

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF GAY RIGHTS AND NIGERIA-US DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

Gay marriage or same sex marriage is a union that allows any two consenting individuals of the same biological sex to form an intimate relationship. The issue of same sex marriage is a controversial discourse in international relations today. The various dimensions of the discourses on the subject of gay marriage show a paradigm shift in the concept of marriage from the traditional and orthodox conception of a male- female consensual relationship to the coming together of any two individuals of any sex - even of the same sex. Using secondary data, analysed through textual and descriptive methods, the paper demonstrates that the politics of gay marriage diplomacy reveals the clash between western civilization, globalization, sovereignty, territorial integrity of states, human right and traditional societal beliefs or norms. Indeed, this was epitomized in the recent strain in Nigeria-U.S diplomatic relations. The paper further observes that over an issue of national concern – same sex marriage - the multicultural dimension of the Nigerian state was relegated to the background and new boundaries of loyalty that defiled ethnic sentiments and religious inclinations surfaced in the country amongst the various religious and ethnic groups. It thus, recommends that although Nigeria's stance on the issue of gay diplomacy not only shook the fabric of her nationhood and caused a diplomatic faceoff between the country and U.S, it is an opportunity for Nigeria to reappraise the nature of her diplomatic relations with the US.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Gay Marriage, Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Law, Nigeria-US Relations, Foreign Policy.

1. Introduction

Nigeria made Africa the centrepiece of her foreign policy and has overtime played a key role in African politics. To accomplish its foreign policy mandate, Nigeria has received a considerable amount of assistance from the United States (Ploch, 2013; Omach, 2000). Despite collaborations in a wide range of areas such as trade, security, democracy, human rights, health to mention just a few, the relationship between the two countries has experienced challenges at various points in time arising from clashes in the pursuit of vital domestic interests (Aka, 2002: 225-280; Ayam, 2008: 117-132). A few factors that engendered the strains in Nigeria-US relations include the violation of human rights during the military dictatorships of General Abacha and General Babangida, kidnapping and abductions of expatriates in the Niger Delta, the acts of the terrorist group Boko Haram and attempted suicide bombings, and most recently, the clash of ideology over gay marriage (*Osaretin & Ajebon, 2012*).

It is instructive that countries of the world are split into two opposing blocs over the acceptance of gay rights, with most of the countries of the global North accepting and canvassing for worldwide recognition of gay rights while a larger portion of the countries in Africa align themselves to the position that gay rights should not be condoned at all. According to Amnesty international (n.d.), homosexuality is illegal in 38 of 54 African countries. African countries have a wide range of punishments for homosexuality. Nigeria, being one of the countries that criminalise gay marriage upholds a stance rooted in African sexual ethics as well as religious beliefs that marriage is a union of a man and a woman; anything otherwise is unacceptable. This out rightly contradicts the position of the US on gay marriage. This ideological difference about the institution of marriage has instigated some form of diplomatic faceoff in the US–Nigeria relations.

Secondary data obtained from relevant institutional reports and briefings, journals, textbooks, seminar papers, magazines, internet materials were used for this research work. The secondary data were analysed through textual and descriptive techniques. The structure of the paper covers the introduction, the definition of concepts, the dynamics of Nigeria-U.S. relations; Nigeria’s anti-Gay Law of 2014 and reactions to the Nigeria’s same-sex marriage (prohibition) law, African perception on same sex marriage, impacts of Nigeria’s stance on gay marriage on Nigeria-US diplomatic ties, recommendations and conclusion.

2. Conceptual Discourse

In this section, concepts germane to this paper are discussed. These concepts are diplomacy and same-sex marriage.

(i) Diplomacy

Diplomacy has often been confused with foreign policy. Foreign policy is the substance of foreign relations. The foreign policy of a state represents the goals and the objectives to be pursued in the international system as it relates with other states. According to Holsti (1967), foreign policy is the actions of a state towards the external environment and the conditions-usually domestic under which such actions are formulated (cited in Folarin, 2014:43). To be able to understand what diplomacy is, it is essential to examine some of its definitions. While some of the definitions express the presence of some goals to be pursued, others communicate how the goals should be pursued and attained.

