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Pentecostal voices and discourse perspectives to LGBTQ+ narratives in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The conformist and dissenting religious voices with various social classificatory paradigms on LGBTQ+ issues have further complicated the association between the West and others in sub-Saharan Africa. Religious leaders from the West and those of African extraction seem to already hold divergent opinions on the issue. This paper investigates Pentecostal voices and discourse perspectives of selected foremost pastors on LGBTQ+ narratives within the Nigerian space. Data were retrieved from the online versions of three widely circulated newspapers: *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, and *Daily Post*, focusing on the represented stances and voices of four Nigerian pastors with the largest membership within and outside the Nigerian space. The study employed a systematic approach to collect and analyse news reports, considering factors such as the pastors' stances, sentiments conveyed, and engagement with LGBTQ-related topics. Nigerian Pentecostal pastors align their stances with foundational religious principles and embrace belief systems that shape human existence. Pentecostal pastors' rhetoric condemns LGBTQ identities and relationships, framing them as a threat to traditional values, natural order and God's will, which are perceived as being undermined by modern, Western influences.

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1. Introduction

The intersectionality of LGBTQ+ issues with various social categories such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, politics, and religion underscores the complexity of the challenges faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning and more (LGBTQ+) communities. It is imperative to recognise these intersections to effectively address the myriad forms of discrimination and marginalisation experienced by LGBTQ+ communities. Belongingness is a basic human need defined as unconditional social acceptance, that reflects an innate capacity for humans to form and maintain interpersonal relationships to sustain their biopsychosocial wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hugues & Rouse, 2023). Belonging or identifying with advocacy is a reflection of human nature; hence, the understanding of how the different aspects of

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identity intersect and influence one another helps the development of more comprehensive and inclusive strategies for advocacy and support. The reception of the discourse in sub-Saharan Africa differs a bit from other parts of the world. In particular, Mkhize and Mthembu (2023, p. 381) posit that 'several sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, Uganda, South Sudan, and Mauritania, legislated against queer identities and same-sex sexual activities to silence the voices and experiences of those engaging in them.' In the Nigerian context, queer discourse encompasses a diverse array of experiences and challenges encountered by LGBTQ+ communities. This discourse delves into a broad spectrum of issues, including identity formation, experiences of discrimination, and the legal ramifications of being queer. LGBTQ individuals in Nigeria are also confronted with pervasive stigma, discrimination, and violence, which stem from a variety of factors, including societal attitudes, cultural norms, and legal constraints.

Within religious communities in Nigeria, LGBTQ individuals often find themselves navigating complex internal conflicts as they strive to reconcile their faith with their sexual or gender identity. Many grapple with feelings of alienation and rejection from their religious institutions and communities, exacerbating their sense of isolation. Moreover, certain religious organisations, particularly those wielding significant political influence, actively engage in lobbying efforts against LGBTQ+ rights and protections. These organisations advocate against the enactment of laws such as anti-discrimination measures or the legalisation of same-sex marriage, thereby perpetuating stigma and prejudice within society. Such actions not only hinder progress towards greater acceptance and inclusion but also exacerbate the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigeria. Several pivotal events, notably the enactment of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act in 2014, have profoundly influenced the legal and social landscape for LGBTQ individuals in Nigeria. These legislative actions have not only established legal barriers but have also intensified societal attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. Such legislations attempt to yield to Western dynamics and interrogate Murray and Roscoe's (1998, p. xi) argument that 'among the myths Europeans have created about Africa, the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring.' Examining the intricate social and political milieu that gave rise to these anti-gay laws, Sogunro (2022) challenges the prevalent narrative suggesting that such legislation aligns with indigenous African values. Instead, Sogunro's analysis sheds light on the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors that underpin the formulation and enforcement of anti-LGBTQ laws in Nigeria.

In response to these series of discriminatory acts, social media has provided a safe arena for sexual minorities to find expression. Social media becomes a tool for marginalised groups like the LGBT community to assert their identities and challenge mainstream narratives (Winkler, 2021), and it offers potential safe spaces for marginalised groups to freely express and defend their sexual orientations (Alichie, 2023). The political and social landscape has also evolved, with periods of heightened activism such as #EndSARS witnessing subtle clamour for the rights of LGBTQ, among other pressing demands (Bamgbose & Alugbin, 2022). Discrimination, harassment, and violence against LGBTQ individuals persist unabated, occurring both within communities (P. Onanuga, 2021) and at the hands of state actors (P. A. Onanuga & Schmied, 2022; Tettey, 2016). These discriminatory behaviours are deeply entrenched in the socio-cultural attitudes and religious beliefs prevalent in Nigerian society. Notably, Pentecostal churches and their

leaders wield significant influence in shaping public discourse surrounding LGBTQ rights in the country. Many Pentecostal pastors vehemently preach against homosexuality, portraying it as a grave sin and a dire threat to traditional family values. Their sermons not only contribute to the stigmatisation of LGBTQ individuals but also reinforce harmful stereotypes and prejudices within Nigerian communities. As such, the pervasive anti-LGBTQ rhetoric propagated by Pentecostal leaders serves to perpetuate discrimination and marginalisation against sexual and gender minorities in Nigeria. It is not enough to critically engage the social subtext of the law and socio-political conditions, particularly in advocating for sexual and gender minorities in Nigeria. The hegemonic influence of religious homophobia also needs to be examined. While religious communities have played a significant role in advocating for human rights throughout history, with many human rights principles finding resonance in religious teachings, tensions can arise when specific religious interpretations or practices clash with certain human rights principles.

