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"Blame Colonialism?" or "Blame the Government?": Identity Construction and Ideological Framing in Homosexuality Narratives on Nigerian Twitter

Paul Onanuga & Josef Schmied

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OYE-EKITI
INNOVATION & CHARACTER FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Alexander von Humboldt
Stiftung / Foundation

TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT
CHEMNITZ

Homosexuality in Nigeria

People of queer sexual orientation [LGBTQ] continue to be marginalised especially through cultural ostracisation, religious denunciation and legal criminalisation.

The digital space has however provided voice and visibility to this 'othered' demographic (Mwangi, 2014; Onanuga, 2020)

Central assumptions

- the digital space allows civic engagement and can be a crucial resource for spearheading decolonisation of the mind

- language use and usage on social media platforms provide insights into attitudes to and perceptions of queer sexuality in Nigeria

- contemporary constructs on queer sexuality have roots in colonial and postcolonial experience

- social media discourse reveals expectations from the two major ideological divides on the role of the government on issues around queer sexuality

- the digital revolution creates new ways of linking, learning and contesting - and decolonising the mind

- from top-down to bottom-up, from old concepts of "European" or "African" to an open-minded discourse on complex personal identities

Decolonisation: Just a buzzword?

- Language is evoked in colonial narratives.

- Colonisation subjugated colonised people and reinforced Western supremacist and hegemonic tendencies.

- Fanon (2008/1952: 14), in *Black Skin, White Masks* says that decolonisation 'is meant to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation'.

- Nyamnjoh (2016: 136) – epistemic decolonisation in education curriculum – *#Rhodes Must Fall* and *#Fees Must Fall* – contest the 'widespread and stubborn misrepresentation of African cultures as static, bounded and primitive, and Africa as needing the benevolence and enlightenment of colonialism and Cartesian rationalism or their residue to come alive'.

- Jonathan Jansen (2020) argues that decolonisation is only a political tool since African epistemologies have evolved and become integrated in contemporary education systems.

- Just like in the European context, English use and usage must be adapted to Nigerian needs and decolonised into modern multilingual, multimodal discourse (Phillipson, 2008) - multilingual Englishes must be languages of liberation again.

Mapping the Context: Why is language important?

- Nigeria has attempted 'decolonisation': FESTAC '77?

- Babatunde Fafunwa *et al* (1989) in the *Ife Six Year Primary Project* advocate the use of Yoruba (nay any mothertongue in the immediate community) in teaching Nigerian pupils.

- Bamgbose (2011) catalogues the challenges that face the integration of indigenous languages in education, chief of which are lack of government will and absence of funds to create materials and resources.

- The suffusion of colonial heritage is identifiable across social practices in Nigeria.

- We focus on a specific context and argue: decolonisation is necessary in marginalised sexuality discourse.

Methods: Outing the data

- Nigerian homosexual narratives on Twitter

- 114,000 word-corpus collected from Nigerian Twitter through keyword searches (Nigeria + Gay + Homosexuality + LGBTQ) between May 2019 and February 2020

- Processed with Anthony's (2019) AntConc software

- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- Focus on how lexical choices, as topoi (strategies used to construct an argument), are used in providing sociolinguistic insight into the perception of homosexuality and what 'new' linguistic practices frame the discussions of the decolonisation of homosexuality in Nigerian digital space.

Matters Arising: the Ideology Divide

▪ **Sociolinguistic concerns**

English = dominant language on Nigerian Twitter

Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other indigenous languages play marginal roles

multilingual and multimodal discourse is the norm

Anti-Homo Narratives

▪ **Religio-Cultural Concerns**

In the Hausa narratives, religion and culture are dominant themes in anti-queer sentiments.

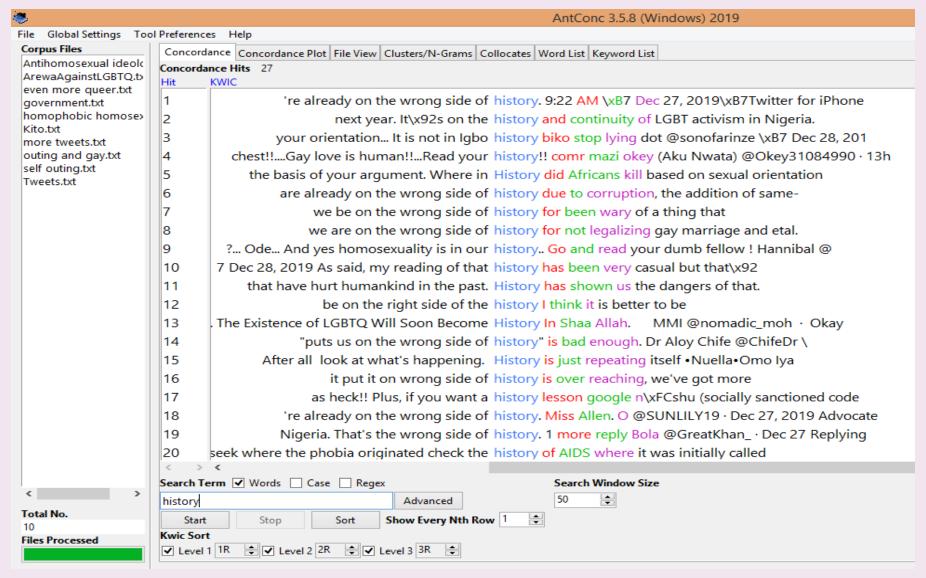#ArewaAgainstLGBT trend between July 20 and July 26, 2019