According to Wright (1955:158), diplomacy refers to the employment of tact, shrewdness and skill in any negotiation or transaction. This stipulates that for foreign policy to be attained, the art of negotiation is imperative. This is because negotiation helps to drive the achievement of highest group objectives at minimum costs within the international terrain (cited in Chandra & Singh, 2009:113). On his part, Panikkar (1956:71) opines that diplomacy is an art of forwarding one's interest in relations to other countries.

Satow (1917) brilliantly gives an interpretation of diplomacy that explains how interest can be pursued so that the desired national interest can be achieved. In this light, Satow (1917) described diplomacy as the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states by peaceful means (as cited in Oshioluemoh, 2013). Islam (2005:57) defines diplomacy as the instrument through which decisions and goals are pursued and implemented. For Barston (2006:1), diplomacy refers to the conduct of international relations through the intercession of professional diplomats with regard to issues of peace-making, trade, war, economics, culture, environment, human rights etc. Ikedinma (2008) views diplomacy as the totality of the strategies through which an independent state relates to other independent states and other international organizations in order to achieve its national interests.

From the definitions above, it is evident that diplomacy has potentials for the management of international-governmental affairs because it is one of the instruments employed by nations to promote their national interest through their representatives. In other words, diplomacy can be said to be the projection and pursuit of interests carried out by act of negotiation with another party or more, whether they are state actors or non state actors. According to Islam (2005: 56-71) negotiation is not an isolated instrument in itself, however negotiation employs persuasion and reconciliation as its important techniques.

More so, from the above, it is clear that a major essence of diplomacy is to build and maintain position and beneficial relations. In the same vein, Ikedinma (2008) observes that diplomacy concerns itself with reducing friction or oiling the wheels of bilateral or multilateral relations. It is imperative to mention at this juncture that diplomacy can be conducted on a bilateral or multilateral platforms or relations. Bilateral diplomatic relations occurs between two states while the multilateral diplomatic contact requires more than two states.

(ii) Same Sex Marriage

According to Allen (2006: 949-980), “marriage is an institution that is made up of complex set of personal values, social norms, religious customs, and legal constraints that regulate a particular intimate human relation over a life span”. Marriage is the coming together of two constituent part or “other halves,” – a man and a woman. For Obidimma & Obidimma (2013:42-49), the original definition of marriage is the coming together of a man and a woman that is, members of different sex to form a voluntary union. According to Gagnon (2004), the idea of marriage found in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures unites male and female into an integrated sexual whole. Marriage requires the two sexes to reconstitute a sexual whole. The sexual merger of maleness and femaleness is a very crucial framework of marriage. In other words, there is more to marriage than intimacy and the sharing of one’s life with another person.

Same sex marriage is the marriage between two persons of the same gender identity that is, a marriage that exists between two persons of the same biological sex (Duhan, 2014:8-11). The marriage could be between two males or between two females, referred to as ‘gay marriages’ and ‘lesbian’ marriage respectively. Thus, same sex marriage comes into existence when two individuals of the same sex take solemn vows to become married. However, the term “gay marriage” has become the general term use to define marriage between same sexes whether between males or females. There are various names same sex marriage is called which include homosexual marriage, gay marriage, and gender neutral marriage (Obidimma & Obidimma, 2013:42-48).

According to Vitiello (2008), gay marriage connotes the extension of the traditional or orthodox form of legal monogamous marriage to include homosexuals (as cited in Obidinma & Obidinma, 2014:42-49). From the forth going, same sex marriage contradicts the belief of the orthodox concept of marriage which conceives it as a relationship between a man and a woman that is two persons of opposite sex (Ikpang, 2012:31-43). Same sex marriage is hence a paradigm shift from the original or traditional meaning of what marriage stipulates.