Existing studies on LGBTQ narratives have explored various facets of the phenomenon, encompassing identity formation (Oyebanji, 2022), social and political contexts (Okanlawon, 2018; P. A. Onanuga & Schmied, 2022), historical perspectives (Sogunro, 2022), legal frameworks (Adebanjo, 2021), and representations in news reports (Oyebanji, 2023). These studies delve into the complexities of LGBTQ experiences, shedding light on how individuals navigate their identities within societal norms, historical frameworks, and legal systems, while also examining how LGBTQ issues are portrayed and discussed in the media. The present study analyses the voice projection strategies employed by Pentecostal pastors to shape their stance on LGBTQ issues in Nigeria. It explores how attitudes and beliefs that influence public understanding and perception of LGBTQ issues are framed through various discourse perspectives.

2. Pentecostalism and the shaping of public discourse

Pentecostalism has emerged as a formidable religious force in Nigeria, permeating various aspects of society and contributing to the shaping of social, cultural, and political discourse. With its millions of adherents, Pentecostalism has established itself as a significant presence not only in Nigeria but also on the global stage, where Pentecostal voices resonate on matters of human concern (Afolayan et al., 2018). Nigeria, like many other (African) countries, has witnessed the profound impact of Pentecostalism across its social landscape. Since its introduction in the early 20th century, Pentecostalism has experienced rapid growth in Nigeria, giving rise to a multitude of Pentecostal churches, including mega-churches with large congregations and influential leaders. This expansion has not only solidified Pentecostalism's foothold in Nigeria but has also catalysed dynamic transformations within urban environments. Pentecostalism's presence has led to the emergence of new religious practices and innovations, reshaping the religious landscape of Nigerian society. Pentecostalism has been described as representing 'the single largest social movement in Nigeria, exerting unparalleled influence and wielding considerable influence within specific communities in Nigeria' (Onuoha, 2013, p. 208). This observation underscores the significant role played by Pentecostal and charismatic movements in filling the void created by economic and social uncertainties in Nigeria. By offering a sense of empowerment and optimism to its followers, Pentecostalism has become a beacon of

hope amidst the challenges faced by Nigerian society, solidifying its position as a transformative force in the nation's religious and social fabric. The pervasive influence of Pentecostal churches in the public sphere is undeniable, marking a significant departure from traditional religious practices and beliefs among the Nigerian populace. Not only have Pentecostalism and its affiliated churches supplanted conventional religious orientations, they have also risen to such prominence that even in the realm of politics, politicians vie for the support and votes of their members, recognising the sway these churches hold over their congregants (Meyer, 2011). This phenomenon underscores the extent to which Pentecostalism has permeated Nigerian society, exerting its influence across various domains.

Scholarly endeavours like Uzodike and Whetho (2011) have provided valuable insight into the emergence of Pentecostal and charismatic movements within Nigeria, situating their rise within the broader context of the country's profound political, social, and economic challenges. Against the backdrop of governmental disillusionment and societal unrest, many individuals have turned to religion as a source of solace and guidance, seeking refuge in the teachings and practices offered by Pentecostal churches. This trend highlights the pivotal role played by religion, particularly Pentecostalism, in addressing the spiritual and emotional needs of Nigerians amidst the prevailing hardships. Furthermore, Owojuyigbe and Busari (2014) underscore the multifaceted role of religion throughout history, serving as both a mechanism for maintaining social order and instigating social change and disorder. Religion, including Pentecostalism, has wielded considerable influence in shaping societal norms and values, while also challenging established power structures and advocating transformative societal shifts. In Nigeria, where socio-political and economic challenges abound, the role of religion as a catalyst for change and a source of stability remains ever pertinent and persistent shaping the nation's social and cultural atmosphere.

Religious teachings and beliefs wield substantial influence in shaping attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities (Beagan & Hattie, 2015). With a population of over 220 million people, where approximately 100 million (45%) identify with Islamic religion, while approximately 93 million (42%) identify with Christianity, Nigeria has been described as home to some of the world's largest Christian and Muslim populations (Diamant, 2019). Both Christianity and Islam, the two dominant religions in the country, denounce homosexuality as sinful and contrary to divine law. Religious leaders frequently reinforce negative stereotypes about LGBTQ individuals, depicting homosexuality as a moral transgression and advocating for punitive measures against those who identify as LGBTQ. Moreover, religious institutions exercise significant social control over their members, often stigmatising LGBTQ identities and discouraging acceptance or support for LGBTQ individuals. This stigmatisation by religious institutions contributes significantly to the marginalisation and vulnerability experienced by LGBTQ individuals within Nigerian society. Often, LGBTQ individuals encounter rejection from their religious communities, intensifying feelings of isolation and alienation. The condemnation of homosexuality in religious teachings further permeates public attitudes, perpetuating discrimination and violence against LGBTQ individuals.

