1994:421) observes that in the eyes of the colonising Europeans, the Xhosas were savages who needed to be civilised. For colonialists and/or missionaries, a coherent African culture did not exist, only mundane tribal practices; and no religion either, but only foolish superstitions and devilish cults. Holding such a point of view, colonialists and missionaries labelled, among other Africans, Xhosa culture as backward and barbaric. They failed to recognise and appreciate the God concepts already in existence in African religious systems. Colonialists and missionaries implanted in Africa a Eurocentric culture “clothed” in the Christian faith, which failed to afford proper regard for cultures such as that of the Xhosa.

Xhosa culture has always been interlinked to a religious system, commonly referred to by commentators as *African Traditional Religion* (ATR). All aspects of life were holistically linked to uThixo (God). But when the colonisers arrived, a dualism was created: home life was separated

from church life. The separation of spheres of life affected life negatively. Not only was family life affected, but relationships between partners. The result of it is that younger generations have discarded traditional African ways in favour of Western practices. Those whose lives are strongly influenced by charismatic churches are told to abandon what is considered evil traditional practices. Consequently, some Christians hide their involvement in cultural practices, lest they face sanctions for deviation by the church. Particularly affected by this are elderly Xhosas, who find it difficult to discard ways of their ancestors.

Western denunciation or condemnation of African cultural belief systems can be traced back to the methods of evangelizing the so-called “dark continent” (a derogatory term which referred to the continent of Africa, then) by missionaries, who also infiltrated Xhosa culture. All the customs of traditional Xhosa marriages were prohibited by missionaries, including polygamy, bride’s wealth, and a host of associated practices (Fiedler 1996:8). It is clear that there was some failure on the part of the missionaries about enculturation. Today, Xhosas are still faced with the problem of a choice between traditional culture and modern religion. By rejecting homosexuality, Xhosas are also registering their objective response to colonisation. For many Africans, colonial systems sought to demean

African cultures, while fostering Western ideologies.

Every culture has certain advantages and disadvantages. An outsider would not fully comprehend Xhosa culture. For example, a feminist theologian would view the Xhosa culture as being oppressive. Gender roles are perceived as restrictive, patriarchal and unethical. Feminism has emerged out of the realisation that people live in a traditionally male-dominated world in which women have been devalued at work, home and in society (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1994:148). The marriage relationship in the Xhosa culture raises the ire of any feminist theologian.

Most Xhosas are opposed to feminism, especially when it disturbs traditional ways of running a Xhosa household (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1994:148). Some Xhosas regard feminism as a Western teaching, which tends to disrupt the family unit. Thus, many men would not want to entertain the idea of *women's rights*, as taught by those who espouse feminist thoughts. To Xhosas, this would mean allowing the cycle of oppression and colonial legacy to continue into modern times. So, for some feministic propagandists, a woman is caught between two dominating systems, namely: Western denigration of African culture and the African patriarchal system that favours men.

The perspectives of feminist theologians have cast different thoughts on gender roles. The Bible states that both man and woman were united to form one entity by way of a union which God established (Gn 2:24). Furthermore, people were created in the image of God and so are equal, although different physiologically. The main difference is that a man would impregnate a woman to bear children. In light of gender roles, males seem to disregard the teachings of Scripture on creation by categorising females into lower ranks; women as a group are accorded a lower status than men (Kretzschmar & Van Schalkwyk 2000:17). To a large extent, women are believed to have been created for the purpose of procreation. In that sense, women's major roles are: giving birth and performing domestic duties. Among homosexuals, procreation is not the agenda, save for a fair distribution of household tasks each one performs, in addition to the satisfaction they derive from this union through other means, other than the traditional methods commonly used in a normal relationship between a man and a woman.

Despite biological differences between women and men, the privileges enjoyed by each of these are different and unequal. For instance, where both spouses are employed, the woman would usually be expected to perform domestic

and kitchen tasks in addition. In instances where the man is not the only breadwinner, gender roles should be re-evaluated and disparities be reduced. Culture is dynamic, and so gender roles should be influenced by social and societal changes.

With regard to homosexuality, the Xhosa culture's objection to the practice is based on the conceptualization of gender roles. Such a conceptualization is not embraced in feminist ideologies. As stated already, feminist ideologies have not been fully embraced in the Xhosa culture either, and are considered Western and colonial in nature. Acceptance of homosexuality is perceived as embracing colonialism and so are feministic ideologies. In Xhosa culture, homosexuality is rejected in an effort to continue upholding cultural belief systems.

4. HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE QUESTION OF MORALITY

In rejecting homosexuality, from the African perspective, the phrase utilized is "it is culturally unacceptable." In his reference to the phrase, Nyarenchi (2004:46) says it confuses questions of morality with those of acceptability. Homosexuality is not necessarily considered immoral because it is not culturally acceptable. Culture and the discussions on homosexuality are problematic and therefore, culture cannot constitute the correct context

within which to engage the issue of homosexuality (Nyarenchi 2004:46).

The sexual intercourse (anal sex) in homosexuality is deemed immoral and an abomination by both some sections of the believing community and those immersed in cultural necromancy: it offends the Supernatural being and the living–dead. In a heterosexual relationship, anal sex is preferred and is not problematized. On these grounds, rejecting homosexuality in terms of anal sex depicts a patriarchal approach to defining sexuality since there is a different approach to sexual activity in lesbianism. It is unjust to limit *same*–sex relationships to focusing only on sexual intercourse between people of opposite sex; this depicts an ignorance of other dimensions of sexual relationship. It is observed that it is the tradition or rather the historical absence⁶ of a certain practice within the tradition. African trajectories are used to deny the cultural legitimacy of that practice (Nyarenchi 2004:51). So, this evokes the question of morality of homosexual orientation. Perhaps this is the context in which the immorality of

⁶ The absence of certain practices within tradition is used to argue the denial of cultural legitimacy of homosexuality and questions the morality of such orientation. Antonio (1997:300) defines historically understood absence as being an imagined otherness or foreignness since its identity is nothing but the shadow of a reconstructed absence. In the light of the view that culture is dynamic, to deny the cultural legitimacy of homosexuality is to fix, restrict and imprison a person's ability and act of living.

homosexuality emanates because it is deemed unnatural within the Xhosa culture. Also, it is considered that sexual intercourse and sexual pleasure cannot occur between people of the same sex.

5. HOMOSEXUALITY AS UNNATURAL

Heterosexuality in Xhosa culture is portrayed as historically and culturally valid while homosexuality is denied any historical validity (Nkomonde (2006:2). Caplan (1987:2) embraces this understanding in arguing “nonconformity to the norms of heterosexuality threatens the dominant ideology’s view of sex as innate and natural.” He further remarks that the historical possibility of homosexuality is denied and heterosexuality is considered to be the norm. Caplan’s contribution offers a Western perspective and yet a culturally sensitive one. It is essential to note the resemblance of the African culture and the Xhosa culture. Homosexuality in the Xhosa culture is deemed as unnatural, an illegitimate sexual relationship and a corruptor of the moral fibre of society (Nkomonde 2006:3–7). Contrary to this argument, is the understanding that African traditional societies were prone to social disruption caused by various ways in which desire was regulated in practices such as clitoridectomy, pledging of young girls to older men (child abuse), polygamy and the coercive inheritance of wives (Nyarenchi 2004:51). Heterosexuality

was a political institution requiring women to be sexually available to men and sustaining their dependence on them. The patriarchal paradigm contributes to this understanding.

6. HONOUR AND SHAME CONCEPT

Negative Xhosa perceptions and views of homosexuality are grounded in the honour and shame concepts, which are evident within the black communities, particularly in the Xhosa ethnic group. The honour of men and women is defined according to their respective gender roles as constructed by the culture of the people.⁷ The male figure is expected to protect, love, and manage his family as the head of the household. According to Coetze (2001) the female figure is expected to raise the children, take care of household duties and be submissive. Failure to uphold these expectations is deemed to be shameful. Within this socially and culturally patterned honour and shame ideologies, one detects an emphasis being placed on headship, production and raising of children, and other distinct responsibilities that are categorically streamlined based on gender.

⁷ Wilson (1983:194) captures the phenomenon that culture is dynamic in asserting that sexual identity and sexual desires are not fixed and unchanging. The reasoning behind this phenomenon is that people construct the cultural milieu and that culture is dynamic.

Since an African response to homosexuality is based on cultural ideologies, critical questions regarding headship, production and the allocation of responsibilities are posed: For purposes of maintaining order in the family, who should be the head of the family in a homosexual partnership or marriage relationship? How does reproduction by means of sexual intercourse manifest itself between gays and lesbians? How could they raise children in such a manner that it embraces cultural values in the African–South African context? How do homosexual relationships embrace the linkage between gender and responsibility as valued in Xhosa context? Questions like these are usually asked, but often, answers not as forthcoming as they should.