3. The Dynamics of Nigeria-US Relations

The independence of Nigeria from Britain marked the former's foray into the international system and the conferment of the right to carry out diplomatic relations with other countries of the world. According to Ayam (2008:117-132), the first diplomatic contact Nigeria had with the US was at Nigeria's independence ceremony on October 1, 1960 where the U.S. President, Eisenhower was represented by Nelson Rockefeller, the then governor of New York.

During the Cold War era, US relations with Nigeria focused on containing the spread of communism, strengthening of democracy, provision of aids and the strengthening of bilateral economic ties (Ayam, 2008:117-132). After Nigeria's independence, Nigeria emerged as a major actor in African politics. In line with her foreign policy objectives, Nigeria mediated disputes in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Angola, drove economic growth via the platform of the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) and the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now African Union, contributed to the eradication of racism and the rise of democratisation in South Africa, and promoted peace and stability in other parts of Africa.

These actions of Nigeria in Africa changed the nature of Nigeria-U.S. relations after the Cold War. Apart from receiving helps from the US to address continental issues, Nigeria also received US aids to address a number of internal challenges such as political turmoil, economic crises, human right violations, ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption and leadership ineptitude, low level of human development, illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and epidemics such as polio, cholera, malaria, HIV-Aids etc (Ploch, 2013).

Nigeria and the US have cherished and strengthened their bilateral relations over decades. Specifically, in 2010 both countries established a Bi-National Commission to manage bilateral relations and ensure the advancement of stronger ties between them in mutual areas which are good governance, transparency, and integrity; energy and investment; security and food security which have kicked off with proofs of cooperation (Bureau of African Affairs, 2013; Oladele, 2011). Economically, Nigeria is an important trading partner of the U.S. She is one of the top six suppliers of crude oil to the U.S., while on the other hand American companies such as Shell, ExxonMobil, and Chevron have enormous investments in Nigeria's oil industry (Omach, 2000). More so, Nigeria provides the largest market for US goods in Africa due to her large population size.

Security wise, Nigeria and the US have increased collaboration. The military/security alliances include Africa Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) aimed at providing military training for effective peacekeeping missions through the State Department's African Contingency Operations Training

and Assistance (ACOTA) program and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) aimed at improving civil military relations (Omach, 2000). In line with the above, there is also a bilateral counter-terrorism pact between the US and Nigeria. The abortive airliner bombing attempt by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian in December 2009 and the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group are some of the reasons that have intensified the need for security caution.

For instance, the Nigerian government collaborated with the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Aviation Administration and the International Civil Aviation Organization to strengthen its security systems. In addition, Nigeria is a member of State Department's Trans Sahara Counter-terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) which is a U.S. effort to enhance regional security. TSCTP provides counter-IED and civil-military operations training to the Nigerian military, and crisis management and border security training to Nigerian law enforcement agencies (US Department of State, 2014).

Concerning humanitarian co-operations, Nigeria has been a key recipient of U.S. foreign aid. For instance, the USAID collaborated with Chevron to improve agriculture in the Niger Delta while in some Northern states, USAID executed programs on education, health, peace and governance. Nigeria is the key country that is to benefit from the U.S. Presidents' Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Presidents' Malaria Initiative (PMI) as well as Feed the Future (FTF), which is an agricultural program for Nigerian farmers. Additionally, the U.S. Africa Command collaborated with the U.S. Center for Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance Medicine (CDHAM) to organise training exercise aimed at protecting Nigerians from natural disasters as well as offer other necessary assistance when needed (Owolabi, 2013).

Although Nigeria has been an essential actor in both regional and international affairs since independence, she has depended so much on aids from America to solve her problems and run her economy. Nigeria's relations with the US have been more of dependence (Ate, 1987). This is a paradox because interferences in her domestic politics have not been favourable for her foreign policy and diplomatic interactions with the U.S or other states.

4. Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Law of 2014 and Reactions Opposing the Law

This section discusses the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Law of 2014 and the reactions it generated in the public and private spheres.

