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# The Missionary-Colonial Forms of Marriages and Sexualities Within African Pentecostalism: A Sankofa-De-Colonial Perspective

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**Abstract:** Looking retrospectively at pre-colonial African marriages and sexualities is critical in the urge to transform the contemporary narratives about marriage and sexuality within African Christian spaces. In Africa, marriage and sexuality had cultural, spiritual, and religious intersectionality. However, the advent of the missionary-colonial enterprise reconstructed the concepts of marriage and sexuality by imposing the supremacy of Christianity and Civilization agendas. Thus, Africans were compelled to discard their views of marriage and sexuality to comply with the prescripts of Christianity, baptism, and church membership. This paper used the Sankofa and Decolonial theories to investigate the perpetual influence of the 19th-century missionary-colonial enterprise within the contemporary African Pentecostal views of marriage and sexuality. It debunked the heterotopias of the born-again experience which propels the supremacy of Christianity and civilization agendas. The findings indicated that these agendas manifest in the form of hetero-monogamous aspirations of missionaries that undermined the African views of marriage and sexuality, thus, rendering them as demonic, backward, barbaric, and something to be forgotten. Lamentably, the same narrative has shaped the views of Pentecostal Christians within the contemporary African context. However, this has created a myriad of problems for both Africans and Christianity in Africa. In conclusion, the study emphasized the need to delink from Western conceptualizations by rethinking African marriages and sexualities. This could be done by revisiting pre-colonial African marriage systems and sexualities to challenge the current distorted narrative while embracing the positive elements of Christianity.



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**Keywords:** missionary-colonial; African Pentecostalism; marriage; African sexualities; Sankofa; decoloniality; heterotopia

## 1. Introduction

Looking in retrospect to pre-colonial African marriages and sexualities is critical in the urge to transform the contemporary narratives about marriage and sexuality in African Christian spaces (Fiaveh and Mensah 2023, p. 8). The African perspectives of marriage and sexuality had cultural, spiritual, and religious intersectionality (Judge 2020). However, the advent of the missionary-colonial enterprise presented the Christian views of hetero-monogamous marriages and relationships as superior and obligatory. According to Tonono (2020, p. 176) “From the onset, missionary ideology cast African people into inferior categories of “heathen”, “unenlightened”, and “barbaric”. Consequently, the missionaries reconstructed the concepts of marriage and sexuality using the Christianization and civilization agendas. Lamentably, the missionary imaginations and accounts of African marriages

and sexualities depicted African sexual practices and marriage systems as exclusively heterosexual, promiscuous, monogamous, demonic, depraved, savage, and uncivilized (Van Klinken 2021; Epprecht 2009, p. 329). This led to the missionaries labeling African marriage systems and sexualities as un-Christian and as the 'other'. However, according to Arnfred (2004, p. 7), "This 'other' thing is constructed to be not only different from European/Western marriages and sexualities, but also functions to present that which is European/Western as modern, rational, civilized, and Christian". In the same vein, the dividing line between Christianity and Westernization was blurred when "African marriage customs and sexual practices were condemned by missionaries and considered as being heathen practices that were primitive and uncivilized" (Tonono 2020, p. 177). Thus, the neophytes had to discard their African views and practices to comply with the prescripts of Christianity, baptism, and church membership (Mothoagae and Shingange 2024).

This study investigates how the 19th-century missionary-colonial enterprise distorted the pre-colonial African views of marriage and sexuality and how it has influenced contemporary African Pentecostalism. It debunks the heterotopia of the "born-again" and sinners which was used to create opposing spaces. The study further looks at the repercussions of the current narrative and provides some possible suggestions on how the status quo could be transformed. It is critical from the onset to briefly present my positionality as Bourke (2014, p. 2) pointed out "The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument. It is reasonable to expect that the researcher's beliefs, political stance, and cultural background (gender, race, class, socioeconomic status, and educational background) are important variables that may affect the research process. I conducted this research as an outsider and insider to African Pentecostalism and gender and sexuality issues. However, the process was conducted in the form of reflexivity. I am a Black African Pentecostal Christian, pastor, and theological scholar and an ally of several Pro Same-sex organizations in South Africa. Again, I view gender and sexuality dichotomies as social constructs that have succeeded in dividing humanity by undermining the African ethic of *Ubuntu* (loosely translated as humanness) and the true meaning of being created in the image of God which is diverse yet without discord. Furthermore, the aim of this study is not to engage in what has come to be termed the "Controversial homosexuality discourse" (Manyonganise and Mahlangu 2022, p. 35) that moves from the premise of judging or justifying homosexuality or even from a desire to force African Pentecostals to accept homosexuality. On the contrary, the study aims to expose the damage caused by the epistemic privilege and arrogance of the Colonial Missionary enterprise and its influence on African Pentecostalism. Furthermore, the study delineates some ways that African Pentecostalism can contribute to transforming the status quo. To begin with, the paper presents the research methodology and theoretical framework. Then, the discussion on pre-colonial African marriages and sexualities follows. That is followed by the debate over the advent of the missionary-colonial enterprise and its influence on the African Pentecostal views on marriage and sexuality. Furthermore, the presentation on how the Sankofa and Decolonial theories can be used to transform the current narrative is presented. Finally, the paper presents some recommendations.

