

Why did colonial authorities seek to regulate "deviant" sexualities?

Sexuality is a very broad category that does not have strict rules to how you should act or feel in most first world countries of this time. There have been many struggles for people to be able to live their lives the way they want to without having to stick to societal norms that are taught throughout society. Many people do not fit into the same category as what they were being led to believe, that they have to marry someone of the opposite sex and play their role depending on the gender they were born.

A human's sexuality is very dynamic and includes their physical, emotional, and romantic attraction, as well as their sexual identity and behaviours. A person's sexuality is usually categorized into the LGBTQ+ community if they do not identify with the sexuality they were taught which is usually being straight and cisgendered. The LGBTQ+ community allow people to express themselves in a way that is freeing and against judgment. It is also a way for people to recognize that they are not alone and to recognize that they were not born wrong even though they were taught that they are. Since this community challenges people's original concept of how to feel and act, this may cause people to criticise and want to silence these people and their ideas.

The belief that people cannot have different sexualities is a relatively new ideology when compared to older civilisations. In ancient Greek, the people did not have categories for who someone would be romantically or sexually involved with, they also did not prohibit sleeping with children. They had relationships which was referred to as pederasty which was when a pubescent man would enter into a relation with a young boy until he grew up.¹ During this time it was not looked down upon and was widely accepted as a form of relationship. In modern times, these types of relationships are heavily frowned upon, not for the genders of the people involved but for the ages. Since the ancient Greeks did not believe in Christianity, they did not have the same values as people in current times when discussing homosexuality. There were also many stories involving the Greek Gods where they would change their sex which would represent intersex.² They had also believed that sex and gender were a spectrum and that depending on the amount of certain chemicals you got it would make you more boyish or girlish.³ The Greeks did not understand gender and sex the same way people of the present times do which makes it more challenging to understand their ideals, but it is clear that they do support different sexualities.

Since wearing makeup is normally reserved for women, it is usually uncommon to find people who identify as males wearing it. When they do apply makeup, it is normally frowned upon for appearing too feminine. This was not the case in ancient Egypt where it was common and ideal for both men and women to wear makeup, such as eyeliner.⁴ Relationships with two men was also a common thing that occurred in this time, as long as the men took an active role in the relationship since the passive role was for the woman who were inferior to men.⁵ This shows that while Ancient Egypt held similar beliefs referring to gender compared to now, their beliefs of sexuality were very different. Their belief was that if you follow your gender role, then your sexuality. One god that the Ancient Egyptians believed

¹ Brinkhof, Tim. "How the Ancient Greeks Viewed Pederasty and Homosexuality." *Big Think*, 13 Jan. 2023.

² Rea, Sabeau. "LGBTIME Machine: Ancient Greece: National Organization for Women." *NOW*, National Organization for Women, 9 May 2017.

³ Rea, Sabeau. "LGBTIME Machine: Ancient Greece: National Organization for Women."

⁴ "Queerness in Ancient Egypt." *ÖAW*, Austrian Academy of Sciences, 17 July 2023

⁵ "Queerness in Ancient Egypt."

in was believed to be both a man and a woman who reproduced asexually to make other gods. This in modern day would be a representation of nonbinary people and would lead scholars to assume that it was not uncommon to see people identify as multiple genders or no genders.

Before Europeans came and colonized the Americas, there were indigenous tribes who lives there and had their own beliefs and ways of life. They had this concept within their tribes known as two-spirit, meaning that one individual carries two spirits with them.⁶ These individuals were honoured within the tribes and were thought to have been gifted. They were often healers or weavers and were also known to be able to see life through a male and a female lens. They were not considered male or female, but a third category, in some cases a fourth category when dividing the male and female two spirited individuals.⁷ There are many differences between each tribe across, but in most cases these individuals were well respected and filled a very specific role among the tribes. Indigenous people did not believe in the strict gender rules that were brought by European colonizers and believed that there were roles to perform by those who wished. The Native people were very open to people dressing like the opposite gender and even had terminology such as Napêw iskwêwisêhot, meaning a man who dresses as a woman, or even Înahpîkasoht, which means a woman who dresses, lives, or is accepted as a man. Their ideologies did not align with those that the Europeans had brought over later on and this shows that it was highly accepted before their arrival.

Many people who are wish to regulate these deviant sexualities use the bible as an example for why it is wrong that they choose to not follow the norm. There has been many debates on whether the bible states it is against homosexuality or not. They use the passage “Men shall not lay with males as with women, for it is an abomination,”⁸ for their reasoning and claim that God is against homosexuality. Since many colonial authorities are Christian, they thoroughly believe that homosexuality is wrong and will claim that the Bible stated it. There are many other bible verses that have been used to justify their actions, such as “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,”⁹ which describes what Christians would refer to as a normal marriage or relationship. Since a lot of colonialism is done in countries where Christianity did not exist before, they people of that country are taught how to behave like a proper Christian and the authorities can essentially decide what they feel is the correct way of living. These figures of authority believe that everyone should think the same way that they do and that people should be punished for not agreeing with them. Many people claim that these have been mistranslations from the original Hebrew script, but most authoritative figures refuse to change their opinions since it is easier to believe in something than it is to change your mind.

