

CAN AFRICAN FUTURISM OF GENDER/SEXUALITY, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BE REPURPOSED?

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Abstract

Most people see gender and sexuality as the same. But linguistically it is not. Culture is a way of life and ways of doing things, behaving and, acting according to the customs or traditions of a particular society or nations. Language is a tool, a vehicle and mechanism that convey or transmits the feelings, ideas, culture and traditions of people. Gender, despite being a social construct, it is dynamic and elusive. Thus making it a title and given label either to male or female. Sexuality is human and that is what we really are. And so, it is nature's gift which is beautiful and makes us what we are. Africa and indeed the world are in deep conflicts due to the fact of misconception and misconstruction of gender and sexuality. Language and culture over the ages has contributed to this crisis of identity. Hence, this research seeks to critically reexamine and redefine the concept of gender and language and the relationship between language and culture. The aim of this paper is to break the walls of hostility that has stood between males and females in Africa so that the continent could develop holistically. We recommend therefore that males and females ought to be seen and respected as equal being but with different biological structures, design optimally by its creator for its unique role and so, should enjoy equal rights, positions and freedom as befits humans. The paper adopts analytic method for its research.

Keywords: human being, rights, freedom, gender, culture

INTRODUCTION

It is pertinent to acknowledge from *ab initio* that the notion of gender is mostly tied around human physical difference or sexuality, that is, the characteristics elements between the male and female sexes. However, gender and sexuality is mostly characterized by the quality of being sexual, that is, what distinguished or differentiate sex respectively. Similarly, gender and sexuality arise from the fact of being male or female, that which is pertaining to sex or the social relations between the sexes.

Similarly, gender initially became a focus of linguistic interest with the Nineteen and Twentieth Century respectively. The interested point of gender becomes the particular differentiation between men and women, languages spoken on the basis of grammar, phonology and lexicon. However, these women's languages and men's languages were characterized as vastly different and mutually exclusive, and were held up as evidence for the rigidity of gender roles in traditional societies in contrast to the enlightened gender liberalism of western modernity (Besnier 30).

From the anthropological view gender and sexuality are organized and structure by the society in we live (Quinn 4). Despite its flaws, the early anthropological research on women's and men's languages did call attention to the important relationship between gender and sexuality. However, this connection was not developed theoretically until the 1990s, in spite of the small but steady stream of linguistic publications on sexuality (Bucholtz 15).

However, in the 1970s, a number of ethnographically oriented researchers published a flurry of studies on sexualized insults and mockery, focusing primarily on male speakers. Although the intention of such work was to bring under-investigated communities and genres into linguistic scholarship, many of these studies unwittingly worked to rein-scribe stereotypes of the licentious and hyper-sexed other.

As linguistic anthropologists began to turn their attention to at least some aspects of sexuality, gender was gaining a more central role in linguistic scholarship due to the influence of second-wave feminism, especially in sociolinguistic research on Western languages. One of the earliest and most important contributions to this new line of feminist scholarship offered a different conceptualization of 'women's language' as primarily pragmatic rather than structural and suggested that women's speech both produced and reflected real-world powerlessness. This view was complicated by contemporary anthropological research, however, which revealed that women's speech in other cultures could be forceful and assertive, though still devalued (Butler 32).

Recognizing the widespread deprecation of social and society practices associated with women, by the 1980s many feminist social scientists, including linguistic anthropologists, were seeking to validate women as competent cultural members in their own right. Meanwhile, the concept of 'culture' was adopted by some researchers of American society to account for what were still seen as vast differences between women and men. Though inspired by anthropological work on cross-cultural communication, this body of work overlooked widespread efforts to rethink the concept of culture within anthropology in this period (Butler 32).

A more complex understanding of culture emerged in language and gender research in the academic forum, accompanied by more explicit theorizing of the concept of gender. Much research on gender and language from the 1990s to the present has been greatly enriched by attention to the ideological symbolic aspects of talk as produced within particular communities of practice. In language and gender research, these insights led scholars to set aside a monolithic model of women's gender identity in favor of an examination of diverse versions of femininity even within a single 'culture' such as the United States and other great nations (Besnier 32).