Gender roles are culturally and socially determined. Every society has its own assumptions about how men and women feel biologically, dress, act and work. These are the cultural norms for feminine and masculine behaviour evident in all human beings. In most societies in South Africa, men are considered superior to women and are expected to play dominant roles. In these patriarchal societies, masculine characteristics (e.g., competitiveness) and roles assigned to men are considered superior and are valued high than those of females, whose characteristics and roles are considered feminine (e.g., nurturing).

Assuming an opposite gender role is forbidden within the Xhosa cultural context, hence homosexuality is objected to.

This paper observes that rejection of homosexuality by Xhosa culture is specifically based on two main factors: the issue of morality and gender role constructions. The honour of men is jeopardised when subscribing to homosexuality, and therefore, rejection of homosexuality enhances the maintenance of honour and morality among the members of the Xhosa community. A cultural construction surrounding marriage relationships within the Xhosa culture has to be stressed in order to comprehend and appreciate gender roles. As noted earlier, this forms as one of the reasons for rejecting homosexuality by the Xhosa community.

7. CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF MARRIAGE

7.1. Marriage dynamics in Xhosa culture

Comprehension of marriage dynamics in Xhosa culture is crucial when discussing the issue of homosexuality. There is a need to clarify that only one set of cultural norms exists among Xhosas, be they from rural or urban areas, applicable to both the young and the old. Western culture and modern worldviews collectively exert a very strong influence on the young and coming generations. A modern Xhosa person in the city does not necessarily follow all cultural practices of the Xhosas owing to changing views of

culture. Xhosa culture is predominantly embraced by the older generations who, quite often, desire to maintain their cultural practices, values and norms. These are a category of those Xhosas who have not been influenced by the Western worldview. For a traditional Xhosa, marriage is sacred and should be respected by individuals desiring to be part of the institution. Preparation for a marriage relationship is characterized by various customs and rituals, which seek to prepare the individual physically and emotionally for incorporation into this new relationship. Rites of passage related to marriage are of importance in discussing homosexuality and how cultured Xhosas perceive it.

7.2. Rites of passage related to marriage

Rites of passage occur at various stages across the lifespan. It includes: birth, *Umeluko*, *Intonjane*, marriage and death.

7.2.1. Umeluko

Umeluko is the rite of passage for a male. When the family elders deem it appropriate and the right time, the boy (inkwenkwe) goes to initiation school where he is taught about being 'a man' (indoda). Stinson (2010) affirms that it is here that the male spends about a month in training regarding the customs of the family and the ways of his

forefathers. Ancestors are believed to be involved in this rite of passage and play a role of blessing the boy who enters into adulthood. He is also taught responsibility after which he finally undergoes circumcision. It is a joyous occasion for him as this is the practice of initiating him into manhood. When he returns home, the boy is now regarded as a “real” man and no longer a boy. The initiation process involves advising and preparing the young boy for marriage when the time comes.

In this rite of passage, the principles of manhood are entrenched. The state of being a man, Manhood becomes a proud and important, integral part of the community and the construction of personality. A male adult who did not pass through this rite of passage is excluded from the circles of men and is regarded as a boy. Neglecting to partake in the initiation “school” by a male is an important omission, considering the role of the rite in Xhosa culture. Likewise, entrenched ideology excludes from taking part in the initiation rite any male who exhibits the characteristics and features of a female. In other words, homosexuality is rejected on the grounds of the ideology of manhood, which is constructed through the rite of *umeluko*.

7.2.2. *Intonjane*

Stinson (2010) explains that when a girl reaches puberty, a celebration called *intonjane* is held. It is here that she is

taught by the elders in her family how to behave as a young woman, on how to look after herself, her responsibilities as a young woman and how to act in the company of young men. This custom and teaching lays the foundation for the type of wife that she will become, and her understanding of being a woman. Intonjane signifies a woman's exit from childhood and entry into adulthood.

Understanding this rite of passage in the discussion of homosexuality is pertinent. Ancestors are believed to play the role of blessing the life and the future of the young woman. Culturally constructed moral behaviour (like faithfulness to one man) infiltrates the development of the young woman. The ideology of gender role requirement is entrenched. The community-constructed role of the female makes it inconceivable to accept homosexuality in the Xhosa culture.