In the Nigerian context, Pentecostalism emerges as a transformative and influential force, moulding not only individual beliefs but also societal structures. Its profound impact reverberates throughout the country's social, political, and cultural landscape,

shaping norms, values, and attitudes towards various social issues, including LGBTQ rights and acceptance. Religious teachings and beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals in Nigeria.

3. Navigating the complexities for LGBTQ rights in Nigeria

There are intersecting influences of religion, culture, government policy, and online discourse on shaping attitudes towards LGBTQ+ experiences in Nigeria. Studies (Adebanjo, 2021; Sogunro, 2022) have addressed the deep-rooted influence of religion and culture in shaping negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigeria. With instances of cases of injuries suffered by people with different sexual orientations, Adebanjo (2021) examines Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (2013) and other legislation targeting LGBTQ individuals. The study underscores the significant influence of religious and cultural factors in shaping the negative portrayal of same-sex relationships in Nigeria. In light of the entrenched cultural and religious sentiments, the study proposes a compromise approach that respects the rights of sexual minorities while avoiding the legalisation of same-sex relationships. However, the 'compromise approach' suggested in this study does not yet truly recognise the rights of LGBTQ individuals. This tolerance is not enough as a basis for accommodation while discussing rights violations. Sogunro (2022) notes that contemporary arguments for the criminalization of same-sex relationships often rely on false narratives of preserving 'African' cultural or religious values, obscuring the underlying dynamics of elite hegemony established during colonial rule. The study did not also explore how these narratives are mobilised and disseminated within specific religious/cultural contexts but relied heavily on laws criminalising same-sex marriages.

The government is also influential in shaping attitudes through legislation. P. A. Onanuga and Schmieid (2022) explore the role of government in shaping attitudes towards homosexuality in Nigeria by examining linguistic representations in online discourses. They employ a mixed-method approach, utilising corpus-linguistic analyses and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The findings reveal two contrasting viewpoints: anti-homosexuality and pro-homosexuality. The former criticises the government for its perceived leniency towards the queer community and calls for stricter measures to be implemented. Conversely, pro-homosexuality tweets advocate for the protection of human rights and challenge the government's stance on homosexuality. Notably, there is the contestation of power relations and the struggle for supremacy between divergent sexual ideologies, with both pro- and anti-homosexuality narratives. Examining online narratives, P. A. Onanuga (2023) examines anti-homosexuality discourses relying on computer-mediated pragma-discursive analysis and corpus linguistic tools. The study highlights how the #ArewaAgainstLGBTQ trend on Nigerian Twitter provides a platform for anti-LGBTQ ideologues to express substantial negativity towards LGBTQ individuals and their human rights. The findings of the study reveal the underlying fear and perceived threat felt by homophobes regarding the potential consequences of increased visibility and expression of pro-LGBTQ views in public spaces. The analysis indicates that online comments may play a role in influencing the evolving social climate and individual perspectives concerning LGBTQ+ individuals within Nigerian society.

Individuals utilise online spaces for identity construction, activism, and challenging homophobia. In his exploration of the persistence of anti-homosexuality and anti-LGBTQ attitudes in Nigeria, P. Onanuga (2021) highlights how digital spaces serve as a refuge for Nigerian queer individuals to assert their identities and shape narratives about their existence. The study shows how the queer community in Nigeria actively challenges judgemental narratives and strives for visibility, acceptance, and the liberalisation of sexual norms. This is done with many Nigerians becoming increasingly comfortable with 'coming out' online, particularly on Twitter, and willing to reveal their sexual identities despite the prevalence of homophobic cyberbullying. The study identifies the government's complicity in perpetuating anti-gay sentiments. The study notes that Twitter-based engagements and representations contribute to queer advocacy efforts in Nigeria, fostering sexual affirmation and emancipation in a society socialised around heterosexual values. Through digital activism, the Nigerian queer community asserts its influence and stimulates public discourse on issues related to sexual identity and rights. Meanwhile, another Nigeria-focused study is Oyebanji (2022), which explores the linguistic strategies employed by the LGBTQ+ communities in Nigeria to construct their identities and resist homophobia on social media, specifically *Twitter*, drawing on social identity theory, critical discourse analysis, and systemic functional linguistics. The study notes how LGBTQ people position themselves as deserving of respect and recognition, challenging prevailing heteronormative narratives. Social media becomes a tool for marginalised groups like the LGBT community to assert their identities and challenge mainstream narratives. LGBT individuals strategically foreground their identities, contesting prevailing stereotypes and representations perpetuated by the mainstream media. A limitation of the study is the inability to track the potential limitations of online identity construction in achieving real-world acceptance.

