

Gender and Equality: An Analysis on the Concept of Biological sex, Gender and Equality in the Context of African Women

Cinsiyet ve Eşitlik: Afrikalı Kadınlar Bağlamında Biyolojik Cinsiyet, Cinsiyet ve Eşitlik Kavramı Üzerine Bir Analiz

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Abstract: Many voices have been heard yearning to minimize the social gap between men and women to eliminate gender patriarchy in societies and to equalize all people at the same level. This indicates a difference in treatment between men and women or males and females which should be reduced or put to an end to ensure equal opportunities among people regardless of their biological sex or gender (Counts, 2018). However, although gender equality is fought for by everyone in our societies, biological sex and gender are two confusing concepts that make some people not to understand their social sides in societies which makes people to end up fighting for women's equality other than gender equality. Therefore, this article tries to make a comprehensive explanation of biological sex and gender as some of the factors on which gender equality is based. This is because gender is built on the biological sex of every person which is a justification that our social sphere plans are on top of the biological world for the present gender planning (Cameron, 2009). The fact is that everyone in our societies belongs to a certain gender with desires for his or her gender which puts gender at the center of our social lives. Although biological sex

determines gender, gender is not repressed naturally from sex (Rubin at el, 1974) that is why people in societies behave differently in doing their activities which makes one gender more superior to another hence inequality. So, in this article gender inequality against women living in Africa has also been explained.

Keywords: Biological sex, Gender, Women, Africa, Gender equality

Öz: Erkeklerle kadınlar arasındaki sosyal farkın azaltılması, toplumdaki cinsiyet patriyarkasının ortadan kaldırılması ve tüm insanların aynı düzeyde eşitlenmesi isteği birçok kesimden duyulmuştur. Bu durum, biyolojik cinsiyet veya cinsiyet gözetmeksizin insanlar arasında eşit fırsatların sağlanması için erkeklerle kadınlar arasındaki farklı muameleyi azaltmayı veya sona erdirmeyi işaret etmektedir (Counts, 2018). Ancak toplumlarımızda cinsiyet eşitliği herkes tarafından savunulmasına rağmen, biyolojik cinsiyet ve cinsiyet kavramları bazı insanların toplumdaki sosyal yanlarını anlamasını engelleyen kafa karıştırıcı iki kavramdır. Bu da insanları cinsiyet eşitliği yerine kadınların eşitliği için mücadele etmeye yöneltmektedir. Bu nedenle, bu makale cinsiyet eşitliğinin temelinde yatan faktörlerden olan biyolojik cinsiyet ve cinsiyet konusunda kapsamlı bir açıklama yapmaya çalışmaktadır. Çünkü cinsiyet, her bireyin biyolojik cinsiyeti üzerine inşa edilmiştir ve bu, mevcut cinsiyet planlamamızın biyolojik dünyanın üstünde olduğunu doğrular (Cameron, 2009). Gerçek şu ki, toplumdaki herkes belirli bir cinsiyete aittir ve cinsiyetleriyle ilgili istekleri vardır, bu da cinsiyeti toplumsal yaşamımızın merkezine yerleştirir. Biyolojik cinsiyet cinsiyeti belirlese de, cinsiyet doğal olarak cinsiyetten türetilmez (Rubin vd, 1974), bu nedenle toplumdaki insanlar faaliyetlerini yaparken farklı davranışlar sergilerler ve bu da bir cinsiyeti diğerinden daha üstün kılarak eşitsizliğe yol açar. Bu makalede Afrika'da yaşayan kadınlara karşı cinsiyet eşitsizliği de açıklanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Biyolojik cinsiyet, Cinsiyet, Kadın, Afrika, Cinsiyet eşitliği.

Introduction

After Gender equality has been discussed by different scholars in various academic disciplines like sociology, political science and in communication among others. Apart from discovering new theories and contributing to the available literature, the focus has been much on finding solutions to reduce the gender gap between males and females to have equal rights and opportunities, equal favorable policies, equal distribution of resources and same working conditions among others. Gender is known as a social economic variable for analyzing responsibilities, roles, restrictions and needs of women and men in a given context (Uzochukwu, 2008). This means gender is based to the social and cultural concepts, and each society assigns to behaviors, characteristics and values attributed to men and women. So, gender concepts are shaped by economic, historical, ethnic, ideological, cultural and religious determinants. However, these concepts on which gender is built all are founded on biological sex (Butler, 2003) which means gender and biological sex cannot easily be separated although few can differentiate the two. Therefore, in this article has articulated both concepts to make them understandable to the readers. Additionally, since Africa is one of

the continents where women are taken to be inferior to men possibly because of various cultures, this article has also analyzed gender equality in African women to see how men and women in Africa should live together equally without any kind of discrimination since gender equality is a fundamental human right for all human beings according to many international and national human right conventions and constitutions.