## 2. Research Methodology and Data Analysis

This study draws primarily from secondary sources and literature to determine how this narrative came into play, its historical background, and its current manifestations within the contemporary African Pentecostal spaces. This process was conducted following Pandey and Pandey (2021, p. 69) who opined as follows: "The secondary data can be collected from technical publications such as manuals, handbooks, data sheets, and standards, books, and journals, official publications of the Central government, state governments,

local bodies, private data services, and computer databases". Thus, some of these data sources were used to collect data for this research. Thematic considerations and keywords such as African Pentecostalism, missionary, colonialism, decoloniality African marriages, African sexualities, and Sankofa guided the literature review.

ScienceDirect, Bible Gateway, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Web of Science, Springer, and Sage were among the search engines used to conduct the literature review. These were selected because of their extensive coverage of scholarly material. The keywords were used to narrow the searches and compile a sizable amount of literature. The documents were carefully sorted by relevancy, starting with a cursory examination of the titles and abstracts to avoid duplications. A subset of full-text papers that satisfied the inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed for additional assessment. Once more, the thematic analysis was utilized to methodically examine qualitative data taken from the literature, adhering to [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) methodology framework to pinpoint important themes associated with this investigation. Finally, the analytical procedure comprised of methodical inspection, synthesis, and interpretation of data was used.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study uses the combination of the Sankofa and the Decoloniality theories to form the "Sankofa-decolonial" theory. Thus, the Sankofa theory was used as a lens to analyze the importance of revisiting pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial African customs, practices, and traditions including practices of marriages and sexualities to understand the present and to chart the way to the future. On the other hand, the Decoloniality theory was used as a tool for the envisaged move. A brief discussion of how these two theories were used is necessary to provide an in-depth understanding of their usage in this study.

#### 3.1. The Sankofa Theory

Sankofa is a concept drawn from the West African Akan communication system. It is embedded in the adage that "(a) There is no shame in going back to claim (or remember) that which has been forgotten, and (b) Go back to fetch that which is forgotten to move forward. Sankofa is symbolized by a bird with an egg in its mouth, which represents the next generation. The bird walks forward with its head turned back" ([Deterville 2020](#), p. 6). It is against the backdrop of Deterville's assertion that this paper calls for looking back by revisiting the pre-colonial era to analyze the current post-colonial African views of marriages and sexualities and further move forward to the future. Again, the move is motivated by the missionary-colonial tendencies of creating spaces that forced the receptors to forget their past customs and practices. This is what Michel Foucault called the heterotopia which begins to function at full capacity when people arrive at an absolute break from their traditional time ([Foucault 2008](#)).

Indeed, looking back can assist the present and coming generations to better understand these concepts and preserve the original African customs and practices. In the same vein, [Dube \(2024\)](#) opines that the Sankofa philosophical framework entails a three-time framework: namely, the present, the past, and the future, which are repeated multiple times on the journey of life, in reading, interpretation, and theologizing. However, the application of the time frames in this paper does not directly follow Dube's sequence and formulation, instead, it draws insight from her formulation of the past, present, and future but uses it as the first-, second-, and third-time frameworks. However, it is further argued that the Decoloniality theory can be a useful tool to transform the current narrative and to accomplish a better future of understanding and preservation of African marriages and sexualities.