Bankole et al. (2023) claim that religiosity and sexual orientation, but not social media, predict attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in Nigeria. However, their study's small, region-specific sample, cross-sectional design, and purposive sampling method may not fully capture the influence of social media on attitudes. The subtle but cumulative effect of social media on sexual orientations, for instance, might not be apparent in a single survey. Ilesanmi and Osisanwo (2024) examine discursive tropes of queer-sexuality resistance in Nigerian standup comedy and aver that Nigeria and many African countries and cultures are less receptive to sexual otherness. The study opines that Nigerian standup comedians portrayed transwomen and gay men as deceptive, threats, criminals, prey and mentally ill while crossdressing was presented as probable propaganda for homosexuality in the Nigerian context. Nigerian queer men use Twitter to assert agency and engage in linguistic advocacy (P. Onanuga, 2021). Here, social media becomes a vital tool for self-representation, identity expression, and resistance against marginalisation related to LGBTQ+ rights. Institutionalised homophobia, reinforced by legislation, reflects Nigeria's cultural rejection of homosexuality, compelling queer Nigerians to employ various adaptive strategies, both online and offline, to assert their identities (Amodu, 2024). As a result, LGBTQ+ experiences in Nigeria and across Africa are shaped by a complex blend of legal, religious, social, cultural, and digital factors. These intersecting elements shape how individuals navigate identity and advocacy within challenging cultural and political environments. For example, police violence and abuse against LGBTQ+ people in Nigeria have risen

significantly (Giwa et al., 2020; Okanlawon, 2018). In addition, 32 African nations now criminalise consensual same-sex relationships for both genders, further exacerbating homophobia (Mubangizi, 2024). These social and legal constraints create a highly charged environment that affects not only LGBTQ+ individuals but also researchers, who may face physical risks and emotional challenges (Agyeman, 2023). The media also plays a significant role in shaping public attitudes, with Oyebanji (2023) highlighting how language is used to delegitimise and marginalise LGBTQ+ individuals, ultimately reinforcing anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice in Nigerian society.

The reviewed studies paint a complex picture of the interplay between religion, culture, government policy, and online discourse in shaping attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigeria. While challenges like deeply ingrained cultural norms, discriminatory legislation, and online hate speech persist, opportunities also emerge. Online spaces offer platforms for identity construction, advocacy, and challenging dominant narratives. However, further research is needed to explore diverse perspectives within religious communities, particularly the influential role of Pentecostal leaders in shaping public perception. Engaging with these diverse voices, understanding their theological interpretations, and fostering respectful dialogue are critical steps towards bridging divides and promoting inclusivity.

4. Theoretical orientation: appraisal

Appraisal is an approach that explores how people, particularly speakers and writers, use language to position themselves about the states of affairs and happenings they present (Martin & White, 2005). Discussions of voice often prioritise how meaning is constructed interpersonally, that is, in the context of interaction between individuals or groups. The focus highlights how people deliberately use language to position themselves, express their attitudes, and engage with others (Hood, 2012). The appraisal framework combines three interacting systems: engagement, attitude, and graduation.

The engagement subsystem in the appraisal framework comprises two domains: monogloss and heterogloss. Monogloss pertains to utterances that deliberately disregard the possibility of 'intertextual heterogeneity.' Despite this, monoglossic utterances still hold interpersonal significance, although they choose to overlook the diversity associated with other utterances. Heterogloss acknowledges that utterances interact with, acknowledge, respond to, anticipate, or challenge a range of alternative utterances. Heteroglossic options delve into the rhetorical aspects that alternative utterances could offer, such as attribution, hearsay, probability, appearance, and proclamation. Therefore, engagement in the appraisal framework encompasses how the writer's voice is used to convey their stance, evaluation, or emotional response towards the subject matter. In discourse, writers and speakers adopt voices in relation to the position they adopt and the stance they take to effectively convey their arguments. Consequently, the voice adopted by a writer or speaker in conveying information and ideas has implications for the meaning a speaker or hearer interprets. This choice of voice serves to highlight the author's perspectives, establish authority, and introduce the notion of self in the discourse. Moreover, the selection of voice not only demonstrates the writer's authority but also sets the expectation of the readers or hearers to find persuasion in what is being said (Charles, 2006; Hunston, 2000). A writer's choice of voice is a reflection of their stance towards the topic

and their appraisal of the information being presented. The chosen voice not only reflects the writer's level of caution and respect for established knowledge but also shapes a shared understanding with the reader, aiming to convince them of the validity of the presented argument.

The attitude subsystem is used to identify positive, negative, or neutral portrayals, and examines the underlying values reflected in the language used. Within the appraisal framework, attitude as a semantic division comprises three domains of feelings, depending on what is being appraised: affect, judgement, and appreciation. The affect domain is disclosed in a text through emotional reports from a speaker/writer. It signifies the emotional evaluation of issues, things, processes, or states of affairs, positively or negatively. A text can convey the attitudinal mode when there is a positive or negative view of either the speaker/writer or reports of emotional responses from third parties within the text. Just as human interactions conform to acceptable social norms, judgement in a text pertains to evaluations of behaviour against these norms. It involves the ethical assessment of human behaviour, which can be from moral or legal perspectives. Judgements are classified based on two parameters: social esteem and social sanction. Appreciation refers to evaluations made of semiotic and natural phenomena in a text, considering their value within a given field. It entails the aesthetic or functional evaluation of things, processes, or states of affairs (Martin, 2000). In essence, the attitude subsystem pertains to feelings, encompassing emotional reactions (affect), judgements of behaviour (judgement), and evaluations of things (appreciation) (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35). This perspective views a text as capable of eliciting various emotions by activating positive or negative viewpoints. As such, attitudinal meanings can manifest explicitly in texts, making it easier to discern whether they carry a positive or negative assessment.

