

## **Mass-Mediated Feminist Scholarship failure in Africa: Normalised Body-Objectification as Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Mass media culture and its role in defining, inculcating and shaping sexual orientation of a society cannot be gainsaid. In this paper, the mass-mediated western feminist scholarship failure in Africa is interrogated in the wake of Sex Robots such as ‘Samantha.’ The argument is that these sex robots function to normalise woman body objectification. The study aims to anchor on Pan African project perspective and the ontological formulation of the African woman as human-being deserving her voice concerning her experiences with patriarchal social structures. The mass media, in its romanticisation of western feminist scholarship denies African woman this voice. There are four fundamental questions central to this paper: 1) what are the epistemological foundations of western feminist scholarship in patriarchal Africa? 2) What is the political economy of western feminist scholarship in sex robotics in Africa? 3) Can sex robots fill the western-feminist-scholarship-born inorganic sexist relation in Africa? And 4) what alternative framework is fit for African woman transformation and emancipation project? The study analyses the feminist scholarship from the past, present and future to give possible solutions to challenges and failures of the strategy toward woman emancipation and transformative agenda in Africa and the developing world.

**Key Terms:** Mass-Mediated, Feminist Scholarship, Normalized, Body-Objectification, Artificial Intelligence

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## Introduction

The failure of western feminist scholarship in the third world and Africa, in particular, has been demonstrated by scholars across decades (Crowley, 1991; Mahanty, 2003; Sommers, 2009; Mohammadi, 2013; Al-Sarrani & Alghamdi, 2014) can partly be read in bold from its consequences and the rise and rise of sex industry disguised as artificial intelligence (AI) that threatens to amplify objectification of woman body, and by extension that of man as analysed by Norris (2017) and Orr (2017). At the core of feminism are the ideals that came to supposedly free women from the oppression of the patriarchal system and that of its chief priest-the man. However, western feminist's misunderstanding of African culture, their essentialisation and assumptions that the western norms should be universalised given its historical dominance; set the African woman free from man instead of from the oppression of the patriarchal system. This alienated the woman from her ecology instead of free her from the oppressive and subjugating social structures, which were very clear from the beginning.

As argued by Sommers (2009) Western feminist scholarship introduced ideological warfare among the genders to the extent of bringing a total separation, mistrust and inorganic gender relations which has created a gap of suspicion. It is this gap that western AI capitalist merchants are appropriating by introducing female and male sex robots traded with such brand names as Samantha and harmony, which have stirred fresh social media discussions in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana among other nations from January 2018 than never before. In their capitalistic impunity, these capitalist merchants are fixated on the expected turnovers and profit maximisation without regard to the impact they are going to have to the social DNA in Africa and other third world countries. The Artificial Intelligence is a

capitalist agent that has introduced to an African man a woman they can buy, control and manipulate without her consent and on the other side, a woman can buy her own male robot; an object of envy that she can manipulate without fear of oppression; an embodiment of powerless society the western world envision for Africa. This technology comes to objectify both men and women and introduces unrealistic relations that cannot make the society to be sustained and transformed for better gender relations.

The sheer organic similitude that the AI sex industry promotional gimmicks share with normative feminist vision is disturbingly unexpected in Africa. Under critical analysis, the sex robotics violates the ontological foundation of a woman and the need to respect her body, whether real or modelled in plastic. This calls for a critical analysis of the epistemological foundations of western feminist scholarship in patriarchal Africa in the first place. There is also a need, as this study seeks to demonstrate, to examine the political economy of western feminist scholarship in sex robotics in Africa. The lingering question then would be if sex robots fill the western-feminist-scholarship-born inorganic sexist relation in Africa if any. Given that the normative western feminism scholarship is supposedly responsible for normalised objectification of both genders, an impact so destructive in third world countries whose ideas were not part of the universalised western feminist vision is there a possibility of an alternative framework for African woman transformation and emancipation project.