### 3.2. The Decoloniality Theory

The decoloniality theory has been used in this study as a tool to dismantle the Eurocentric and Western constructions of African marriages and sexualities. This is because the missionary-colonial project did not only redefine what it purported to be best for Africa, it went further to use lies and deceit to make Africans doubt their beings, and existence and forget their past. Therefore, the application of the decoloniality theory in this study takes cognizance of what Ndlovu-Gatseni (2013, p. 10) meant when asserting “What Africans must be vigilant against is the trap of ending up normalizing and universalizing coloniality as a natural state of the world. It must be unmasked, resisted, and destroyed because it produced a world order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy, and lies”. Therefore, the universalizing of African marriages and sexualities to conform to what has been deemed the norm and standard for the world should be unmasked, resisted, and destroyed. This move is like what Mignolo (2013, p. 303) calls the act of “delinking: the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality”. Thus, the decoloniality theory in this study challenges Western rhetoric that uses Christianity and civilization to undermine African worldviews. So, to begin this task it is important to first look at the past, to understand the present, and to chart a way forward to the future. Therefore, the next section is based on Sankofa’s first-time framework that (Dube 2024) was referred to as “The past”.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The Pre-Colonial African Marriages and Sexualities

Looking at the past pre-colonial African marriages and sexualities can be a decolonial act of de-linking from the heterotopia enforced by the missionary-colonial enterprise. Again, this acts as a resistance to the Western notion that Africa does not have a history as Pieterse (1992) noted. Such a view is tantamount to the portrayal of Africans as *tabula rasa* (clean slates) waiting for the West to inscribe on them. On the contrary, Africans had their views of marriage and sexuality long before the coming of the missionaries and colonialists. Accordingly, these views were not rigid and conservative. According to Magadla et al. (2021, p. 530), Africans promoted plurality, gender fluidity, and tolerance. Africans did not emphasize monogamy and gender binaries. Mbiti (1969, p. 133) captured the essence of African marriages when asserting the following:

For African people, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living, and those yet unborn. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed, and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress, not just a spectator.

Against the backdrop of Mbiti’s assertion, marriage in an African context did not merely involve two joint individuals; it involved their families, the community, the ancestors, and future generations. Thus, the individualistic view of the Western form of marriage is not congruent with the African understanding of different parties’ involvement.

Several examples indicate that the understanding of marriage in Africa differed from that of the Western missionaries. For instance, “Among the Langi of Uganda, the “*Mukoko dako*” or effeminate males were considered as an “alternative gender status” who were treated as women and could marry men with no social sanctions” (Chacha and Taabu 2024, p. 60). Again, polygamous marriages were preferred among most African communities. According to Orera et al. (2023, p. 143) taking an additional wife among the Gusii and other western Bantu communities “was regarded as one of the fundamental indicators of a successfully established Gusii man. Married wives approved of their husbands’ taking of additional wives to increase the labour force and productivity”.

Also, among the Ndaou people in Mozambique, marriage customs were anchored on lobola payment, and a plethora of traditional customary marriages were permitted (Moagi and Mtombeni 2021, p. 5). In this case, “The most common one was *kuzvarira*, whereby the parents pledge their daughter to a rich man, with or without her consent. This marriage arrangement guaranteed the girl’s family economic, political, and social security” (Moagi and Mtombeni 2021, p. 5). Furthermore, the commonality of same-sex practices in Africa was confirmed during an interview in February 1987, in the Bushbuckridge area when a British Sibuyi interviewed an old Tsonga man called Philemon, who had worked in the mines from the late forties to the early sixties. This man told him of what was called *tinkonkana* or “wives (used interchangeably with ‘boys’) in the mines” (Moodie 1988, p. 230). Therefore, marriages in African mines were not confined to hetero-monogamous terms and restrictions. On the contrary, boy wives were a common phenomenon in the mines, and female husbands existed within several African communities (Epprecht 2021).

Furthermore, the pre-colonial African sexualities also differed from those introduced by Western missionaries. Amongst others, Epprecht (2009, p. 1271) aptly discussed the pre-colonial African sexualities by maintaining the following:

The new research fundamentally challenges many of the assumptions and prescriptions of the old. It includes the finding that Africans were not as naive about same-sex sexuality and non-normative practices as was once asserted; that someone can be proudly out in a non-normative way such as gay or lesbian yet at the same time desire to marry and have children; that female desire and sexual autonomy existed even within strongly hetero-patriarchal customs and institutions; that Africans’ decision-making about sexual relationships cannot be explained simply by structures and functions but also involves such ephemeral issues as intimacy, love, spirituality, and self-doubt, including masculine self-doubt; and that plurality and historical context need to be emphasized in any analysis.