Understanding Biological Sex and Gender

We have been asked about our genders in various situations while feeling forms of different nature but we are rarely asked to tell our sex. This is almost certainly because we are born with sex which is asked and known once during child birth (Rubin at el, 1974), but we are not born with gender. Gender is known as a social economic variable for analyzing responsibilities, roles, restrictions and needs of women and men in a given context (Uzochukwu, 2008). Gender is not something we are born with, but is what we do (West and Zimmerman, 1987). So, we can look at sex as the biological difference between male and female, but we see gender as a socially constructed behavior based on people's surrounding environments like social cultures and how they perform their activities (Butler, 2003; Orhan, 2021).

This means biological sex is determined naturally and it is known during birth (Rubin at el, 1974) and maybe sometimes before birth thanks to technology, while gender is built and determined by sex and societal activities. That is why we see small children start emulating people in their societies basing on their biological sex. This is where we start seeing boys following the footsteps of their fathers or men and girls following what their fellow girls, women and their mothers execute. Orhan (2021) tells us that a child become a feminine or a masculine gender as a result of biological characteristics on which social performances are constructed. Therefore, gender is established on biological sex and people become aware of their gender behaviors at earliest age where they start performing gender roles through socialization places and channels such as schools, families, society peer groups, communication via mass media and other cultural functions (Eckert & McConnell- Ginet, 2013).

It is because of socialization that boys and girls grow up into male and female gender with elements of men and women behaviors. This is where sex and gender come together (Orhan, 2021). However, sex and gender don't exist at the same time, and people who powerfully identify with the contrasting gender are known as transgendered (Hines & Sanger, 2010). So, how people understand themselves and how they understand others as male and female is subjected to social behaviors, and classifying them as men and women is a social decision (Connell, 1998). Therefore, historically and culturally based explanations of male and female gender in one society may differ to other societies but there is no gender free group of people around the globe (Stephainie, 2015; Rose, 2010)

The fact is that everyone in our societies let's say scientists, religious leaders, journalists, teachers and cultural leaders among others belong to a certain gender and they have desires for gender news means that gender is at the center of our social lives. This is a justification that our social sphere plans are on top of the biological world for the present gender planning (Cameron, 2009). However, even though gender is related to our biological identities, people's body features like hormones, voices and sex do not determine work, color choices, power positions or care towards children (Connell, 1998). Therefore, there are some things which may be known to be done well by men and there are some things that women can do better. In addition, although biological sex determines gender, gender is not reprieved naturally from sex, otherwise people would sit and watch on when babies are growing up to any gender of their sex (Rubin et al, 1974).

On the other hand, sex only can possibly set the gender of a baby on which individuals depend to nurture him or her according to gender based social cultural, political and economic features of the society. In this gendering process in many societies a baby learns either to be male or female basing on the dressing code, names given, gender specialization of work and responsibilities and emulating doings of fathers or mothers. Eckert, & McConnell- Ginet (2013) stated that gendering is a long-life process through which we see people result into not only big men and women but also part of culturally and socially constructed societies that attribute people to cultural and social ideologies. It is probably from this point of view that gender is something that one can learn and practice as a man or a woman from the surrounding environment because, gender is something that grows into people over time to define them as femininity and masculinity or males and females (Orhan, 2021).

Gender makes people to belong to the societal relationships and to fit in all aspects of the society like political, social, cultural, economic, religious and educational aspects (Orhan, 2021). Through these aspects, gender is set in institutions of learning, government offices, schools, churches, hospitals, markets, entertainment, sports, media and communication, restaurants, society leadership offices, and on streets. This implies that various institutions or areas of residence develop environments that accommodate people basing on their gender behaviors.

How Gender and Equality Are Thought About in Societies?

Regardless of their gender and biological sex, people are expected to contribute to the development and growth of their societies equally. Meanwhile, in some societies gender is categorized into different social groups with beliefs that one gender or the other is having different capability, strength and power to do some tasks better than the other (Rose, 2010). Therefore, the nature of gender may only determine behaviors but not strength and power, human rights, jobs, salaries and others that may cause inequalities among people. This implies that

all people should act equally in changing their communities for better regardless of their social factors. However, each gender having its place in a certain social group in the society creates a conflict of interest among the people between males and females because some individuals do believe that one can be more powerful than the other (Goldner, 1988).

Relating to the above, in their book *Language and Gender*, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013) quoted Simone de Beauvoir saying that “people are not born as women and men but are made to be, and the process of making a person to female or male starts from the birth and it is never ending”. Additionally, individuals do not know to judge others or to associate with them in the communities without attributing elements of gender to them (Nass et al. 1997). This means gender is a determining factor in the actions and behaviors in our societies where nothing can be done unless it is linked to gender which may lead to gender inequality. In Turkey, for example, students get transport subsidies by subscribing to a monthly subscription called ‘abonman’, but after pressing their transport cards on an ‘electronic pass-away machine’, the voice that notifies you to pass is based on gender. A big voice for males when male students press their cards on the machine, and a small voice for female students.

So, from childhood, the capability of people is interpreted differently according to their biological sex (Rubin et al., 1974). With observational evidence, the perceptions of some employers in many institutions are affected by the opinions they have about employees’ biological sex or gender before giving them jobs and many employers put it in adverts as they are looking for employees of a certain gender that is to say male or female. This indicates that employee’s gender is taken to be more important than his behaviors, strength and power to do work which makes one gender to benefit more than another. When she was talking in the TED conference in 2015, Ananya Roy said that differences in gender treatment of people leads to systems where men hold power and women largely get discriminated in societies hence patriarchy systems. She added that this must be solved through creating institutions that enable equal rights and equity to all human beings regardless of their sex or gender.