## Research Methodology

The study relied on qualitative descriptive research design. This design is best for studies that use descriptions, argument analysis, critical formulations and reviews to answer questions which are analytical and reflective on specific social phenomena as in this study. The researcher analysed the feminist scholarship from the past, present

and future to give possible solutions to challenges and failures of the strategy toward women emancipation and transformative agenda in Africa and beyond. The relevant data was collected in the form of scholarly texts, scholarly reviews, as well as critiques of the AI robotics (both male and female sex robots) from feminist perspectives were considered as valid data provided it led to describing and answering the research questions. The data in this study was mostly archival and critical discourse analysis as well as textual analysis was used to interpret the data and link arguments for purposeful argumentations. Therefore, the feminist scholarship theories, scholarly texts, scholarly reviews, as well as critiques of the AI from feminist perspectives were analysed in a bid to provide answers to research questions.

## The Feminist Theory

The feminist theory in its three western forms; Marxist, radical and liberal is used to interrogate issues raised in this paper. The limitations of these forms of feminism are exposed in their ideals and visions, which are treated as Universalist and applied in the African context without regard to the continent's unique ethnographic characteristics. The feminist project vision fails in its assumption and disregard of African cultural, social, political and historical experiences in its conceptual framework that is presented as a Universalist manual for gauging situations in western and other parts of the world. In addition, the mission of western feminist theories produces a different social reality where women, from a formally coherent society, are freed from men, and vice versa and the resultant gap has been appropriated by western merchants of sex robots for both men and women thus objectifying women and men more than before. This threatens to destroy the cohesive social structure that existed in Africa. Ethnographic incorporation of feminism form could form a successful feminist ideology capable of transforming Africa and emancipating African woman and

man from subjugating social structures symptomatic of male dominance.

## Epistemological Foundations of Western Feminist scholarship

Feminist theory is a corpus of framework aiming at explaining the position of woman in the society, the system that sustains it and strategies of improving the woman position to a better one. The western feminism scholarship has from decades ago, concentrated too much on the ideological tug of war rather than in the formulation of strategies to address the problems they highlight (Crowley, 1991). Mahanty (2003) argues that western feminism has helped women to exit the victim status in a patriarchal society and ushered them into the role of perpetrator or oppressor, which further impedes the realisation of the feminist vision that is in pursuit of gender justice and equality.

The failure of western feminism inheres from the fact that its ideals were closed, but were envisioned to work in African culture and social structure which was ontologically open-ended (Mahanty, 2003). For example, Africa was not used to radical approaches to the social system; it was based on African customary system which was flexible. It is this core foundational system that African form of feminism could have been formulated to drive the African woman emancipatory project. Because of this misapplication, the western feminist scholarship has succeeded to disposition woman in Africa from man who out of insecurity, fear and defeat is a fertile market for modelled women in the form of a sex robot.

The western feminist has also embraced themes that define women in Africa as archetypes of oppression and uses Africa as a site for studying woman oppression and thus ghettoising African woman as not members of the struggle movement but as part of the struggle. According

to Bruno (2006), emancipatory frameworks based on western feminism were “mostly developed under the influence of subsequent versions of western feminist theory, exporting to the rest of the world a set of visions and strategies that were context specific for western women’s movements.” p.2

Another soft underbelly of western feminism scholarship is its not definitive framework that allows emotional, descriptive formulations which do not pass the test of validity and infallibility. Consider the argument of Christina Hoff Sommers in her 2009 critique of feminist scholarship in a review entitled “Persistent Myths in Feminist Scholarship”. She reflects on the building blocks that have been mounted on feminist scholarship thus:

Feminist misinformation is pervasive... Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge (2003) describe the “sea of propaganda” that overwhelms the contemporary feminist classroom. The formidable Christine Rosen (2002)... found them rife with falsehoods, half-truths, and “deliberately misleading sisterly sophistry

Sommers (2009), gives an account of her experience trying to point errors in Berkeley law professor Nancy K.D. Lemon. She narrates that the professor, instead of taking the comment as a scholarly input and accept errors in the book she had edited, fought back with feminist fags and accused him of “launching a public attack on me and my work”. The writer thus posits “One reason that feminist scholarship contains hard-to-kill falsehoods is that reasonable, evidence-backed criticism is regarded as a personal attack.” (p.1). More disturbing in Sommers’ analysis is that “Over the years, the feminist fictions have made their way into public policy” (p.4). The writer traces the chain of feminist ideology from the textbooks to

women advocacy groups, to news stories and then political leaders and then into parliament that endorses them as policy. An example quoted in this case is the order by President Obama to establish a White House Council on Women and Girls based on the centuries-old notion that women are primarily not on the receiving end in the society, which is no longer valid.