CONCEPTUALIZATION FRAMEWORK

To avoid the risk of ambiguity, it is chief that we clarify certain terms employed within this article, terms that are of relevance in the use of our subject matter and particularly on traditional usage of our knowledge and these has serve as key words in our research theme.

GENDER:-The Advanced Learner Dictionary 8th defines 'gender' as the identification as a male, a woman or something else, and the association with a (social) role or set of behavioral and cultural traits, clothing, etc, a category to which a person belong on this basis. Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do (West and Zimmerman 1987) – something we perform (Butler 1990).

SEXUALITY: - In a more common and simple form, sexuality refers to the quality of being sexual; that which is characterized or distinguished by sex.

LANGUAGE is conceived in this paper as a body of words and sets of method of combining them (called a grammar), understood by a community and used as a form of communication. In other, it refers to the expression of thought (the communication of meaning) in a specified way; that which we communicate something, as language does.

CULTURE Culture simply refers to the conventional conducts and ideologies of a community; the system comprising of the accepted norms and values of a society. In a more common parlance, culture is the arts, customs, lifestyles, background and habits that characterized a particular society or nation (Advanced Learners Dictionary 8th Editions).

In this paper, we are evaluating how human reproduces deeply on the ways in which what we have been taught to think of as natural, that is, our sex, gender, and our sexuality, is, in fact, deeply embedded in and shaped by our culture. We challenge humans to explore precisely, if any, aspects of our gender and our sexuality are totally natural.

One powerful aspect of culture, and a reason cultural norms feel so natural, is that we learn culture the way we learn our native language: without formal instruction, in social contexts, picking it up from others around us, without thinking. Soon, it becomes deeply embedded in our brains. We no longer think consciously about what the sounds we hear when someone says “hello” mean unless we do not speak English. Nor is it difficult to “tell the time” on a “clock” even though “time” and “clocks” are complex cultural inventions (Peggy 18).

The same principles apply to gender and sexuality. We learn very early (by at least age three from human development) about the categories of gender in our culture, that individuals are either “male” or “female” and that elaborate beliefs, behaviors, and meanings are associated with each gender. We can think of this complex set of ideas as a gender ideology or a cultural model of gender language. All societies have gender ideologies, just as they have belief systems about other significant areas of life, such as health and disease, the natural world, and social relationships, including family (Strum & Linda 201).

However, looking at the notion of gender and the notion of sex in our human cultural society, the language can reveal cultural beliefs. A good example is the term “sex.” In the past, sex referred both to sexuality and to someone’s biologic sex: male or female. Today, although sex still refers to sexuality, “gender” now means the categories male, female, or increasingly, other gender possibilities. Why has this occurred? The change in language reflects profound alterations in gender ideology in the United States and English speaking countries or civilized nations. In the past, influenced by Judeo-Christian religion and nineteenth and twentieth century scientific beliefs, biology (and reproductive capacity) was literally considered to be destiny. Males and females, at least “normal” males and females, were thought to be born with different intellectual, physical, and moral capacities, preferences, tastes, personalities, and predispositions for violence and suffering (Bucholtz & Hall 204).

Ironically, many cultures, including Western and European Christianity in the middle Ages, viewed women as having a strong, often “insatiable” sexual “drive” and capacity (Inoue 13). But by the nineteenth century, women and their sexuality were largely defined in reproductive terms, as in their capacity to “carry a man’s child.” Even late-twentieth-century human sexuality texts often referred only to “reproductive systems,” to genitals as “reproductive” organs, and excluded the “clitoris” and other female organs of sexual pleasure that had no reproductive function. For women, the primary, if not sole, legitimate purpose of sexuality was reproduction.

Gender ideologies linked sexuality and gender in other ways. Sexual preference the sex to whom one was attracted was “naturally” heterosexual, at least among “normal” humans, and “normal,” according to mid-twentieth century Freudian-influenced psychology, was defined largely by whether one adhered to conventional gender roles for males and females. So, appropriately, “masculine” men were “naturally” attracted to “feminine” women and vice versa. Homosexuality, too, was depicted not just as a sexual preference but as gender-inappropriate role behavior, down to gestures and color of clothing (Eckert 23).