Against the backdrop of Epprecht assertion, African sexualities embraced non-normativity and did not universalize human sexual experiences. Therefore, African sexualities were not confined to Western gender and sexual identities. These identities include among other categories such as straight, gay, and lesbian (Dean 2011). Thus, practicing same-sex relationships did not restrict individuals from getting married to the opposite sex and raising families. This is because Africans did not promote the binaries of male–female, man–women, etc. Amadiume (1987) opined that while African societies were not egalitarian, their gender constructions were not necessarily dualistic and hierarchical. Again, according to Kaunda and Kaunda (2021, p. 21) “African ontologies are inhospitable to dichotomies such as those between creation and God; the natural and the supernatural; the physical and the spiritual; the female and the male; the individual and the community and so on”. Therefore, dualism and the binaries of gender and sexuality are Western constructs and conceptualizations. This is further demonstrated by the African conceptions of genderless gods, deities, and celestial beings. For example, “In Shona spirituality and language the Supreme Being is genderless” (Musili 2024, p. 15).

In the same vein, the moon is a celestial being that can be both male and female in several African mythologies (Holbrook 2020). The idea that the moon can be both male and female indicates that possessing both genders has never been a problem within the African understanding of gender and sexuality. However, it is as Musili (2024, p. 2) opined “A male God and his son replaced a more gender and communal-inclusive spiritual space”. Henceforth, the concepts of God, gender, and sexuality were confined to hetero-patriarchal terms that dictated the hegemonies of male domination and heterosexuality. The next section expands on this issue by looking at the advent of the missionary-colonial enterprise in Africa.

#### 4.2. *The Advent of the Missionary-Colonial Enterprise*

The advent of missionary-colonial enterprise in Africa was marked by universalizing tendencies (Musili 2024, p. 2). However, these tendencies contradicted the African view of pluriverse, diversity, and co-existence. Nevertheless, the historical account of the advent of missionaries in Africa cannot be complete without including the relationship of the missionaries, colonizers, explorers, anthropologists, imperialists, and settlers. According to Tonono (2020, p. 172) “The voyages of explorers, and the thrust of spreading Christianity in Africa by nineteenth-century missionaries, laid the foundation of European imagination on African subjectivities, through describing the exotic lands that colonialism had conquered”. Therefore, the Christianization agenda was pivotal in paving the way for colonization. According to Falen (2008, p. 54), “The early missionaries to Africa usually required or encouraged monogamy and fidelity, and this position has largely shaped the association of Christianity with monogamy”. Thus, monogamy was understood as a Christian marriage and polygamy as un-Christian. Consequently, the past African marriage and sexual practices were termed “immoral”, “heathen” and “barbaric” (Lewis 2011).

One missionary in 1914 aptly depicted this view when asserting “Notably the most pressing but the most puzzling, the most insistent, the most far-reaching of problems is that of Christian marriage in the heathen world” (Hastings 1973, p. 5). Indeed, the missionaries could not comprehend African marriages and sexual practices. According to Van Klinken and Obadare (2020, p. 7) “During the colonial period, both missionaries and colonial administrations were concerned with policing African practices of sex, intimacy, and relationships, and with reshaping their underlying cultural values and meanings, as part of the mission of civilising the natives”. Indeed, this narrative has played a major role in shaping the contemporary African Pentecostal views of marriage and sexuality. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1997), modernist assumptions regarding interfering in local societies and pursuing new projections of the future were given almost hegemonic power due to the growing dominance of Christianity, its relationship with the establishment of colonial power, and the creation of educated elites. The next section is based on Sankofa’s second-time framework which Dube (2024) calls the “the present”. It further argues that the legacies of the missionary-colonial enterprise still have a firm grip on the understanding of marriages and sexualities in the contemporary African Pentecostal context. For instance, it remains a challenge to accept polygamists and same-sex couples in most South African Pentecostal churches even though the constitution of the country prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, or sexual orientation. Indeed, this narrative can be traced to the missionary colonial epoch.

#### 4.3. *The Missionary-Colonial Influence on African Pentecostalism*

The arrival of missionaries in Africa and later the advent of Pentecostalism imposed the tendency to break away from the traditional past. The missionaries had an ambition to create new spaces for Africans which were modeled according to Western prescripts. However, these spaces were created in such a manner that one had to choose one certain space over the other. As alluded to earlier, the creation of these spaces is like what Foucault (2008) discussed in his fourth principle of heterotopia which he argues that it begins to function at full capacity when people arrive at an absolute break from their traditional customs and practices.

