

# **The Disposition of *Odù Ègúntánsé* in *Ifá* Corpus to Homosexuality**

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## **Abstract**

*Homosexuality is same sex marriage condemnable both in religious and social spheres. However, it has become a global issue given the fact that the act is being forced on some nations' throats (Nigeria as an example) by powerful nations, who do not see anything wrong in it coupled with the fact that some religious bodies that had formerly preached against such an act are now supporting and recommending it. The question to be asked is, are we re-writing history even at religions level? It is on this note that we want to examine the position of the Yorùbá indigenous religion based on *Ifá*, the Testament of *Òrúnmìlà*, which is regarded as the holy book and guardian of their faith as found in *Odù Ègúntánsé* where *Ifá* says that a woman is in every circumstance preferable to a man in marriage than man marrying man. The paper is premised on absolutism theory of Emmanuel Kant. Also, we interviewed some of the custodians of this authority for their views on the subject in focus. For the interview, twenty Babaláwo, *Ifá* priests, were randomly selected in *Òyó* and *Òşun* States - ten from each state. Data collected was subjected to both descriptive and content analyses. Findings revealed that homosexuality has no basis in the religion and society of the Yorùbá.*



**Key words:** Homosexuality, Yoruba, Ifá divination, Traditional Religion, world view.

### **Introduction**

Homosexuality is an engagement or marriage between people of the same sex. It is an issue that has generated heated arguments and condemnations among people and nations around the world. While some individuals are against homosexuality, some believe that it is discrimination toward a small portion of the world population. Some reject the act based on the provisions of their Holy scriptures like the Holy Bible to Christians and the Holy Quran to the Muslims. The Christians claim that the scripture teaches that homosexuality is contrary to the will of God. Majority of the people and countries that are against homosexuality based their reasons for the rejection on their religious beliefs. Nevertheless, there are some religious bodies that accept the concept. In the light of this, we decide to look at what Ifá says in the Testament of Òrúnmilà, which can be regarded as the authority of the Yorùbá indigenous religion, on homosexuality.

### **Homosexuality and Worldview**

Homosexuality is a concept approached through different perspectives like legal, political, secular and religious. The question to be asked is, what are the explanations of religion on homosexuality? Why were some religious groups against it in the past only to turn round in support of it now? Are we saying that religion is now a secular matter? Or is it that the standards of religion is changing?

There are divided opinions on the issue of homosexuality in the world. While some countries support the idea, some insist that it is an aberration to engage in such an act. According to the research conducted by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, the European Union countries top the list of countries where homosexual is accepted. Spain has the highest percentage of 88%, Germany 87%, Czech Republic 80%, France 77%, Britain 76% and Italy 74%, while Greece and Poland are not definite with a mixed view of 42% acceptance and 46% rejection. Eighty percent of Canadians accept homosexual, America 49%, Argentina 74%, Mexico 61%, Brazil 60%, Venezuela 51%. In summary, Europe, Southeast Asia, Latin America, North America and Australia are pro homosexual.<sup>1</sup>

Countries where homosexuality is prohibited are predominantly Muslim countries and African countries with 98% in Nigeria, Senegal 96%, Ghana 96%, Uganda 96% and Kenya 90%. Even in South Africa where homosexuality is legalised, at least 61% still reject it. Islamic countries like Jordan, Tunisia, Palestine, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia and Lebanon vote against homosexuality with 97% as the highest and 78% as the lowest. However, the overwhelming rejection of homosexuality by the Africans could be traced to their fervent belief in the Creator, their culture and tradition that do not support it; most especially their religion which controls both their spiritual and secular life. Therefore, in many of these African countries where homosexuality is illegal, laws are made to back it up. For instance, same sex relationships and marriage



is a punishable offence in Nigeria today with 14 years' imprisonment. In Iran, homosexuality is punishable by death<sup>2</sup>.