7.2.3. Lobola

Lobola is a token of love, which is given by the groom to the father of the bride: the amount depends on the latter. In some instances, it comprises money while in others it consists of cows, depending on the preference of the bride's family. Lobola represents the joining of the two families as one. It also signifies a kind of appreciation on the part of the groom to the bride's parents for bringing up

their daughter and making her ready for marriage. Parents of the couple bless the couple as they embark on building their family. Statements such as “ichume intsimi yenu” (let your field be fertile) are uttered. The significance of this statement is that a couple is given the blessing of production, such as child bearing and material blessings. Allusions to child bearing and or production make it impossible to accept homosexuality. An involvement of the families in this integral part of a marriage institution makes it difficult to accept and embrace same–sex unions, as this involves elders whose strong cultural values would distance them from homosexual entrants.

7.2.4. Utsiki

Utsiki is a ritual that takes place when a woman is married.⁸ The groom’s family slaughters a goat for the bride. A large chunk of meat is given to her with the instruction that she finishes it on her own. This instruction signifies that she will attend to her problems as a wife and should not share them with anyone. The problems to be faced by her relate to the female gender roles that are expected in a Xhosa household. A traditional ceremony is conducted for a kind of introduction of the daughter–in–law to the ancestors for her to be accepted as a member of the

⁸ This ritual was performed when my wife was being accepted as a member of my family.

new family. Gender roles and the significance of the introduction of woman (the bride) to the man's (the groom's) ancestors serve as the rationale for rejecting homosexuality in the Xhosa culture.

7.3. Purpose of marriage

Marriage is ideologically constructed to fulfil various purposes within the Xhosa culture. Amongst these is that marriage is viewed as one of the ways of proving and affirming the manhood of an individual. By his marrying, the dignity of the man is affirmed in and by the community. A man is respected as a result of circumcision, the ability to pay lobola and the ability to provide for his family.

Marriage also fulfils the purpose of building a family or household. Another purpose of marriage is that of child bearing and rearing. It is imperative for the married couple to have children. Failure to have children shames the couple, especially the woman. With the emphasis placed on child bearing, marriage makes available a platform for ensuring the continued existence of the family and the family name. Children who are born carry the name of the clan and/or family. Children are also expected to ensure the continued existence of the family and or family identity in their generation. It is rather inconceivable to fulfil these purposes in a same-sex union; hence, the Xhosa ethnic group rejects homosexuality.

7.4. Gender roles in the marriage relationship

The relationship between the parents wields a strong influence on the children in the family and may contribute to the incidences of divorce in families. Gender roles are thus passed down from generation to generation, and the cycle of gender role construction is very difficult to end. It is worthy to note that in the present context, gender roles are not viewed as being oppressive but rather as the way of life; it is in the natural order of things that each gender should perform its particular task. It is noted that the early missionaries to South of Africa, made the following comments:

The head of a family in a particular kraal is a man of moderate means and influence. This is indicated by the fact that he has three wives, for whom he has paid dowry in cattle. The principal wife occupies the centre hut. Unless it is hunting season or a quarrel with some neighbouring community, there is little to occupy the hands of men, they are much concerned about what they should put on, their only garment being a sheepskin Karos. The womenfolk felt most of the duties of the home, they cared for the children, cooked the food, prepared the beer for the consumption of their lord and his companions, and did most of the hoeing of the land (Jafta, Maluleke & Mogashoa 2001:71).

It is clear from the extract that the role of the woman is to look after the house and children and to keep the family

happy whilst the man is the provider. These clearly defined roles are still operational amongst rural and urban Xhosa people. Whilst a woman can take a job and also contribute financially, it is still considered as her duty to take care of the household despite the sharing of the role of a breadwinner. Each society has its own view with regard to gender roles, thus gender roles are social constructs which people choose to own and adhere to instead of re-evaluating and resisting these (Kretzschmar & Van Schalkwyk 2000:18). Assumption of an opposite gender and/or role is against established belief concerning gender roles. It is thus on these grounds that homosexuality is rejected.

7.5. Role players in the marriage relationship

7.5.1. Extended family

The life of an African is communal. A person does not live for him or herself, nor does he or she die as an individual. The concept of “Umntu ngumntu ngabantu” (a person is a person through others) defines the communal life of Xhosas. Since life is communal, an individual almost automatically becomes integrated into a network of mutual relationships with the community. The totality of life boils down to the maintenance of dynamic relationships with one’s extended family, one’s clan or tribe, one’s ancestors, nature and God (Kruger, Lubbe & Steyn 2002:35).