This is apparent in old stereotypes of gay men as “effeminate” (acting like a female, wearing “female” fabrics such as silk or colors such as pink, and participating in “feminine” professions like ballet) and of lesbian women as “butch” (cropped hair, riding motorcycles, wearing leather prototypical masculinity). Once again, separate phenomena sexual preference and gender role performance were conflated because of beliefs that rooted both in biology. “Abnormality” in one sphere (sexual preference) was linked to “abnormality” in the other sphere [gendered capacities and preferences] (Inoue 41).

Admittedly, the gender and sexual ideologies were based on biological language or determinism. According to this research theory, males and females were supposedly born fundamentally different reproductively and in other major capacities and preferences and were “naturally” (biologically) sexually attracted to each other, although women’s sexual “drive” was not very well developed relative to men’s and was reproductively oriented. Decades of research on gender and sexuality, including feminist anthropologists, has challenged these old theories, particularly biological determinism. We now understand that cultures, not nature, create the gender ideologies that go along with being born male or female and the ideologies vary widely, cross-culturally. What is considered “man’s work” in some societies, such as carrying heavy loads, or farming, can be “woman’s work” in others. What is “masculine” and “feminine” varies: pink and blue, for example, are culturally invented gender-color linkages, and skirts and “make-up” can be worn by men, indeed by “warriors” (Butler 34).

For example, the Hindu deities, male and female, are highly decorated and difficult to distinguish, at least by conventional masculine. Women can be thought of as stronger (“tougher,” more “rational”) than men. As for sexual desires, research on the human sexual response by William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson established that men and women have equal biological capacities for sexual pleasure and orgasm and that, because males generally ejaculate simultaneously with orgasm, it is easier for women than men to have multiple orgasms (Okamoto & Smith 204).

Therefore, One’s biologic sex is a different phenomenon than one’s gender, which is socially and historically constructed. Gender is a set of culturally invented expectations and therefore constitutes a role one assumes, learns, and performs, more or less consciously. Even cultures with fairly well-defined gender roles do not necessarily view them as fixed, biologically rooted, permanent, “essentialist,” or “naturalized” as occurred in the traditional gender ideology in the western bodies. Gender may not even be an “identity” in a psychological sense but, rather, a social role one assumes in a particular social context just as one moves between being a student, a daughter, an employee, a wife or husband, president of the bicycle club, and a musician.

Cultures also change over time through internal and external forces such as trade, conquest, colonialism, globalization, immigration, mass media, and, especially, films. Within every culture, there is tremendous diversity in class, ethnicity, religion, region, education level, and generation, as well as diversity related to more-individual family circumstances, predilections, and experiences. Gender and sexuality expectations also vary with one’s age and stage in life as well as one’s social role, even within the family (e.g., “wife vs sister” “mother vs mother-in-law” and “father vs. son” “brother vs father-in-law”). Hence, people can appear to conform to cultural norms but find ways of working around or ignoring them.

Contemporary Changes of African Gender Relations

The contemporary change of African Gender relations “has opened up discussions, campaigns and calls for getting rid of the so called gender inequalities in Africa and at the global context” (MacKinnon and Cumbers, 2011). This globalization, liberal ideas and free capital economy have all affected the change being experienced today. According to Jumanne Kassim Ngohengo (2021) quoting Madueke, (2014) gave an expose that “since the dawn of man, African gender relations were not a problem among Africans. People collectively lived with their specified divisions of labour and specialisations within the households, where men were in charge of all family matters” (113). In this context, inequalities in contemporary times now defines and redefines the spectrum for which the classification of African gender relations is premised. For Bourguignon, “what is said to be gender inequalities in all forms are rooted from social economic traditions of the given community” (2018). The campaigns for gender equality have brought serious problems in gender/sexuality, language and culture for the Africans in contemporary society.

The concept that gender is not a collection of inborn characteristics that people possess but rather a set of behaviors that are repeatedly invoked in its performance had a big effect on the study of language and gender. The pressures and restrictions placed on people who might want to inhabit or experiment with liminal gender and sexual identities are highlighted by a growing corpus of study on the linguistic behavior of trans people.

Can African Futurism of Gender, Language and Sexuality be repurposed?