Al-Sarrani and Alghamdi (2014) argue that ‘the colonial ideology has set the western society as the norm generalising about other civilisations as the other’ (p.5). There is a propensity to universalise values like freedom and agency in feminism accompanied by a misunderstanding of the meaning of religious and social conventions such as the wearing of the veil or headscarf. Al-Sarrani and Alghamdi (2014) argue that western culture tends essentializing the experience of women of unfamiliar cultures (p2). For example, Western feminist scholarship calls for African women rights without having adequate knowledge about the nature of African society.

In the analysis of Mohanty (2003) Western feminist scholarship has failed in their definition and location of the actual circumstances of women and feminisms in the third world and has ignored in totality the historical, geographical and geopolitics of Africa and thus colonises third world women by treating them as a monolithic subject. Mohammadi (2013) argues that women everywhere are united by sociological factors that make them withstand prevalent evils and that western feminism lack enough information and knowledge of the experiences of third world woman.

### Political Economy of Western Feminist Scholarship

Long after the attainment of the feminist emancipatory vision, there are visible debris of cold war, low esteem, fear and insecurity among men and women in Africa leaving a void that the western robotics industry is appropriating as



a global market for sex robots. The mediatised promotional discourse that comes with robots such as Samantha is evidence enough of the ready market. Articles such as by Mbuthia (2018) prides that sex robots are programmed to 'sustain a conversation and recall and react to sexual advances, flirt and stimulate orgasm'.

Myall (2017) in an article entitled "I have sex with a doll four times a week, and I'm saving for a sex robot - but my wife doesn't mind", a 58-year-old engineer, married for 36 years confesses to possessing a sex doll beside his wife. In what can be a voice of defeat, his wife says "If he wanted to, he could have gone out and found someone else; but he didn't do that, he was true to me." Myall (2017) article features Susan, who works in the robot company confessing that she bought a sex robot to her husband as a graduation present, confessing that "I'm not a beautiful woman and these things are beautiful, and I was feeling I'm not good enough." This assertion is a marketing gimmick by the robotic industry implying that sex robots are solutions to women 'limitations'.

Taylor (2017) in "Africa: Sex Robots - Perverted or Practical in Fight against Sex Trafficking?" quotes a robot creator arguing that the dolls are aimed at staffing brothels and help combat sex trafficking. That artificial intelligence is getting into the global sex market with a marketing claim that they are "designed to offer sexual gratification with a near-human touch." The writer captures the designer of Samantha, Sergi Santos justifying that sex robots could help lesbians, gay and bisexual and prevents sexually transmitted diseases. From the analysis of these discourses, it is clear that the western robotic industry is taking advantage for an already existing sexist inorganic relation, created by the feminist scholarship to fund the western global sex economy and this is likely to affect Africa where western feminism has created inorganic

relations that separate woman from her man and vice-versa.

## **Western-Feminist-Scholarship-Born Inorganic Sexist Relation**

The sex robots industry comes with normalisation of intensive and explicit male sexual aggression; what was fundamentally the treatment of woman as a mere object to be owned and controlled by men. For example in 'The damage to Samantha the sex robot shows male aggression being normalised' Norris (2017) examines an incidence of a sex doll on display at Linz's electronic festival that was molested by men to the extent of needing considerable repair. The owner of the doll claimed that the doll is designed to take such eventualities; implying that men can do "whatever they want to an object designed to resemble a woman's body." It is a design that makes men violence and exercise of dominance normal.

Moreover, the fact that dolls are owned by men, and they have an entitlement to treat them as they will entrench the sexual entitlement and aggression that threatens the ontological foundations of woman as a human being. Sex robots is the "idealisation of the woman who never says no; the normalisation of sexual aggression; the eroticisation of non-consent." The robots are models of a woman's body that take away women's humanity and replace women's bodies and sexualities with conformity.