The extended family acts as a support structure for persons in a marriage relationship. The couple can consult the senior members of the extended family to seek advice on any marital problems. It is noteworthy that both the husband and wife have a difficult task proving themselves to the other parties' family.⁹ A wife needs to prove her ability to be a good wife who can build a warm and loving home. The husband on the other hand needs to display and prove his ability to take care and to provide for the family. In a way, the extended family can add pressure to the marriage relationship. When two people marry, they also marry into each other's families. The wife and husband carry the responsibility to provide for the extended families if the need arises; this may even imply financial support. It is rather unpleasant and unacceptable to be in a same-sex love relationship in this setting.

7.5.2. Ancestors

The belief in ancestral spirits is very common in Africa. Ancestors are seen as the living dead. They are involved in the life of the communities by guiding, communicating and protecting them. Ancestors also serve the role of maintaining the ways of the fathers (Gehman 1987:150).

⁹ This teaching was given to us by my parents and in-laws in my marriage ceremony.

It is believed that people are married and bear offspring so as to be remembered by them (Kruger, Lubbe & Steyn 2002: 34). Traditional Africans believe that when a person has died, a ritual is conducted to bring back his or her spirit to the living. People become ancestors by means of a ritual performed to bring their “spirits” back to the lives of certain people within the family structure. People who do not have children to remember them slowly fade away from memory and are soon forgotten (Kruger, Lubbe & Steyn 2002:34). This once again proves the value of children. It is pre-conceived that ancestors enjoy the privilege of being remembered on family occasions and in decision-making processes. On the other hand, the living members of the family depend upon the ancestors for direction, guidance and prosperity. In the marriage relationship, ancestors are consulted for decisions. Incense is occasionally burnt if problems occur. Their role is one of consultation, the removal of *ibadi* (bad luck) and they are venerated. The ancestral spirits are believed to make their appearance through the family totem.

As previously mentioned, the new bride is introduced to the new family through a ritual called *utsiki*. It is in this ritual that the introduction to the groom’s family ancestors is made. After the woman is introduced to the ancestors, she

is then considered a full member of the family and her husband's ancestors become hers. Ancestors also serve the role of approving and accepting the bride into the groom's family. Ancestors' approval of a bride is signified by the howl of the cow when it is slaughtered, and the elders of the family would proclaim that "icamagu livumile" (the ritual is successful). This proclamation is understood to mean that the ancestors have approved the marriage ritual. The role of the ancestors in the marriage understood in this way further supports the rejection of homosexuality.

8. CONCLUSION

The constitution of RSA directs that the Xhosa perception of homosexuality should not be classified as discrimination. It must be authentic and should reflect Xhosa cultural identity. Objecting to homosexuality signifies the rejection of colonisation and its negation of Xhosa cultural identity. The rejection of Xhosa beliefs and practices in the name of feminist ideology, as far as the construction of gender roles is concerned, means the acceptance of homosexuality. In Xhosa culture, homosexuality is rejected.

Homosexuality in the African culture is deemed unnatural, firstly as an illegitimate sexual relationship and secondly, it corrupts the moral fibre of society. Further arguments regarding the rejection of homosexuality in the Xhosa culture were discussed. An ideology of sustaining honour

and pitying shame also contributes to the rejection of homosexuality in the South African context.

Homosexuality is rejected on the grounds of Xhosa ideology of manhood and or masculinity. A community–constructed portrait of a man and his personality is central to the rejection of homosexuality. In the intonjana (female initiation) custom and teaching lies the foundation for the type of wife that a woman will become and her understanding of being a woman, a notion that is in contrast with the image of a female homosexual. The community–constructed image of a female and male person makes it inconceivable to accept homosexuality in the Xhosa culture. Gender role distribution and culturally constructed ideal on moral behaviour enshrined in the Xhosa culture are entrenched in the portrait or character of a female person. Allusions about child bearing or material blessings enhanced by payment of lobola make it impossible to accept homosexuality.

The involvement of the members of two families (that is, bride’s and groom’s) in the lobola–payment exercise, the role of the wife and the requirement for her to adopt her husband’s ancestors, further contributes to the consolidation of traditional Xhosa value systems and or norms, which forms bases for rejection of homosexuality.

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