**“A Flower without a Fence”: Female Sexual Minority Rights in Ghana**

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Homophobia has escalated in several African countries. Amnesty International has reported that homophobia is reaching dangerous levels in many African countries. The situation in Ghana on this issue is a complex one. Ghana has had a stable democracy for more than two decades and generally, this has fostered a nurturing environment for the respect of human rights. However, despite these impressive strides, Ghana has failed to safe guard the rights of its sexual minorities. Currently, male same-sex intercourse is illegal in Ghana due to a colonial era law that has been maintained in Ghana’s Criminal Code. Although female same-sex acts are not illegal, studies have revealed that female sexual minorities are subjected to societal scorn, blackmail and verbal abuse and coerced into heterosexual marriages. In 2015, there have been reported cases of lesbians in Ghana being harassed, assaulted and murdered. It is without a doubt that there are peculiar challenges that female sexual minorities in Ghana face due to the fact that Ghanaian society embraces certain patriarchal norms and expectations so far as female sexuality is concerned.

*This paper will discuss the human rights abuses that Ghanaian female sexual minorities encounter and consider the factors driving this abuse (historical, colonial, religious, political).*

The title for this paper is inspired by a Ghanaian proverb that says that “A woman is a flower in a garden; her husband is the fence around it”. The logical extension of this proverb is that women in same-sex relationships (who are without husbands or male partners) are “fenceless” and this is indicative of the social perception of female sexual minorities in Ghana and how vulnerable they are to human rights abuses.

This paper will examine social and cultural expectations of women in Ghana including expectations about how women should perform their femininity and express their sexuality. In discussing Ghanaian culture, folklore and traditional proverbs about women will be considered. Further, there will be a discussion of the effect that traditional expectations of womanhood, colonial rules of morality and religious moral standards (imposed by the three most popular religions in Ghana: Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion) have had on the rights of female sexual minorities.