### **Religion and Homosexuality**

As earlier stated, those who opposed the idea of homosexuality based their arguments on their religious beliefs. Christians, for instance, are of the opinion that when God created the world, He created it to work and operate in a particular order which is natural. According to the book of Genesis chapter 1 verses 3-28, when God created all things, he created them male and female including darkness and light that can be regarded as male and female. When he created human, he made man and woman, he commanded them to be fruitful and multiply to populate His kingdom. Therefore, a man shall leave his family, cling to his wife and shall become one. This indicates that God's creation revolves round using the family as a platform to carry out His plan by approving marriage as the union of one man and one woman, which is an element of natural order that homosexuality runs against.

Marriage is central to the will of God in creation. Therefore, any marriage relationship that goes against this will is regarded as a sin. As part of God's natural order, animals were created male and female. It has never happened that animals of the same sex engage in intercourse for procreation except when humankind began to do this all in the name of modernity. Even at that, they still rely on male and female reproductive system to do this. The anger of God which visited Sodom and Gomorrah as found in the Bible was basically because of homosexual practices. Where then do this new



generation churches that approve of homosexuality find the Bible passages to justify gay marriage which they now engage in? Are we re-writing history in the area of religion? Almost all the Islamic countries are against the legality of homosexuality based on their religious belief because the Quran does not approve of it in any form. Even in some of these countries, it attracts death penalty. However, historically, some cultures and religions accommodate same sex marriage. A good example is Hinduism which does not see anything bad in or view homosexuality as a religious sin. However, if we look critically at the birth of the religion, we will realise that it started with mother goddess and the male god. We may, therefore, ask where the idea of same sex relationship comes from in their belief system<sup>3</sup>.

Marriage as a sexual joining of a man and a woman is found in all the religions we practice in Nigeria today. Marriage as a purpose of creation is found in *Odù Òyèkú Méjì*<sup>4</sup>, there *Ifá* says:

- |                                       |                                                          |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Títí í tí lorí ogbó</i>            | - Everlasting is the head of an aged person,             |
| <i>Bìrìpé bìrìpé lomi okò ó dà</i>    | - It is the waves of the water that directs the boat     |
| <i>Dídà lomi okò ó dà</i>             | - the water is just spilling                             |
| <i>Omi okò kì í yí,</i>               | - the boat will not capsize                              |
| <i>A dífá fún Òduà atẹ̀wòn rọ... </i> | - A divination was performed for <i>Oodua Atẹ̀wòn rọ</i> |
| <i>... ọkan ọso péré lobìnrín</i>     | - a man enjoys his union with just one woman             |
| <i>dùn mọ lówó okọ</i>                | - when they are two, it brings jealousy                  |
| <i>Tó bá di méjì a d'òjòwú</i>        |                                                          |



*Tó bá di méta a d'èta ntúlé...* - when they are three, they scatter home

What that *Odù Ifá* tries to establish is the fact that though one can marry more than one wife, the best is to marry only one because of the disadvantages in marrying more than one. It is surprising today that despite the fact that these religious bodies knew the grave consequences surrounding the acceptance of same sex marriage, they still go ahead damning the consequence by allowing their will to control them rather than the will of God.

As said above, Yorùbá indigenous religion was the first religion to be practiced in Yorùbá land before the advent of other religions. What does it say on this issue of homosexuality? Is there anywhere in *Odù Ifá*, the testament of Òrúnmìlà that represents their own book of faith, that legalised homosexuality? Then let us examine their views concerning this.

**Origin of Homosexuality according to the Testament of Òrúnmìlà in the Yorùbá Indigenous Religion**

Before delving into what *Ifá* says about homosexuality and the religion of the Yorùbá, it is pertinent to first of all examine the Yorùbá concept of marriage and their views on opposite sex. Marriage is an important institution in Yorùbá-land particularly in the olden days<sup>5</sup>. The Yorùbá believe that money or a child should not be got by any means, but getting married is paramount. This is the reason why it is so important and every caution is taken to guard against misfortunes in