##### 4.3.1. African Pentecostalism

African Pentecostalism holds a strong view with the ideology of breaking from the past. However, this “past” is often associated with the African traditional and customary past. Again, the missionary-colonial views had a great influence on African Christianity.

Although the comparison of different Christian traditions could shed some more light on this topic, the scope of the study cannot allow that broad discussion. However, an example of the Anglican Diocese of Tamale in Ghana, where reports indicate cases of members leaving the Church either because they have married another wife or because they desire to marry an additional wife in the future, shows that the challenge is not only exclusively affecting African Pentecostals, but it also prevalent in other African Christian backgrounds (Katampu 2021, p. 2). An additional example is the ongoing discussion around homosexuality and the ordination of homosexuals within the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) since their 2005 Pietermaritzburg General Synod (Senokoane 2023, p. 1). However, it is that period when Pentecostalism began to develop and spread in Africa that is discussed in this section. To this end, Pentecostalism is arguably one of Africa's greatest and fastest-growing Christian movements (Wariboko 2017). The advent of Pentecostalism in Africa demonstrated the high level of influence that manifested when spaces for those who were saved or born-again and for those who were sinners emerged. These spaces focused on the body and what is done in and with the body as a determining factor for one's acceptability before the face of God. According to Kaunda (2020, p. x): The fundamental religious belief of Pentecostalism is that the Christian life between an encounter with the saving grace of Christ begins with the body. When people are born again, their first act of commitment is to renounce what Paul refers to as the things of the flesh—sexual immorality, drinking of alcohol, abuse of drugs, and smoking of tobacco, and so on—and they all have to do with keeping the body pure in the pursuit of holiness. This notion is based on the literal reading and interpretation of Biblical texts among others Leviticus 18:22, and Leviticus 20:13 which state that it is an abomination for a man to lie with another man as he would with a woman, 2 Corinthians 12:21 “I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble you, and will be grieved over many who have sinned and earlier and have not repented on the impurity, sexual sin, and debauchery in which they have indulged” and Romans 1:27 “In the same way the men also inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error”. However, it becomes problematic when such scriptures are read out of context and selectively used to condemn those who are deemed to be different.

Therefore, the body, in particular, black African bodies became contested spaces as these verses were used as a tool of condemnation. This is because among other things, same-sex sexuality, especially in black contexts, is at times understood as “a defect in the development of Black masculinity” (Owino 2020, p. 339). Thus, it is such perceptions among others that arguably mark the understanding of marriage and sexuality issues among African Pentecostals. Indeed, polygamy and non-heterosexual sexual practices are deemed to be un-Christian and demonic (Owino 2020, p. 349). Although Pentecostalism in general and African Pentecostalism, in particular, is fundamentally associated with Spiritism and pneumatology (Resane 2024), “Its fixation with doctrinal dualisms which enforce separation of body and spirit, and a Puritan sexual ethic” (Nadar and Jodamus 2019, p. 1) and its conservative sexual norms that have led to the policing of bodies and sexual practices are evident (Nadar and Jodamus 2019, p. 1). Succinctly put, obsession with sin, the flesh, and sexual [i]morality are one of the common main characteristics of African Pentecostal existence propelled by what has come to be dubbed “The born-again experience”.

#### 4.3.2. The Born-Again Experience

The born-again experience emphasizes the distinctions between the old and new creation, the body, and the spirit, the moral and the immoral, etc. Again, the renouncement of past life and experiences is fundamental in one's journey of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal savior. Thus, when one is saved through the born-again experience, the past is gone as Paul asserts in 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come". Thus, African Pentecostal Christianity associates the "coming of the new" with the abandonment of the past life including African cultural practices.

Indeed, the ideology of the "old and new persons" is aligned with the [Bochow and Van Dijk \(2012, p. 329\)](#) notion that "Heterotopias are related to 'complete breaks with the past' in much the same way that Pentecostalism has been prescribing". Thus, among the prescribed heterotopia of African Pentecostalism is the notion to break away from the traditional past customs and practices in the form of being "Born again" thus, becoming a new creation. Again, this breaking away included discarding African marriage and sexual practices which were deemed by the missionaries to be immoral and un-Christian.