4.1 Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Law of 2014

The Anti-Gay Law of 2014 is not the first of its kind that has been proposed in Nigeria. During the International Conference on HIV/AIDS (ICASA) in 2005, there were agitations for same-sex marriage. Following these protests, the Federal Executive Council of Nigeria in 2006, proposed a same-sex marriage prohibition bill to the National Assembly for approval into law (Ikpechukwu 2013). The purpose of the bill was to maintain the acceptable social norm of heterosexual relationships and make laws to punish homosexuality. The punishment for gay lovers and any one that opens a gay club, organization or societies was a five-year prison term. Despite President Obasanjo's defence of the 2006 prohibition bill stating that homosexuality is 'unnatural, ungodly, and un-African', yet the bill was not passed (Obasanjo, 2006 cited in Ajibade, 2014).

Also, in 2008 the same sex marriage prohibition bill was tabled for discussion at the National Assembly in January 2009. The content of the bill was similar to that of 2006. The bill still supported marriage as a relationship between two adults of opposite sex. Likewise, it also punished gay sex/marriage partners but with a shorter term of imprisonment of three years. On March 11, 2009, there was also a public hearing on the matter. However, these deliberations did not yield support for the bill to be passed into law (Ajibade, 2014).

Sessou (2013) cited in Obidinma & Obidinma (2013:42-49) opined that public outcry against gay practice in Nigeria instigated a re-visit of the issue of gay practice in 2011. On 29 November 2011, the senate of Nigeria passed the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) bill. The same bill was passed by the House of Representatives of Nigeria on July 2, 2013. In the second half of 2013 the bill was also referred to a Conference in the Senate to harmonise minor differences in the language between the Senate bill and that of the House of Representatives. By December same year, the harmonization was completed and was signed by the President on 7 January 2014 (Ajibade, 2014).

The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Law of 2014 contains punitive measures for those that are supporters of same sex marriage and those that would enter same sex marriage. The punishment attracts a sentence of up to 14 years imprisonment and also criminalises the formation, operation and supports for gay clubs, societies and organizations with sentences of up to 10 years imprisonment (Ikpechukwu, 2013; Onuche, 2013:91-98).

4.2 Reactions to the Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Law

The conditions and terms of the bill spurred mixed reactions from various bodies such as international organizations like the UN and EU, Non-Governmental Organizations, international health community, human rights

activists and countries such as Canada, US and Britain amongst others (*Osaretin & Ajebon, 2012*). Pressures were also mounted by Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora through the mass media, social media, scholarly writings and formal letters to the President (European Parliament, 2013; Dimitrina, 2014). The international responses to the same-sex prohibition act are numerous, however; a few shall be noted here.

John Kerry, the US Secretary of States called the Act a “dangerous restriction on freedoms”. William Hague, the UK Foreign Secretary opined that ‘the Act is a disappointment’. For John Baird, the Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister, ‘there is the need to repeal it’. Ms Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa hinted on the need ‘to mount pressures on the President to change the law and respect human rights for all Nigerians despite sexual orientations’ and lastly the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay said that the same sex marriage prohibition law is “draconian and illegal” (Ajibade, 2014; Nnochiri, 2014; Bowcott, 2014; Nwokolo, 2014).

The following are some of the reasons for opposing the Same-Sex Prohibition Act of 2014:

- a. **The Unconstitutional Nature of the Law:** It is in contradiction to Nigeria’s Constitution of 1999. Sections 39(1); 38(1), 37, 40 and 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that every person has a right to be entitled to freedom of expression, freedom to hold opinions, freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and religion as well as the right to decide freely on his/her private life (Obidinma & Obidinma, 2013:42-49).
- b. **The Irrationality of the Law:** Some argued that it is logically inconsistent and born out of disgust. Furthermore it is argued that it ignores the fruit of scientific searches that proof that homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality (Premium Times, 2014).
- c. **Impediment to International Interdependence:** They argued that in this age of interdependence and the collapse of the world into a global village, the Act will threaten foreigners like tourist, expatriates and diplomats that are gay from coming into the country.
- d. **Violation of International Standard of Human Rights:** The law is a gross violation of the freedoms of expression; association and assembly of just an infinitesimal section of the Nigeria’s population that international law already made provisions for. For instance, under the United Nations Charter and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights provision has already been made for the protection of human. On this note, a case is being made for marriage equality or equal marriage that allows a person to choose his or her sexual partner (Kefalas, 2012).