marriage. In the olden days, marriage was a family affair rather than individual affair as we have it today. It was the duty of the parents to get good wives and husbands for their children. When parents found that a family is good, a mature man that was ready or almost ready for marriage might decide to marry from that family. Principally, the Yorùbá contracted marriage in three ways. The first was that, if there was any pregnant woman in such a family, he signified his intention by telling the husband of the pregnant woman that he was interested in marrying the unborn child if she was a girl. So such a marriage began before the birth of the girl child<sup>6</sup>. The second method was that when a baby girl was born, one could also signify his interest in marrying such a child either for oneself if the man was not too old or for his son if already old but have male children. Even if the male child is not yet ripe for marriage, the preparation and agreement would be laid down for the future of both children. The third type was when a boy was ripe for marriage and saw a mature and unmarried girl; he could signify his intention by telling either his own parents. As a result of these, parents were very conscious, careful and watchful of their children's behaviours and interactions with same sex and opposite sex before marriage so that they would not get unnecessarily attracted to same sex or opposite sex. They were not allowed to play where they would not be seen. As part of the children home training, they were taught how to respond to conversations, how to sit in public, how to react to situations, and so on. These trainings were important especially for girls to



protect their virginity till the day they got married; virginity was a thing of pride then<sup>7</sup>.

However, before marriage was solemnised, *Ifá* would be consulted to know whether the man and the woman involved in the marriage were truly meant for one another from heaven. This validates the saying that marriage is made in heaven. Once *Ifá* validated the union, other preparations would follow. The above shows the importance of marriage institution in Yorùbá land. However, we should note that there was no occasion when a man was given to another man or a woman given to another woman in marriage in Yorùbá-land.

Almost everyone in Yoruba-land at one time or the other realised the importance of *Ifá* in all areas of life. Hardly can we see anything, living, nonliving, nature, human, animal, science and technology that *Ifá* did not say something about. Even this raging issue of homosexuality is adequately addressed in *Ifá*, we shall be considering *Odù Ègúntánṣé*<sup>8</sup> otherwise known as *Ògúndá Ọ̀sẹ̀*. *Ègúntánṣé* is one of the *àmúlù odù*. According to the *Odu*, *Ifá* says;

<i>È é ṣe yín,</i>	what is wrong with you
<i>Mọ́dẹ̀ wọ̀nyí</i>	you these little children.
<i>Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ fí nṣe bí ò ti wọ̀</i>	why do you behave
	waywardly
<i>Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ fí nṣe bí ò ti yẹ</i>	why do you behave
	unacceptably
<i>Èyìn mọ́dẹ̀ wọ̀nyí,</i>	you these little children
<i>Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ fí n pèyélọ̀jà lórúkọ</i>	why do you nicknamed the
	vagina



<i>Òrò kan ló délẹ̀ yí,</i>	A matter has just arised
<i>Ifá ní lógungun lógungun</i>	Ifa says bones of bones
<i>Ifá ní lógùnlògùn lógùnlògùn</i>	Ifa says charm upon charm
<i>Èyàn tíò bá lógùngùn,</i>	he who lacks charms
<i>Kó má bání dágun ègúntánṣé</i>	should retreat from an act that can bring penury
<i>Ifá ní</i>	Ifa says
<i>Àwọ̀n ènìyàn kan</i>	some people
<i>Ṣerú è lẹ̀gùn nijósi</i>	tried such in the time past
<i>Iyemoja ló gbé wọ̀n lọ</i>	were carted away by the river goddess
<i>A dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà.</i>	Cast divination for Orunmila
<i>A bù fún Olódùmarè</i>	made consultation for Olodumare
<i>Ọ̀ba agòtún</i>	the king of agotun
<i>Tí ó ma fàṣẹ̀ lé Ọ̀rúnmilà lówó</i>	who will delegate authority to Orunmila
<i>Wípé ègún ni ò</i>	declares that, it is a curse
<i>Ègún ni,</i>	it is a curse
<i>Èni tó bá ṣerú èyí ò</i>	whoever does that
<i>Ègún ni</i>	is a curse
<i>A kii ṣerú òrò bẹ̀è</i>	one cannot commit such an abomination
<i>Kó má hun ni.</i>	and go scotfree.