The former question answered affirmatively: Can African Futurism of Gender, Language and Sexuality be repurposed? The African Futurism of Gender, Language and Sexuality can be repurposed if the impact begins in innocuous and harmless ways in cross-cultural philosophical analysis. This African futurism of Gender possess a complex psychological study of a dysfunctional character in an achievement-oriented society. One way of repurposing African futurism of gender is the reevaluation of the value of knowledge accessed about the gender language and sexuality. Its path indicate that truly, ‘one can only know what is true, and truth in one’s beliefs does seem to be valuable’. ‘If truth in one’s beliefs is valuable, and knowledge demands truth, then we may be at least halfway towards answering our question’ of can African futurism of gender, language and sexuality be repurposed?

The problem, however, lies with the ‘all other things being equal’ clause which we put on the instrumental value of true belief. In order for us to see the instrumental value of true belief, we have to impose this qualification because sometimes having a true belief could be unhelpful and actually impede one’s goals, and in such cases true belief would lack instrumental value. For example, if one’s gender depended upon it being repurposed, could one really summon the courage to recreate the gender language of sexuality if one knew (or at least truly believed) that there was a grim prospect that one would fail to influence the usage around Africa? Here, it seems, a false belief in one’s language and culture would be better than an exact belief if the goal in question (Repurposing the gender language) is to be achieved.

The major reason why we argue for the idea of repurposing is because, as a socio-epistemological, politico-linguistic idea, it reminds us of the competing and conflicting claims about our identity and difference, while placing an emphasis on cultural colonial integration. Thus in the words of Fetson Anderson Kalua,

the fact that the name *Africa* is a product of the colonial imaginary and, hence, we should not betray the truth of what it means to be African through an uncritical linking of the idea with the notion of racial blackness. Rather, we should think of identity in terms of intermediality—a formulation which promotes a non-foundational, non-partisan notion of African identity in the context of power relations, common histories, and shared memories (23).

Based on the fact that we are all human, Antonio Gramsci developed the theory of *cultural hegemony* in order to locate the power structured in our day to day humdrum, thus emphasized the most effective form of domination is the assimilation of the wider population into one’s worldview. To this end, the theory explains that Hegemony is not just a matter of widespread ideas but includes the organization of social life more generally. In accepting and acclimatizing the *cultural hegemony* of Gramsci’s theory, Raymond Williams (1977) explains further:

It is in [the] recognition of the wholeness of the process that the concept of “hegemony” goes beyond “ideology.” What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values (19).

In his explanation, Williams did not accentuate this hegemony in its totality. This inconclusiveness led Sherry Ortner (1990) to appeal on this non-totality and focused on “[t]he loose ends, the contradictory bits” of gender hegemonies that can be “examined for their short-and long-term interactions with and for one another” (46). The view of gender disparity is highly and notoriously nurturant deeply entrenched in the common belief that the feminine gender are more soft-laden than masculine in hegemonic claim to infantilizing environment and overwhelmingly in our narrative of development of the ubiquity of gender.

Gender is so intricately organized at every level of experience that there is something approaching a seamless connection between a girl’s desire for a frilly party dress and the male control of the means of production. What we experience as our individual, perhaps whimsical, desires emerge within a far-reaching gender order – an order that both supports, and is supported by, these desires. It is this seamless connection that makes language so important to gender and vice versa. Our smallest interactions can be imbued with gender, and our continual performance in those interactions strengthens their role in supporting gender. Every time a little girl desires a frilly pink party dress, insists on having one, or wears one, she is performing a gendered act that renews the gendered meanings associated with pink, frills, dresses, and party clothes. In arguing for the universality of beliefs in male superiority, Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (1981) put a similar point this way: “[a] gender system is first and foremost a prestige structure” (16).

We therefore reiterate that dichotomous gender is at the center of our social institution because we kept it there. Insofar, our survival does not depend on males wearing blue and females wearing pink; humans are insightful species, and so we can talk to each other. The continual differentiation of male and female serves not to guarantee biological reproduction, but to guarantee social reproduction – to reaffirm the social arrangements that depend on this categorization of male and female. These dichotomous categorizations are ongoing human accomplishment, and for this reason, our study of language and gender treats language not simply as reflecting pre-existing categories, but as part of what constructs and maintains these categories.

Finally, gender is disproportionate. However a person may feel about the current gender (dis)order, there is no question that male and female are not simply two equal sides of a coin. Inequality is built into gender at a very basic level. Indeed, Kate Bornstein (1998) has said that gender is just a system to justify inequality.

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