- e. **It Impedes Global Solution to Non-Human Enemies:** Some scholars such as Nnochiri, (2014), Ajibade (2014) and Barnett-Vanes (2014:783-784) contend that it has negative consequences for public health in Nigeria and can constitute a barrier to the struggle against the spread of AIDS. This is because by the terms of the Act, homosexuals will not have the courage to enrol for HIV educational programmes, prevention, treatments and care services as well as disclose their sexual identity.

During deliberations on the bill, there were threats of sanctions from western countries to cut down the flow of aid to Nigeria, reduce support for HIV/AIDS and anti-malaria programmes and other formal state visits (Okey, Eyoboka & Ojeme, 2014).

Following the signing of the bill into law on January 7, 2014, opposition groups did not relent. The international bodies and countries argued that the pursuance of same-sex marriage is not a western morality or culture but the preservation of human rights of individuals. Furthermore, they pressed that universal human values should take pre-eminence over cultural values (*Osaretin & Ajebon 2012; Cox, 2014; Kacem, 2014*). Okey, Eyoboka & Ojeme (2014), and Barnett-Vanes (2014:783-784) argue that the US pledges to employ a lot of propaganda to urge civil society and human rights groups to pressure Nigeria for a change of policy in favour of same-sex marriage and providing resources to fund gay clubs and advocacy groups across Nigeria as well as use international platforms to pressure Nigeria for a change of policy in favour of same-sex marriage (Nnochiri, 2014).

Also, the European Parliament Resolution of March 13, 2014 deliberated to suspend Nigeria from the Cotonou agreement (European Parliament Resolution, 2014). Another strategy used by UN was a state visit to Nigeria. For the first time in 20years that the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights was created, the UN High Commissioner Navi Pillay paid Nigeria a visit to discuss the gay marriage issue. This visit was actually very important to the UN and the US specifically because of the leadership role Nigeria plays on the continent and in the Human Rights Council in Geneva (Akano, 2014).

5. African Perception on Same-Sex Marriage

According to a 2013 Pew Research Report, Nigeria is the world's least tolerant country of homosexuality with roughly about 98 percent of the country's population opposing society's acceptance of homosexuality (Cox, 2014). *Okoli and Abdullah (2014:17-24) argue that* Nigeria's position against same sex marriage is rooted in inherent socio-cultural ideological complexes of the African society and the cultural proclivity of the African society does not allow for such marital unions. Okey, Eyoboka & Ojeme

(2014), Igbodo (2012) and Molefe (2014) posit that the African traditional view of marriage holds that homosexuality and lesbianism are “animalistic and degrading to humanity”, “it is defiant to virtues such as value, moral, respect and honour that being African stands for”; “it is an unacceptable social behaviour and a taboo that is anti-thetical to the African Culture”.

Onuche (2013:91) observes that Nigeria’s moral frame recognizes that marriage is the coming together of a male and female each as partner of a complete life giving whole within a heterosexual union which is not obtainable in gay marriage. Onuche (2013:91-98) opines that in Nigeria, morality is based on the beneficiary values of collective family and community well being. The moral system of most Nigerians declares homosexual relations to be wrong and unacceptable. That is homosexuality is a challenge to the moral foundation of Nigerian. Nigerians believe that it is not part of their culture therefore it should not gain ground. Gay marriage is not part of any ones culture but it emerged out of responses to life development process e.g. urbanization, education international travel, internet spread etc. He further argues that same sex relationship is not alien in our society but it is not societally acceptable. It has failed moral test due to Nigerians’ understanding of marriage and its communitarian foundation.