Blum (2016) in "How Women Really Feel about Sex Robots" explores the different opinion of women and men regarding sex robots through the judgment of a sex researcher, a PhD candidate at New York University. The writer refers to a survey conducted by researchers at Tufts University where 75% of women said they cannot entertain sex robots. On the contrary, 75% of men said they welcome the AI robotic technology. The survey findings reveal that men support sex robots because "more than women, [men] see the sexual appeal of dominating their sexual

partner... [Probably] they are more aroused by the idea of sex with an objectified sexual partner. However, women "actually experience the desire for more "meaningful" sex—sex that involves an emotional connection with another person" Unlike men. Moreover, February (2017) in "Celebrity sex robots for fantasies", examines the imminent possibility of sex robots modelled from real celebrity women arguing that the ideation of celebrities and fan fantasies and brings closer objectification of real women and treatment similar to that of political statues.

In the analysis of Man-in-chief (2017), the AI sex robots cannot in any way compare or replace human beings as they are creations with plastic limitations; they blatantly fail to match up to human body and sexuality, and are just objects for control. However, the inorganic relationship born of western feminist scholarship is demonstrated in Onyeji's (2018) article entitled 'Nigerians Express Divergent Views on 'Sex Dolls' Debate' where the author examines an online reaction on Nigerian cyberspace on the sex dolls where men and women are reacting differently. It is clear from the reactions that men are taking sex dolls as an alternative for the 'hard headed woman' while women are taking it as an insult for their emotions, sexuality and right of expression in a relationship. The dislike and insult is demonstrated in Rotimi (2018) analysis where the writer quotes a Nollywood actress and sex goddess Seyi Hunter saying that "its only men with fear, men that have complex issues, men that can't woo a woman that will get the sex doll."

However, the reaction of feminist women changes at the promise of a male sex robot as in Boyd (2018) article entitled "Hard wired: Now you'll be able to buy MALE sex robots too as artificial 'companions' with bionic penises are set to go on sale this year". The writer, quoting the Matt McMullen the manufacturer of female sex robots Harmony and Samantha, announces that male robots are to be rolled

up in 2018. The women seem to be happy about it as the designer promises that the expected robots will be a replacement for the most popular feminist sex toys such as vibrators and Dildos. He writes "If women are that interested in getting satisfaction from a vibrator, imagine how the same women will feel having a robot they can put their arms around them and having the robot squeeze them." Given the reaction of women to the promise of male sex robots, it is clear that the war is about the objectification of the other; the diametric opposition created by the alien feminist scholarship especially destructive in African setup.

Stassa (2016) in an article entitled "Are Sex Robots Unethical or Just Unimaginative as Hell?" Stassa agrees that sex robots raise the question of consent and ownership and this alarms the return of normalised objectification of women. The writer views the technology as not only unethical but that functions to reinforce power relations that do not treat either men or women as human subjects. The author quotes Kathleen Richardson, a senior research fellow in ethics of robotics at de Montfort university arguing that "sex robotics perpetuates stereotypes of passive women and active male creators" (p.2). The argument is further reinforced by Orr (2017) in an article "At last, a cure for feminism: sex robots". Orr argues that future women are likely to be objectified as ever available and ready to please men; the ideal of a sex robot. Even before feminism set it, women were modelled by society to be subservient, and this was a legal obligation de facto. The author argument is that out of respect for women, sex robotics should be rejected because they are modelled in the form of a woman and they are archetypes of sexual objectification in bold type. This reaction is not farfetched from Mbuthia's (2018) argument that sex robots are "Another tool used for men to have women submit to their desires and not have to worry about it being inappropriate."

## Conclusion

There is hunger sweeping across Africa for African Woman Transformative Framework that will inform the Emancipatory Project capable of addressing African centred challenges. This framework cannot be the western marking schemes constructed under the tutelage of western feminist theory. Crowley (1991) argued that there is a need to have a historical and cultural review of the western feminist project because the descriptive and normative dimensions of western feminism were lacking when applied to non-western societies. Somjee (1989), accused the western feminist of theoretical reductionism where they "seek universal validity by attempting to homogenise complex and internally changing aspects of social reality to fit neatly into their theoretical models" p44.

In the view of Crowley (1991) the descriptive and normative dimensions of western feminism were, from the beginning, found to be sadly lacking when applied to non-western societies. The creation of a meaningful feminist paradigm should be through the study of culture, and the study of feminist's political economy should be supplemented by anthropological data instead of forcing sameness and thus diversity can be celebrated. Marcus and Fischer (1986) offering their solution argued that ethnographic enquiry could help feminism to establish whether it is applicable to specific peoples and places.

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