According to [Manglos \(2010, p. 411\)](#), born-again conversion is understood by Pentecostals as a change in moral practice rather than a change in religious beliefs or ideologies. This experience is "Understood as a transition to a moral lifestyle, in which the individual enters a close relationship of cyclical agency and reciprocal responsibility with God" ([Manglos 2010, p. 411](#)) Thus, transitioning from the old traditional life and practices is deemed as an imperative aspect of being born again. However, this transition is imposed by strict and conservative morality. According to [Bochow and Van Dijk \(2012, p. 329\)](#), in the current African context, Pentecostals seem to be interested in producing rigid moralities about sexuality; the control of marital, premarital, and extramarital relations; and the control of the body and its domains of pleasure. Again, African marriages and sexualities are deemed as a curse that one needs to be delivered from to have that complete breakaway. Furthermore, most African traditional customs and cultures are associated with demonic possession, and so, the need for deliverance for those who hold to African practices, polygamy, and same-sex practices is often emphasized ([Owino 2020, p. 341](#)).

According to [Kaunda \(2020, pp. x–xi\)](#) "In the African Pentecostal context, exponents of healing and deliverance for example teach that those who make themselves available to participate in or even observe traditional religious practices, create demonic doorways by which evil spirits enter their lives. This position is based on the Pentecostal view that traditional religions constitute the realm of Satan. Succinctly put, the following of any African customs, traditions, and cultural practices including maintaining the pre-colonial views of marriage and sexuality is demonized within African Pentecostal spaces. This happens when, among others, African bodies, marriages, and sexualities become contested spaces. As a result, the heterotopia created by missionaries led to spaces of being and non-being, Christian and non-Christian spaces, and good and bad spaces which are problematic. Therefore, the next section is based on Sankofa's third-time framework which problematizes and challenges the current status quo to chart a way forward for transforming the future.

### 5. Problematizing the Narrative

African Pentecostalism has a great influence on the moral fiber of society. [Bochow and Van Dijk \(2012, p. 326\)](#) argued that "Christian agendas concerning marriage and sexuality affect local moral imaginations". Indeed, most African traditional leaders adopt the rigid and conservative African Pentecostal stance in their dealing with issues such as same-sex attractions in Africa ([Van Klinken 2014](#)). Amongst the leaders who adopted a similar stance were the late former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe ([Chabata 2024](#)), the former



president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma (Hoad 2020), and an endless list. This is problematic because it provides support to the ostracization of those who do not conform to the norm.

Again, those who refuse to break with the past traditional practices are condemned and “othered”. For instance, Angus Buchan, a famous South African Pentecostal evangelist based in Greytown, Kwa-Zulu Natal and the founder of the Shalom Ministries and the Mighty Men Conference known for converging men and addressing moral issues such as marriage and sexuality, responded in this manner to his interview to Shanait Spain, when asked whether a man can have passion for another man:

I love homosexuals, I love lesbians, but their lifestyle I cannot condone. It is contrary to the word of God. The word of God condemns two men sleeping on the same bed or two women sleeping in the same bed. Okay . . . I don’t have any problem with the people, I don’t hate people. I don’t hate anybody but, what you gonna understand is, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one sending me to preach the message of love and peace and reconciliation. Okay! (Owino 2020, p. 337).

Such a response contradicts the notion of a loving God who created everyone according to God’s image (Wilkins 2020 cited in Owino 2020, p. 337). While Bachun speaks of love, peace, and reconciliation, he also speaks of the word of God that condemns “two men sleeping on the same bed” (Owino 2020, p. 337). Although, the meaning of “two men sleeping on the same bed” can be understood as two men having sexual intercourse. Some might even take it further and detest two men who merely share a bed. This is because this narrative has led to the belief that even homoeroticism and bromance should be frowned upon; equally, monogamous marriages should be deemed as Christian marriages. Again, to be saved should be equated to sexual orientation conversion. Furthermore, it pushes those who hold African traditional beliefs that do not subscribe to gender binaries outside the household of God. This happens because monogamy and heterosexuality have become among others, the conditions for baptism and Church membership.