It imperative to state that consideration was not given to the adoption of homosexual law in Nigeria because the anti-gay law represents the will of the majority and the practice of gay marriage is the choice of a very minute minority. Nigeria being a democratic state respected the opinion of the majority that abhors the practice of same sex marriage (Campbell, 2014:70-85; Bowcott, 2014). Standing on the socio-cultural ideological complexes of the African society, most Nigerians stood as one forgetting their multi-cultural character to collectively condemn the acceptance of gay marriage in Nigeria. In other words, despite tribal affiliations, Nigerians stood together to condemn the act of homosexuality as a taboo against the socio-cultural context of African societies. Various reasons can be linked to this wide spread consensus against homosexuality. Some of them are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first is the religious beliefs of most Nigerians. Researches by Sessou (2013) cited in Obidinma and Obidinma (2013:42-49), Marshall (2014) and Kalahari Media (2014) explained that religious beliefs of the Bible and Quran condemn and abhors homosexuality. Gagnon (2004) further explains that same sex marriage or relationship cannot qualify as a proper marriage because it lacks the necessary sexual counterparts or complements. This marital ethical value is found or rooted in the Jewish and Christian sexual ethics. Faith based arguments against same-sex marriage views homosexuality as a sin that must be avoided. There are cases of homosexuality in the bible that incurred the wrath of God. The most

common of such story is the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire (stated in Genesis 19).

In addition to the above, Pepler (n.d.: 39-55) states that from the beginning of creation, God made a man and gave him a wife (a woman) (stated in Genesis 1 verse 18). In another portion of the bible, it is stated that a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and the two of them shall be one flesh (stated in Ephesians 5 verse 31). From the above explanations, Pepler (n.d.: 39-55) argues that heterosexual marriage is the will of God and that is the divine intention of marriage. Furthermore, he is of the view that people should not argue from current culture back to the bible but from the bible to current culture.

The next is the essence of marriage. According to Ekong (1988), marriage in Africa is a union between a man and a woman, which brings together families, communities and ethnic groups (cited in Ola, 2009:205-209). The institution of marriage exists for various reasons amongst which are for procreation and for companionship. This means that couples should be able to reproduce. Gay marriage, due to sexual similarities cannot allow for procreation.

Another reason why gay marriage is unacceptable in the Nigeria state is that it has the capacity to weaken the marriage institution, the family and societal values. A new family structure is emerging all over the world arising from the platform of gay marriages and relationship. According to Cassandra (2011), gay marriage is an insult to the institution of marriage and family and its unacceptability can also be attributed to the role the family plays as an agent of socialization. In the light of the above, once the family values are weakened there are implications for the society at large. The aftermath of this is that the society itself will be weakened and the future of the country is at risk.

According to George W. Bush, a former President of USA, “marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious and natural roots without weakening the good of the society” (CNN, 2004). That is to say, once marriage is separated from cultural and religious beliefs the society stands the risk of becoming weak in the present and the future. All these reasons put together explain why Nigeria adopted restrictive measures against same sex marriage.

6. Impacts of Nigeria’s Anti-Gay Marriage Law on Nigeria-US Diplomatic Ties

The Anti-gay law has caused rifts between the US and Nigeria (Marshall, 2014). Looking at the sequence of the turbulences Nigeria-US relations has faced, it will be observed since the beginning of this fourth

republic, terrorism and anti-gay rights law are the major factors that engendered diplomatic row in Nigeria-US relations.

There are various dimensions to the arguments on the impacts of Nigeria's stance on gay marriage on her relationship with the US. While some scholars such as Ate (2001) and Dickson (2013) argue that Nigeria needs to ensure that her relationship with the US is strong and very strategic in order to improve her relevance in the international system, others disagree with this stance of remaining attached for relevance and argue that the Nigeria's relations with the US is driving the imperialistic intents of the US. They further suggest the need to detach from neo-colonial ties with the US and build her strength with the opportunity that the disagreement over gay rights has presented (Campbell, 2014:70-85).