When the world was created, it was populated by the *Ajagunmàlèkú* that can better be explained as angels. They were the first inhabitants of the earth. They gave birth to children that were called *Ajagunmàlèkú* too. Among them were these



*Ajogun*- fallen angels. They were the first to practice same sex marriage. Two female among *Ajagunmàlèkú* got attracted to one another. With the power vested on them by Olódùmarè, which they could use to achieve any feat including having intercourse with one another, these two female had intercourse and it resulted into pregnancy. The outcome of this pregnancy was the birth of *Ifá*. Though Olódùmarè was annoyed for this act because when he created man, he created woman. But he said he deliberately allowed this to happen because of the work and role *Ifá* is coming to play on earth otherwise; he would have killed them. When *Ifá* was given birth to, there was no bone in his body because the two women that copulated and gave birth to him too had no bones in them.<sup>9</sup>

Olódùmarè handed *Ifá* over to Òrúnmilà to start proclaiming that the act is prohibited for any humankind to practice. Olódùmarè, therefore, placed a taboo on the act so that nobody would try such again with a promise that anybody that tries it, shall be cut off. *Ifá* is still enforcing and emphasising the taboo among the Yoruba till today. However, with the advent of foreign religions, civilisation, science and technology, many aspects of the Yoruba culture and tradition had been neglected by many including consulting with *Ifá* for any occasion and taking instructions from him. The rest of the *Ajagunmàlèkú* were the ones that gave birth to other Òrìṣà that we have and know today. Though all these *Ajagunmàlèkú* have gone, but they are still believed to be at the middle of the earth and heaven. They have become servants and errand boys and girls to the Òrìṣà. They are serving and worshipping them because of



their bad behaviour. The leftover of these *Ajagunmàlèkú* are those causing troubles and confusions on earth today among humankind.

It is a taboo, no matter how long because when Olódùmarè created the world, he created male and put female besides him just as *Ifá* says in *Ogbèsé*<sup>10</sup> that:

<i>Ìwọ akọ</i>	you are a male,
<i>Èmi abo</i>	I am a female
<i>E jé ká jọ má a tójú ara wa.</i>	let us take care of ourselves together.
<i>Ìwọ ọyẹ</i>	you stand firm
<i>Èmi ọyẹ</i>	I stand firm
<i>Yangí ilé</i>	the house pillar
<i>Wọn kìì yélé</i>	does not fail the house
<i>E jé ká jọ máa tóju ara wa</i>	let us take care of ourselves together.
<i>Kéni má yèmi ò</i>	a dependable loyalist
<i>Nàà lalábarò</i>	is the companion
<i>Fólú awo.</i>	to the priest.

For us not to see the like or type of *Ifá* was the reason why the task was given to *Ifá* to do.

As earlier said, the role of *Ifá* in Yorùbá belief cannot be ignored. This is the reason why *Idowu*<sup>11</sup> is of the opinion that in all things, the Yorùbá are religious. According to him, the keynote of the Yorùbá is their religion. To them, religion dictates all things including marriage. Once we realise that *Ifá* forms the basis of life for the Yorùbá, it is adequate then to look



at Ifá's view on the concept of homosexuality. In *Ìrosùn Òwónrín*,<sup>12</sup> Ifá emphasised that:

- |                                      |                                                         |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Epó dùn ún jẹṣu</i>               | - Palm oil is good to eat yam,                          |
| <i>Ìkèté dùn un jẹfó</i>             | - slurry is suitable for vegetable.                     |
| <i>Obìnrin ṣeé básùn jòkùnrin lọ</i> | - intercourse is better enjoyed with a woman than a man |
| <i>Bó bá dúró</i>                    | - if she stands,                                        |
| <i>Ó láyùngbà</i>                    | - you will enjoy her                                    |
| <i>Bó bá bèrè</i>                    | - if she squats,                                        |
| <i>Ó láyùngbà</i>                    | - you will enjoy her                                    |
| <i>A dífá fún Àwèlé</i>              | - cast divination for Awele                             |
| <i>Onídí òlenkére.....</i>           | - with a sexy buttocks....                              |