## 6. Decolonizing African Marriages and Sexualities

Decoloniality here challenges both the Westerners and Africans to act in ways that will restore the past African customs, cultures, and traditions including marriage and sexual practices. Pieterse (1992, p. 9) argues that it may be time for Western culture to critically examine itself in terms of its views of other cultures in a world that is becoming smaller and societies that are becoming multi-cultural. This call for the West to do self-introspection that challenges among others, white supremacy, cultural dominance, and hegemonic hetero-patriarchal tendencies. On the other hand, the move to decolonize these narratives challenges Africans to take destiny into their own hands by embracing their past as a God-given gift. Thus, the “born-again” experience should not be used as a Pentecostal heterotopia of the desire to break away from past African experiences (Bochow and Van Dijk 2012, p. 329). However, it should as Lindhardt (2010, p. 242) argues “Rather than producing individualist subjects disconnected from cultural constructions and social entanglements, born-again practice fosters dispositions for managing a continuous connection to an existing social world”. Therefore, the born-again experience should not push individuals away from their cultural roots, rather, it must foster their connection with their past and present realities while pointing the direction to God.

Thus, decolonization in this regard takes the Sankofa aspirations seriously by calling for the move to seek to “know your history to be able to understand the present and move forward into the future. This is something that resonates in various colonial contexts in which people’s history was taken away from them by an oppressive foreign system” (Donadey 2024, p. 2). African Pentecostal Christians need to “delink” from the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality (Mignolo 2013, p. 303). However, this should

be done while taking cognizance of [Kaunda \(2015, p. 242\)](#) when arguing that we should always ask, “How can we overcome the mental coloniality without throwing away the best of modernity over the romanticization of the African religio-cultural past?”. This can be done among others by challenging the heterotopia that creates polarized spaces that demand breaking away from their past traditional practices, however, embracing the good elements that come with the salvation of the soul.

It is my view that [Arnfred \(2004, p. 7\)](#) was referring to this kind of act when asserting: “The time has come for re-thinking sexualities in Africa: The thinking beyond the conceptual structure of colonial and even post-colonial European imagination”. So, the rethinking will among other things portray African marriages and sexualities as something good that should be embraced. However, it does not entirely discard the born-again experience. On the contrary, the born-again experience should be understood not from the perspective of demonizing African customs and cultures but from the salvation of the soul that is distinct from enforcing cultural worldviews. This should emphasize the renewal of the inner person, i.e., the soul. Furthermore, this will also be a response to the [Magadla et al. \(2021, p. 530\)](#) call to resuscitate, reconnect, and re-interpret these histories toward an inclusive Afrocentric future.

## 7. Recommendations

African Pentecostalism has a great influence on defining the moral fiber of society. [White \(2020\)](#) noted that it greatly impacts addressing the religio-cultural and socio-economic needs of Africans. This influence can be used constructively to build an inclusive society that sees God as a loving God who does not demand monogamy or compulsory heterosexuality. It is the elements of neglect of responsibilities in polygamous marriages and the non-consensual, harmful practices such as pedophilia and rape that should be condemned. Succinctly put, places of worship including the African Pentecostal spaces should become safer spaces that promote love and acceptance. Although the focus of this study was African Pentecostalism, there is still a need for further studies into the subject that can provide a comparison with other Christian contexts.

## 8. Conclusions

This study emphasized the importance of looking retrospectively at pre-colonial African marriages and sexualities to transform the contemporary narratives about marriage and sexuality within African Christian spaces. It argued that in Africa, marriage and sexuality had cultural, spiritual, and religious intersectionality. However, the advent of the missionary-colonial enterprise reconstructed the concepts of marriage and sexuality by imposing the supremacy of Christianity and Civilization agendas. Thus, Africans were compelled to discard their views of marriage and sexuality to comply with the prescripts of Christianity, baptism, and church membership. The Sankofa and Decolonial theories were used as tools to investigate the perpetual influences of the 19th-century missionary-colonial enterprise within the contemporary African Pentecostal views of marriage and sexuality. The study then debunked the heterotopias of the born-again experience and challenged the supremacy of Christianity and civilization agendas. It then called for the de-linking from the Western conceptions of hetero-monogamous aspirations of missionaries that undermined the African views of marriage and sexuality. Furthermore, the study argued that Sankofa’s theory could be used to revisit pre-colonial African marriage systems and sexualities and to challenge the current distorted narrative while embracing the positive elements of Christianity. Finally, the study recommended that African Pentecostalism should use its great influence in defining the moral fiber of society, however, constructively building an inclusive society that sees God as a loving God who does not demand monogamy

or compulsory heterosexuality. Consequently, places of worship including the African Pentecostal spaces can become safer spaces that promote love and acceptance for every member of society.

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