5. Data and methods

The data relied on newspaper reports from reputable and widely circulated newspapers among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. Specifically, data was collected from the online databases of three prominent newspapers: *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, and *Daily Post*. Focused on the period between 2015 and 2022, the study compiled news reports capturing the statements and reactions of Pentecostal pastors regarding LGBTQ issues. In 2014, Nigeria passed a law criminalising same-sex relationships under President Goodluck Jonathan. This legislation fuelled further public debate on the issue, particularly amplifying viewpoints opposing homosexuality. The selected pastors whose statements were analysed were anonymised in the data and analysis to avoid infringing the principle of confidentiality and protection of the rights of the participants. These pastors lead some of Nigeria's largest Pentecostal denominations, and their pronouncements on social issues receive significant public attention. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the study employed a systematic approach to collect and analyse news reports, considering factors such as the pastors' stances, sentiments conveyed, and engagement with LGBTQ-related topics. The study then narrowed down the news reports based on the following criteria: (i) direct statements from the pastor on LGBTQ issues and (ii) the credibility and wide circulation of the news source. Through qualitative content analysis, the study aimed to analyse the voices in the pastors' discourse, evaluate their perspectives on LGBTQ+ issues, and understand the broader socio-cultural context influencing their viewpoints.

The study deploys appraisal framework to examine how Pentecostal discourse utilises emotions and affects to influence audiences by analysing instances of fear, guilt, shame, and compassion in shaping attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals and narratives. The study considers how these emotional appeals mobilise support for certain positions, which potentially contribute to discrimination and prejudice against LGBTQ individuals. The present study focuses on the 'attitude' subsystem of Appraisal as it provides relevant tools to delve into the evaluation of different discourse situations (Alba-Juez, 2018), such as that on Pentecostal voices and LGBTQ narratives in Nigeria.

6. Analysis

6.1. Religious perspectives on marriage and family values

The analyses highlight the strong adherence to traditional Christian teachings regarding marriage and family values, as expressed by Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria. These perspectives emphasise the importance of heterosexual marriage as ordained by God and rooted in biblical teachings. The invocation of divine authority and scripture underscores the belief that marriage between a man and a woman is fundamental to religious doctrine and reflects the moral integrity of the church community.

Text 1

(Pastor A) wrote: "Our God is **the God of distinction (+j; proclaim)**; He is **not** an author of confusion (**disclaim**). **A man** chooses to be confused when **he does not want to do the right thing (implicit judgement)** as ordered by God and so **pretends** that he does not know what God wants from him. When God creates, He does so with precision and purpose. 'He created lights for a purpose and darkness for another,' 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.' "God, in His **infinite wisdom**, created mankind as male and female, yet **some people** feel the need to change their gender (**-J**) as though He did not know what He was doing when He created them! "God does not make mistakes. Our God is **the perfect God of distinction (+J)**. (Vanguard, September 12, 2021. <https://shorturl.at/aj30U>)

Celebrating 54 years of marriage, Pastor A chooses to extol his wife and counsel the growing LGBTQ community in Nigeria. In Text 1, the language used by Pastor A to describe God's persona reflects a highly positive appraisal, with terms such as 'distinction,' 'infinite wisdom,' and 'perfect' attributing elevated social value to God. These evaluative phrases emphasise the superiority and moral authority of the Pentecostal perspective, positioning and proclaiming it as the ultimate truth. There is an implicit judgement towards 'man' in the text, suggesting disapproval of actions contrary to divine commandments, particularly highlighted through the evaluative verb 'pretends.' This reflects a negative stance towards behaviours perceived as deviating from religious norms, reinforcing the disapproval of LGBTQ individuals and their lifestyles. The text maintains a monoglossic stance by presenting the Pentecostal viewpoint as the sole valid truth, dismissing alternative perspectives on gender and sexuality. The use of phrases like 'feel the need' diminishes the agency of LGBTQ individuals and delegitimises their experiences, reinforcing the dominance of the Pentecostal narrative while silencing dissenting voices. Although the LGBTQ community is not explicitly positioned in the text, they are implicitly judged and associated with negative consequences. Representations such as 'A man' and

'Some people' depersonalise and generalise LGBTQ individuals, framing their identities and experiences in a negative light.