Here, Ifá emphatically declares that regardless of any situation in marriage, a woman is preferable to a man when it comes to having sex. This is an indication that in all circumstances, Ifá is never in support of homosexuality. Another Ifá verse in *Òdí Méjì*<sup>13</sup> affirms that:

- |                                    |                                           |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <i>Àṣẹ̀ṣẹ̀rò òjò,</i>              | - the first rain after drought            |
| <i>Ní taruku láúláú.</i>           | - Brings a lot of dust.                   |
| <i>A dífá fúnwọ̀n nídiíkùnrin,</i> | - cast divination for manhood             |
| <i>A bù fúnwọ̀n nídiìbìnrin,</i>   | - made consultation for womanhood         |
| <i>Ìgbàìdí di méjì</i>             | - it is when man and woman meet           |
| <i>Nire omọ dé.</i>                | - that the blessing of reproduction comes |

As said earlier, one of the reasons why Olodumare created man and woman was for them to procreate and fill the earth. The Yorùbá can go to any length to make sure that they have a child, even to the level of making sacrifices to the gods if need be. Not just having a child, but a good child that will inherit property and give a befitting burial when the father or mother dies. This is due to the nature of our social, cultural, political, economic and religious environments that do not give room for someone not to have somebody that will care for him or her at old age. Therefore, for a man to marry another man would spell doom for someone that engages in such an act at old age, especially in developing countries where there is no government welfare for the aged. But in an enabling environment like we have in the developed world, they could do such since the issue of child bearing would not pose any threat. Even in some cases, male and female couples do engage in marriage of convenience whereby they would agree not to produce any kids in their marriage and would be happy together. Therefore, if they engage in such an act like homosexuality, they would not see anything bad in it.

Besides, science and technology have almost taken the place of religion in their society. As a result, there is almost no room to appreciate the work of the Creator through procreation. This is not the case in Africa, particularly among the Yorùbá who would do everything possible to have a child. There are several places where *Ifá* refers to the importance of having children and since *Ifá* is the ultimate guide of all things they do, they do not consider any alternatives. Therefore, in Yorùbá-



land, children are precious and are sources of joy. Since procreation is not possible with same sex relationship, the Yorùbá consider homosexual as a sexual aberration that needs a quick and serious spiritual attention. Rather than same sex, opposite sex must be involved. Although *Ifá* mentions in *Ogbè Àtẹ́*<sup>14</sup> that a man was pregnant without copulation. However, things did not go well with him until the pregnancy was aborted through offering of sacrifice. According to the *Odù* that goes thus;

- Ogbè wá tẹ́ kára ó rò wọ́n* - Ogbè makes divination that they  
may have comfort
- Èni tó ñwáwàákúwá* - he who searches for mystery,  
*Ni í rírìkúrì* - will encounter abhorrence
- Ló dífá f'ápòòn* - cast divination for a bachelor  
*Tí ó f'ài lóbìnrin nílẹ́* - who has no wife
- Nlọ tọrọ ọmọ lówó òrìṣà* - but persistent in plea for a child  
before the gods.

In analysing the *Odù*, one would realise that it is ignorance that causes the man's problem. When he is told what to do, he does it and the problem ends. All the informants maintained that as far as the Yorùbá was concerned, there was no place where *Ifá* claimed that a man and another man or a woman and another woman were joined together in marriage as we have it today. Majority of the informants also blamed the situation of things in the world today on modernity. For instance, *Erinmi Òpitàn* of Ìwó, Adétóyèṣe Adéníyí<sup>15</sup> viewed that foreign religion and civilisation were the twin-factor responsible for all the problems we experience today in Nigeria.



He went further to explain that in the olden days, parents chose husbands or wives for their children with a lot of respect, investigation and due process. But today, children bring home husbands and wives for their parents to see, not to approve or disapprove. Another informant, Fákólàdé<sup>16</sup> corroborated what the previous informant's views, that such behaviour was responsible for many marital problems like distrust and divorce. Fábùkúnmi,<sup>17</sup> an informant, said that in the time of our forefathers couples developed love after marriage and not before. This was when they had started living together or shortly before they got married. He said further that such love always lasted long. This is contrary to what obtains today when love is developed between a man and a woman before marriage. Shortly after such marriage, some things are known to the man and wife when they begin to reveal their true identities. They will find out their incompatibility as husband and wife, thus, leading to divorce and single parenting. As a consequence, children of such marriage turn out to exhibit juvenile behaviours and become a problem to the society.