The place of religion also reveals the opposition as couched in Western-rooted Abrahamic religious beliefs:

God, end of time, sin, punishment, Satan, Hell fire, God destroyed soddom and Gomorrah cos of it = Homosexuality is bad.

Language Use in the Attitudes to Queer sexuality

- Personality attacks (or to sexual behaviour): homo, fag, gay, etc. while some others reflect attitudinal perception of homosexuality: sick, mad, dirty, stinking, wrong, indecent, etc.

- Practical reinforcements: 'no homo' and 'Gabriel'. 'no homo' = linguistic clarification to forestall possibility of being regarded as gay, 'Gabriel', a pun on the word 'gay' in the first syllable, is used to mock and abuse a suspected male homosexual.

- Indigenous lexical items for homosexuality: 'Liwadi', 'adodi', and 'adofuro', which were also realised in the data, are all suggestive of perceptions which focus on private sexual practices. 'Liwadi' is Hausa for homosexual while 'adodi' and 'adofuro' are Yoruba – all draw attention to anal penetration, which is central to the sexualisation of homosexuality.

- Only 'Yan Dauda' does not exactly have a negative connotation, only pragmatic negativity

- Baére, Zanello and Romero (2015) recognise these linguistic choices as insulting and reflective of heteronomative values

Historicisation in the data

■ Realisations of 'history' in the data: 27 hits

History & Culture: Pro-Homo Sample Tweets

▪ "Sorry darling our Arewa has condoned and normalized homosexuality from way way back." YANDAUDU " sounds familiar? They have become a part of Arewa & no 1 is blinking. How about the 1st gay marriage in Kano 2013? Did anything change. Sis homosexuality lives here "unfortunately"."

▪ "The biggest problem of Northern Nigeria is Denial. I knew about "Yan Daudu" before I knew what gays or homosexuals meant in English. The first step towards solving a problem is accepting that the problem exist in the first place. May Allah guide us all."

▪ "Yan daudu in Kano arrested on suspicion of performing same sex acts and forced to perform Muslim religious acts by morality police. Another sad and violent incursion into the lives of consenting adults. If only the morality police could check the thieving Governor."

▪ "I"m intrigued at the handling of Alafin Orompoto"s accession to the throne. I believe he was double gendered. Even the name supports this! Now, I must say this is mere speculation, based on a casual reading of the events surrounding his ascension to the throne."

▪ "Is Jesus and Christianity part of your culture?... Ode... And yes homosexuality is in our history.. Go and read your dumb fellow !"

"Blaming Colonialism or the Government?": Decolonising Perceptions of Queer Sexuality in Nigeria

Quijano's dual terminologies of coloniality of power and modernity (Lugones, 2007) suggest that colonial ideologies and epistemologies are superior and authentic. These have implications on perceptions of sexuality.

Two ideological divides: **anti-homosexuality vs. pro-homosexuality**

Anti-homosexuality   tweets charge the government with the necessity of toughening the stance against the queer community through requisite legislation and implementation.

Pro-homosexuality tweets: upbraid the government for failing to uphold the global standards of human rights and protect marginalised communities.

Support decolonisation as it is a vista for acceptance

Conclusions

- Language is a tool that can be used/misused/construed in positive and negative contexts. What qualifies as 'good' language is the focus for those who support local, national and international language (there is WORK to do for ALL).

- Decolonisation is critical for the propagation of African epistemologies, including those related to marginalised sexualities.

- However, while the demystification of traditional or pre-colonial African sexualities has positive promissory implications for minoritised sexualities, contemporary homophobia nursed by the (post-)colonial experience continues to repress and render invisible non-heterosexual orientations.

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Paul Onanuga   emperornugadellio@yahoo.com
Josef Schmied   josef.schmied@phil.tu-chemnitz.de