Text 2

(Pastor B) has said that anyone who dares to 'marry man and man' in his church will not make heaven. "Don't say I believe the whole Bible. Specifically what are the fundamental things you believe? Do you believe in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the second coming? You believe in rapture? You believe in marriage between man and woman? not between female and female, man and man?" "Till Jesus comes, anyone who dares to marry man and man in this church **will not make heaven**. No policy of any government under heaven can rule over my faith. What I believe I believe." "It is not your policy that brought me to what I believe. People fall too cheaply to things. We are defenders of the gospel. Male and female he created them. Reason, to replenish the earth". (*Daily Post*, March 29, 2022, <https://shorturl.at/ORzzB>)

There were concerns in response to plans to amend the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act meant to criminalise LGBTQ citizens. Queer individuals became more vocal in their opposition during this period. Pastor B also weighed in, attempting to leverage his religious beliefs to influence government decisions. The text employs evaluative phrases such as 'will not make heaven' and 'dare to marry man and man' to strongly express disapproval and imply a judgement of immorality towards same-sex marriage. These phrases suggest a sense of moral superiority held by Pentecostal voices over LGBTQ narratives, reinforcing a hierarchical stance on the issue. Additionally, terms like 'defenders of the gospel' further emphasise the perceived righteousness of the Pentecostal perspective, framing adherence to traditional Christian values as essential for maintaining the integrity of the church and upholding Biblical principles.

Pastor B's statement not only evaluates these values as crucial but also associates their adherence with the concepts of righteousness and fidelity to God's will. By equating same-sex marriage with not making heaven and defying God's will, the text conveys a deeply negative attitude towards LGBTQ narratives, fostering a climate of stern disapproval and condemnation. Pastor B positions himself as a staunch defender of traditional Christian values, showing his unwavering belief in the Biblical concept of marriage between a man and a woman. His statement evokes emotions like fear and exclusion for individuals who identify as LGBTQ or support same-sex marriage, reinforcing a narrative of moral absolutism. The language used conveys a sense of moral superiority and absolutism, reinforcing his rejection of same-sex marriage as contrary to his faith.

Text 3

Pastor C, while responding to the issue of same sex marriage in the Church, said that the word of God **remains unchanged** no matter the current situation the world finds itself. 'So, we stand **obedient** to Christ, and **submissive** to Christ, and we carry on **the words of Christ that says** it's a man and a woman that should be joined together in marriage until death do us part. That is where we have always stood, and that is where we still stand,' Pastor C said. (*Business Day*, December 24, 2023, <https://shorturl.at/o7GI2>)

In December 2023, the Catholic Pope approved blessings for same-sex couples, which seemed to divide opinions within the Church. This created misunderstandings among Christians, prompting Pastor C to provide his opinion on the issue. The text employs a heteroglossic strategy by invoking an alternative voice, attributed to 'the

words of Christ,' which strengthens the assertion that the opinion expressed is not solely that of Pastor C but is rooted in divine authority. By attributing the stance to Christ, the text seeks to lend credibility and infallibility to the claim, thereby reinforcing the Pentecostal perspective on same-sex marriage as being in alignment with divine will. Furthermore, the text utilises affectual lexis such as 'obedient' and 'submissive,' coupled with the plural pronoun 'we,' to draw other unnamed participants of the church into the conversation. This collective language creates a sense of solidarity and unity among church members, contrasting with the LGBTQ communities. The use of 'we' suggests that the disagreement on LGBTQ issues is not merely personal but reflects the broader stance of the church community. Moreover, by reiterating adherence to traditional Christian teachings, the text implies an appreciation for the moral integrity of the church. The invocation of obedience and submission to the word of God serves to reinforce the moral superiority of the Pentecostal voices, positioning them as defenders of divine truth and righteousness. This reinforces the dichotomy between the perceived moral righteousness of the church and the perceived moral deviance of LGBTQ individuals, thereby reinforcing the stance on the issue.

6.2. Consequences of sexual immorality in religious doctrine

Pentecostal pastors express a perspective on LGBTQ issues, particularly concerning same-sex relationships, emphasising the belief in divine judgement and the eternal consequences of actions deemed sexually immoral according to their religious doctrine.

Text 4

Pastor D says homosexuals and lesbians do not have a place in the kingdom of God. According to her, the sins of homosexuality and lesbianism are detestable sins clearly written in both the old and new testament of the Holy Bible. She warned that no matter the pressure of modernization, westernization, or civilization, the sins of homosexuality and lesbianism are detestable sins that brings forth the wrath and anger of God. (*Daily Post*, October 31, 2021, <https://rb.gy/o1ty93>)

Pastor D engages directly with the topic of homosexuality and lesbianism, presenting a vivid perspective on the matter at a singles' conference. She asserts that individuals who identify as homosexuals and lesbians do not have a place in the kingdom of God, positioning her discourse within a religious framework. There is a religious assessment in the text through explicit negative judgement. By framing homosexuality and lesbianism as sins, the text aligns with traditional religious teachings that often associate sexual immorality with divine punishment and spiritual consequences. The text conveys a strong negative attitude towards homosexuality and lesbianism, characterised by terms such as 'detestable sins' and 'wrath and anger of God.' These evaluative expressions indicate Pastor D's moral condemnation of these sexual orientations, framing them as morally reprehensible and deserving of divine punishment. The use of phrases like 'detestable sins' evokes a sense of disgust and moral outrage, reinforcing the severity of her stance.

6.3. Natural variability of sexuality and gender roles

There is the presentation of the binary notions of gender and marriage between a man and a woman, which aligns with traditional interpretations of biblical teachings. This binary perspective emphasises the idea that there are only two genders, male and female, and that marriage should only occur between a man and a woman.