### **Conclusion**

We realise that homosexuality has no basis or place in the life of the Yorùbá since their religion provides adequate guide for everything they do. What we are experiencing in Nigeria today are what we inherited from other peoples' cultures and religions. Let their religions and cultures be removed in Nigeria today, the country will spring back to her normal state of existence and former glory. Through their religions, we no longer value our own gods who are quick to



anger and punish offenders according to the level of their offence. Rather, we are following a compassionate God that tolerates corruption, embezzlement, lies and every other social vice. Keeping virginity is no longer a thing of pride. Rather than for ladies to dress decently, they prefer to expose their sensitive parts for people to see all in the name of civilisation and modernity. Because we want to be like other nations around us, we have lost all our cultural values. That is the reason why somebody would be thinking of same sex relationship. However, we can still give kudos to Nigerians for rejecting the act and on the part of the government, for producing a law that makes homosexuality an illegal union, with only few fractions that practice it in their closets.

According to an informant, what was responsible for many bad behaviours on earth today was that majority of people on earth were either animals or other forms of nature like trees and stones. Therefore, one should not expect good behaviour from them. This affirms what Líyàdù<sup>18</sup> says about the sons of Àjàláyé that complained to Olódùmarè that they wanted more people to populate the world. As a result, humans were made from trees, stones and animals, but their behaviour were different from the normal human beings. They are the ones initiating bad ideas in the society today. Therefore, homosexuality has no basis in Yorùbá society. It can therefore, be asserted that in the Yorùbá indigenous religion, homosexuality had no place and the Yoruba society of today should endeavour to keep the sanctity of our traditions and cultural heritage rather than imitating foreign cultures and



behaviours that will do the society no good. There is the need to sustain our cultural and religious heritage.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewglobal.org> 04/06/2015

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.76crimes.com>24/05/2015

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.marketfaith.org>04/06/2015

<sup>4</sup> Wande Abimbola, 1968, *Ijinle Ohun Enu Ifa Apa kinni*, U.K: Collins, Sons and Co Ltd, P. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Olu Daramola ati Adebayo Jeje, 1975, *Awon Asa ati Orisa Ile Yoruba*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, P. 34.

<sup>6</sup> C. L. Adeoye, 1979, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, London: Oxford University Press, P. 18.

<sup>7</sup> C. L. Adeoye, 1985, *Igbagbo ati Esin Yoruba*, Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited, P. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Adeniji Apata, Babalawo - Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Iwo, Osun State, May 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Adeniji Apata, Babalawo - Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Iwo, Osun State, May 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Adeniji Apata, Babalawo - Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Iwo, Osun State, May 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Bolaji Idowu, 1962, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Bealief*, Lagos: Longman Nig. Ltd. P. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ayo Salami, 2002, *Ifa a Complete Divination*, Lagos; NIDD Publishing and Printing Limited, P. 232.

<sup>13</sup> Ayo Salami, 2002, *Ifa a Complete Divination*, Lagos; NIDD Publishing and Printing Limited, P. 35.

<sup>14</sup> E.M. Lijadu, 1923, *Ifa: Imole re ti Ise Ipinle Isin ni Ile Yoruba*, Exeter, James Townsend and Sons, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Adeniji Apata, Babalawo- Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Iwo, Osun State, May 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Fakolade Ajibade, Chief Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Ajibode, Ibadan, Oyo State, May 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Fabukunmi Ayoade, Babalawo- Ifa Priest, Oral Interview, Apete, Ibadan, Oyo State, May 2015.

<sup>18</sup> E.A. Lujadu, 1998, *Ifa Mimo Alabalase Palero Kinni*, Ondo:Ife Oluwa. Printing press P. 12.