Many countries, before Europeans arrived, had no problems with people having different sexualities and embracing their differences. Once the Europeans had arrived things changed since Europeans were not used to living with so much sexual promiscuity. Homosexuality was seen as an insult to the crown and was an unspeakable sin that should not be normalized.¹⁰ The Europeans had used violence and force in order to make the

⁶ Thurston, Isabella. “The History of Two-Spirit Folks.” *The Indigenous Foundation*, The Indigenous Foundation, 26 July 2022.

⁷ “Two-Spirit.” *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health*, Indian Health Service, 2015.

⁸ Lev. 18:22

⁹ Gen. 2:24

¹⁰ Azevedo, Anna, and Luiz Mott. “The Colonial Roots of Homophobia.” *The Colonial Roots of Homophobia*, Zeitgeist- The Cultural Magazine of the Goethe-Institut, July 2021.

people they were colonising stop having relationships with those of the same sex and to follow their ideologies which erased the freedom that they had experiences before. In Brazil, if someone was caught performing an act of sodomy they were charged for the 'sin of sodomy' and exiled or had to do forced labour.¹¹ Eventually in 1821 when Brazil had gained their independence sodomy was no longer considered a criminal offence, but there were new challenges that people in the LGBTQ+ community faced. Hate speech had started to become a very popular thing and still is, as well as murder and suicide rates climbing within the LGBTQ+ community. Even when the authorities do not consider it illegal anymore, people have become so stuck in their ways and it becomes very difficult to change someone's mind.

This importation of western laws also affected many places in Africa. When the Europeans came and colonised Africa, they brought about their own beliefs and laws about sodomy and how it is a sin, which was not a law that existed there previously. They also removed any form of gay liberation and brought over anti-gay sentiments which is a very Western idea.¹² There were many tribes before colonisation that did not separate the genders like in modern time, including one tribe from Uganda known as the Ganda or Baganda tribe who would refer to the women in the royal clan with masculine titles and would potentially not have to perform female duties.¹³ There was also evidence that suggests same-sex relationships were around before colonisation in Africa.¹⁴ Colonisation effectively erased Africa's history and instead implemented a Western legal system which included making sodomy illegal, thus imposing a Christian perspective in a non-Christian continent. This act on Africa still have negative effects today and has only turned Africa into a more homophobic place than it ever was, now with more evangelicalist this problem has only gotten worse.

As with other continents that have been affected by the European colonization, Asia is not an exception. They were told by colonists that sodomy and homosexuality was a sin and had to reimagine their legal system. Many countries affected by this, like in Bangladesh, chose to ignore their LGBTQ+ community so the government would not have to solve any issues that they brought up.¹⁵ This issue could only be resolved with political and global pressure put on the government to force them to pay attention to that part of their population, but the issue faced here is if too much pressure is applied then the leaders may align themselves even further against the LGBTQ+ community than before.¹⁶ When discussing these issues at a conference Joke Swiebel, a dutch politician, remarked how "LGBT rights have become a key indicator of a global fight between two different views of the world: one based on individual freedom [...] and respect for diversity, and one based on totalitarianism, nationalism, and religious fanaticism,"¹⁷ which essentially supports the view that colonial authorities feel the need to regulate sexualities as a way to get and hold control over the people they trying to colonize.

Colonisation has had massive effects on nearly every continent and every country it had affected. Since most of the places the Europeans were travelling to were not Christian

¹¹ Azevedo, Anna, and Luiz Mott. "The Colonial Roots of Homophobia."

¹² Pishdadian, Erica. "Anti-LGBT Sentiment in Africa and Asia: A Legacy of Colonialism?: News." *The Link*, The Link, 7 Oct. 2014.

¹³ Kalende, Val. "Africa: Homophobia Is a Legacy of Colonialism." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 30 Apr. 2014.

¹⁴ Kalende, Val. "Africa: Homophobia Is a Legacy of Colonialism."

¹⁵ Pishdadian, Erica. "Anti-LGBT Sentiment in Africa and Asia: A Legacy of Colonialism?: News."

¹⁶ Pishdadian, Erica. "Anti-LGBT Sentiment in Africa and Asia: A Legacy of Colonialism?: News."

¹⁷ Pishdadian, Erica. "Anti-LGBT Sentiment in Africa and Asia: A Legacy of Colonialism?: News."

they had brought over entirely new ideologies which were sometimes the complete opposite of the one already existent in that nation. The colonised nation did not have much of a choice in if they wanted to adopt these new ideologies since the Europeans decided to use force and violence in order to make them believe it. The Christians had a very ego-centric mindset when it came to the correct thing to believe and whether or not they are right is not something that's provable, but it is obvious that their methods were not correct or very often humane. They wanted to have full control over the nations they colonised because they believed that they had discovered them and the only option would be to 'civilise' the people who were there. One way to civilise someone according to Europeans was to ensure that they entered into marriages with someone of the opposite sex and only did not have any romantic or sexual encounters with those of the same sex.

The methods that the Europeans used to colonise nations and suppress any deviant sexualities has caused a lot of strife for those apart of the LGBTQ+ community. Having a different sexuality than the one someone is taught they should have is a big struggle, especially for young adults and children, but even grown adults struggle with fitting in and avoiding hate crimes or even death. Control had always been the goal for those who colonise people and controlling one's sexuality is just another method of gaining control.

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