Text 5

Pastor A has condemned (**Judgement**) the recent United States Supreme Court ruling supporting same-sex marriages across the country as **satanic and demonic**. According to him, the recent national approval given by the apex court on same-sex marriage in the US is **from the pit of hell**. He said it is unfortunate that America who started in the spirit is now living in the flesh. 'It shows the **end of time** and **level of degeneration**. The same-sex marriage is from the pit of hell and a backsliding victory for America.' He challenged Africa to rise against any ungodly pressure from the West to legalise same-sex marriage, as it is **against nature** and **unAfrican**. (**Appreciation: social value**) (*The Nation*, July 12, 2015, <https://shorturl.at/zXytM>)

In 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled in support of same-sex marriage. Sensing the influence this could have on Nigeria, Pastor A strongly condemned the ruling. Text 5 presents a strong judgement from Pastor A, condemning the United States Supreme Court ruling supporting same-sex marriages as 'satanic and demonic.' This evaluative language conveys an explicit negative attitude towards same-sex marriage, positioning it as morally reprehensible and against divine principles (Judgement). The use of terms like 'satanic' and 'demonic' carries heavy negative connotations, reinforcing the disapproval of same-sex marriage within the Pentecostal perspective. The text also appreciates the social value of upholding traditional religious and cultural values, as reflected in Pastor A's call for Africa to resist pressure from the West to legalise same-sex marriage. This appreciation underscores the importance placed on preserving religious and cultural norms, framing them as essential aspects of societal identity and moral integrity (Appreciation: social value). Furthermore, Pastor A's positioning as a defender of religious and cultural values aligns with the Pentecostal voice, implicitly portraying it in a positive light. This positioning contrasts with the negative portrayal of the LGBTQ+ narrative, which is condemned as 'unAfrican' and a sign of moral degeneration. The text employs contracting strategies to dismiss the LGBTQ+ narrative, utilising strong negative language and associating it with evil and moral decline.

Text 6

Pastor A has openly condemned homosexuality, saying it is an immoral act and against the will of God. The Pastor who made his position known via a Facebook post said he was in a particular country and **the misconception (disclaim)** was that he hates Homosexuals. He however said that he does not hate any human being, but that it was wrong for a man to be married to a fellow man instead of the normal practice of man and woman as instituted by God. Pastor A said that the problem is that the natural order of procreation instituted by God may be expunged if the practice continues. (*Daily Post*, May 5, 2015, *Daily Post*, May 5, 2015, <https://rb.gy/onits4>)

Amid accusations of hatred for homosexuals, Pastor A clarified that he loves all people but does not accept homosexual acts, distinguishing between actions and individuals. Text 6 presents a clear judgement from Pastor A, openly condemning homosexuality as 'an immoral act' and against the will of God (Judgement). This negative evaluation of homosexuality

implies a strong disapproval and positions it as morally wrong and contrary to divine principles. The use of terms like 'immoral' and 'against natural order' portrays heavy negative connotations, reinforcing the disapproval of homosexuality within the Pentecostal perspective. While Pastor A clarifies that he does not hate individuals, the text implicitly portrays his stance as positive by emphasising his lack of hatred (Appreciation). Conversely, the LGBTQ+ narrative (homosexuality) is heavily judged negatively, implying a lower social value placed on homosexuality compared to heterosexuality. It hints at an underlying concern about the potential consequences of homosexuality. Additionally, the text employs a disclaimer to inter-subjectively position the speaker against a supposed erroneous notion, clarifying Pastor Adeboye's stance on homosexuality (Positioning). This disclaimer serves to provide a divergent view on homosexuality and provide a clearer perspective from the Pentecostal standpoint. It condemns homosexuality, portraying it as an immoral act and explicitly stating that it contradicts and violates the will of God. This portrayal reflects a clear judgement on LGBTQ+ narratives, employing evaluative language to express disapproval and moral judgement. Phrases such as 'condemned homosexuality,' 'immoral act,' and 'against the will of God' indicate a strong stance against LGBTQ+ identities and relationships. Additionally, the text emphasises the social worth of heterosexual marriage, framing it as the norm established by God and suggesting that deviating from this norm is detrimental to the natural order of procreation.

Text 7

'He created lights for a purpose and darkness for another,' he charged. **He created the day for work and the night to rest.** If for any reason we do not rest in one night, the following day should compensate for the loss of rest. Failure to observe rest produces stress, sickness and ultimately death. **(Social value)** 'Little wonder life expectancy in the last 50 years has been on the decline. Achievements that should **normally** have taken 40 years to accomplish are realized in fewer than 30, at the price of dying earlier,' he said. (*Vanguard*, September 12, 2021, <https://shorturl.at/dDQuL>)

Text 7 reflects a binary understanding of gender and sexuality by emphasising traditional, heteronormative perspectives on these aspects of human identity. This binary understanding typically views gender as strictly binary, with individuals categorised as either male or female, based on biological sex characteristics. Similarly, sexuality is often understood within a binary framework, where heterosexuality is considered the norm and deviations from this norm are seen as aberrant or unnatural. The metaphor of 'lights' and 'darkness' is commonly used to symbolise contrasting elements, with 'lights' often associated with positivity, enlightenment, or goodness, while 'darkness' is associated with negativity, ignorance, or evil. In this context, the text refers to a binary division between two distinct purposes or roles, where one relies on the other for productivity or heteronormative relationships. This implies that deviations from heterosexual norms are unnatural or contrary to the intended order of creation, thus reinforcing traditional interpretations of religious teachings on marriage and family values.