The quality or substance of the relationship between Nigeria and the US is over trivial matters. Foreign aids from the US to Nigeria is over trivial issues directed at survival instincts as against the needs for developmental and technological advancements that preside over the diplomatic discourses between the U.S. and some other countries of the world like China (Soremekun, 2014). Soremekun (2014) further stressed that despite Russia's anti-gay law and China's laws that contradict western democratic ideology, the US did not threaten Russia with sanctions and still does business with China. The difference is in the quality or substance of the relationship.

Although neo-colonial patterns more often than not display a manipulation and control of the weak by the strong, the controversy over the gay rights shows a change of pattern that occurred with the seemingly weak Nigeria deciding its position on the subject despite global opposition. According to Ayo Adeniran, a former Nigerian diplomat:

Nigeria should seize the moment and use the negatives of the gay diplomacy to free itself from the neo-colonial yoke. ...What is correct behaviour in this gay controversy is for Nigeria to call the bluff of the EU and the US. They see Africa as their neo-colonial backyard. Homosexuality is against our cultural values (Mandyen, 2014).

The implication of the pressures from the US is a pointer to the fact that the US desires to strengthen neo-colonial and imperialistic cords at the slightest opportunities as well as maintain a hold on Nigeria, arguably Africa's most influential country. The US knowing that Nigeria occupies a significant role in Africa presently and in the future would want Nigeria to accept gay marriage as proper because Nigeria will drive the acceptance of homosexuality to other parts of the African continent. However, Nigeria took a bold step to uphold a stand that gay marriage is unacceptable within its territory.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

In order to enhance the quality of Nigeria-U.S. bilateral relations, the following are put forward as suggestions: First, there is the need for the diversification of the Nigerian economy. The over-reliance on oil as the major source of revenue makes Nigeria act with fear and prevents her from taking bold steps in making significant diplomatic bargains.

Second, the consumerist orientation of the Nigerian state should be replaced with a production orientation so as to be empowered to use the opportunity of the Africa growth and opportunity act (AGOA) to gain more access into the US market and thereafter correct her imbalanced trade relations with the US.

Third, the implementation of the anti gay policy is an eye opener that Nigeria can without fear or favour of the U.S and the international community make her own indigenous policies that allow for development and preserve her values. Therefore, the policies of Nigeria that embraces aids-which are the pathways for western incursion into her affairs should be shut and domestic strategies should be fashioned to oppose post independence imperialism.

Fourth, the Nigerian government should dive into this newly found spirit of nationalism amongst the various religious and ethnic groups to promote unity and peaceful coexistence as well as other goals geared at national development.

In conclusion, the paper examines gay diplomacy and Nigeria-US relations. It acknowledges that Nigeria and the US have cooperated to pursue foreign policy goals in areas such as peacekeeping, democratization, trade, security, humanitarian aids and military trainings. The paper further observed that overtime, there have been strains in Nigeria-US relations both in the military and democratic dispensations. The factors observed as impediments to smooth Nigeria-US relations include militancy, terrorism, human right abuses and most recently, the ideological differences over gay marriage amongst others.

Findings from the study reveal that the implication of the ideological differences over the acceptability of gay marriage shows a clash between national sovereignty, respect for the territorial integrity of states, the fundamental human rights and the socio-cultural beliefs of a society. The interference of the U.S. and other western powers in the affairs of Nigeria in the name of human rights protection weakens her sovereignty, defies her territorial integrity and disrespects her socio-cultural perception of the concept of marriage. President Jonathan's anti gay marriage law brought glimpse of hope that against all odds, Nigeria can make better diplomatic negotiations with the United States. This therefore calls for the government to pull together Nigeria's resources - both natural and human in order to

empower the domestic environment of her foreign policy and gain better grounds in her diplomatic relations.

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