Text 7 suggests a predetermined and established order within the natural world, where daytime is for work and nighttime is for rest. This points to the concept of orderliness of the world as governed by God. The statement 'He created the day for work and the night to rest' carries an evaluation of ethical value, suggesting a moral dimension to the natural order of day and night. This evaluation implies that adhering to this natural order is not

just a matter of practicality but also of ethical importance, reinforcing traditional values associated with work and rest. The subsequent statement highlights the social value attributed to the concept of rest, suggesting that failure to observe rest leads to negative consequences such as 'stress, sickness, and ultimately death.' This evaluation underscores the importance of societal norms surrounding rest and its impact on individual well-being, framing rest as a fundamental aspect of maintaining health and longevity (social value). The mention of declining life expectancy in the last 50 years expresses disappointment and concern regarding societal trends. The language used suggests a negative appraisal of the situation, indicating that achievements are being realised at the expense of health and longevity. This evaluation could be implicitly linked to the disapproval of the LGBTQ+ narrative, as the decline in life expectancy may be perceived as a consequence of societal shifts away from traditional values and norms.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The analysis of the texts reveals a staunch adherence to traditional Christian teachings regarding marriage, family values, and sexual morality among Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria. These perspectives emphasise the belief in divine authority and scriptural teachings as the foundation for understanding and evaluating LGBTQ issues. The Pentecostal voices express strong disapproval and condemnation towards same-sex relationships, positioning them as immoral acts contrary to God's will and natural order. This judgement is reinforced through evaluative language, such as 'satanic,' 'demonic,' 'immoral,' and 'against the will of God,' which carry negative connotations and stance on the issue. This analysis underscores the unwavering commitment of religious institutions, especially Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria to traditional Christian interpretations regarding marriage and family values. At the core of their perspective is the firm belief in heterosexual marriage as the divine order established by God and firmly rooted in biblical teachings. This viewpoint is deeply entrenched in a binary understanding of gender, where individuals are categorised strictly as either male or female, and sexuality, where heterosexuality is upheld as the normative standard.

Central to the expression of this perspective is the invocation of divine authority and scripture, serving to justify and legitimise their stance on LGBTQ+ issues. By appealing to the word of God, Pentecostal pastors seek to underscore the infallibility and moral superiority of their position, positioning themselves as faithful interpreters of divine truth. This invocation of divine authority not only reinforces the perceived righteousness of their perspective but also serves to delegitimise alternative interpretations and dissenting voices. Moreover, the language employed by Pentecostal pastors is laden with evaluative expressions that convey strong disapproval and moral condemnation towards LGBTQ+ narratives. Terms such as 'immoral,' 'unnatural,' and 'against God's will' are used to stigmatise same-sex relationships and LGBTQ+ identities, portraying them as deviant and sinful. This evaluative language serves to reinforce the monoglossic nature of their discourse, where the Pentecostal perspective is presented as the sole truth, while alternative interpretations are dismissed or disregarded.

The perspectives of Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria on LGBTQ narratives underscore a deep-seated belief in aligning human rights with foundational religious principles. While acknowledging the importance of recognising individuals' desires and aspirations, the pastors emphasise the significance of maintaining alignment with the belief systems that

shape human existence. Humanity is diverse and encompasses individuals with various backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. While recognising these differences strengthens our understanding and fosters inclusive societies, we should also respect the unique cultural contexts that make up our diverse world and communities. The socio-cultural formation of African societies often places a significant emphasis on procreation as a fundamental aspect of cultural continuity and family lineage. Within many African communities, the ability to bear children is not only valued for its contribution to population growth but also for its role in sustaining family structures, passing down traditions, and ensuring the welfare of the community. While procreation holds cultural significance, human sexuality encompasses a broad spectrum of experiences, desires, and expressions that extend beyond reproduction alone. Human sexuality is deeply intertwined with various social, spiritual, and relational dimensions. It encompasses notions of intimacy, companionship, and emotional fulfilment within the context of marriage, social life, and family life. Rather than imposing Western ideologies, there is a need for a nuanced approach that recognises and preserves our cultural diversity. The Pentecostal pastors' stances agree with the sub-Saharan legislation against LGBTQ+ communities (Mkhize & Mthembu, 2023), and confirm Murray and Roscoe's (1998) argument about the stance of African societies. However, since studies (like Sowe et al., 2017) have confirmed that members, especially Christian affiliates of LGBTQ suffer mental health when unfeelingly attacked by heterosexists, Pentecostal pastors may be more subtle in taking their stances to accommodate and win rather than losing them completely.

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