Individuals’ behaviors may be more powerful than others may think but because our societies are built on gender, even people who would focus on gender equality by considering strength and capability of others also change their minds to believe that some tasks cannot be done by certain genders due to limited elements in their nature (Orhan, 2021). Although it may be a collective responsibility for the society to build people’s gender, people in societies seem not to be equally involved in promoting gender equality. According to Rubin et al (1974), men and boys believe more in promoting gender differences than women and girls, and fathers are more of instilling gender behaviors in children than mothers. This is probably because men consider themselves to be superior,

but for a person to be a man it does not make him more powerful and good in everything (Rose, 2010).

In majority of African countries for example, men with powers whether political, social or economic powers are more than women with powers. This is probably based on gender and strength and it leads to inequality among people. Surprisingly, men with power are more likely to be rough with their fellow men in doing work and very gently with women doing the same responsibilities. Men in turn, are more rigged with power than women and they show much power to their fellow men than women (Rose, 2010). However, men considering themselves superior is an historical behavior and today their belief of being superior is just a path dependency where the past actions constrain the present actions (Rerstedt, 2016).

This indicates that within societies, individuals are treated differently due to their being females or males and it became a normal behavior in many countries regardless of various local and international conventions, treaties and constitutions being put in place to promote and ensure equality among criticizes.

Gender Equality and Women in Africa

Our societies are surrounded by sex and gender arguments in all aspects of life. We hear arguments about these concepts in families, institutions, emotions, actions and cultures among others since our childhood and some people grow up knowing that gender based actions and beliefs are natural. In the world, understanding gender is considered as the way we understand ourselves. Also, everyday ideas on gender are considered normal because, it is the perspective in which we knew the world since its creation (Connell, 1998) which is a psychological effect that disturbs people's minds in the society around the world (Stephaine, 2015). Therefore, our 'old' beliefs on gender bring hardship to discover new right things about gender, and the same beliefs make us to refute new good discoveries and probably accept wrong ones about gender because we have the perception of righteousness on everything surrounded gender and sex beliefs.

According to (Rose, 2010) the challenge to change the already confirmed right has resulted into the continuation of wrong actions, inhuman behaviors, social inequalities and discriminations in our societies as a result of believing in historical gender theories. While talking about gender, power, identity and history, Rerstedt, (2016) said that historically, the belief on gender started many years ago where men were considered to be more superior to women because men were doing all the work in the universe including protecting women whom they believed that had fragile and weaker bodies. As a result, some academic scholars, international bodies and national constitutions in different countries try as much to change the prevailing beliefs to promote learned thinking about gender and its related discriminations or privileges because according to United Nations Uni-

versal Declaration of Human Rights charter of 1948, human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Eckert & McConnell- Ginet, 2013).

However, despite the existing international conventions and treaties on equality, few societies and countries in Africa take gender equality serious and this is related to traditional cultures and other societal norms. In many of African cultures, women have been discriminated and regarded as minors in societal activities and practices (Anyanwu and Ibagere, 2012). According to Counts (2018), the fight for women's rights has been in the written words for over 500 years but the progress towards equality has been very slow. This means that a lot have been researched and solutions have been provided but implementations have not yielded fruitful results yet. As it was predicted in one of World Economic Forums that it will take over 200 years to ensure equality between men and women in workplaces in form of participation, seniority and wages (Counts, 2018), some women in Africa are still waiting to see changes in working conditions after 200 years to witness societies where equal rights are shared.

According to the Global institute for women's leadership (2019), ensuring equality in African societies has been hindered by social and cultural customs that have prolonged discriminations against girls and women in many countries, societies and families. In Uganda for example, there are some communities in Ganda tribe where cultural customs still restrict women from some privileges such as restrictions from eating chicken, riding bicycles, climbing trees etc. Such norms restrict the effort to bring back rights of women not only in Ganda tribe in Uganda but also in Africa as well. However, the fight for promoting gender equality in the world seems to have gained much energy due to the rise of some groups of people including men and women who are against inequality and its negative consequences towards humanity such as sexual harassments, violence against women, restricting education to a girl child and many others (Global institute for Women's leadership, 2019).

Therefore, many voices have been heard about closing the social gap between males and females to eliminate gender patriarchy in societies and to equalize men and women at the same level. In trying to close gender gaps, in some communities women have traditionally moved into male roles but it has been at low pace for men in some traditions to move into female areas (Counts, 2018). This perhaps has been as a result of fixed mindsets men have about gender roles, and the fear for men about losing their superiority as men. However, people who are confident with mindset that behaviors such as intellect are inborn and constant seems to give up easily when problems comes beyond their ability than those with growth mindsets (Counts, 2018). This may imply that although women try to do what were termed as men's activities, men are not ready yet to do 'women's activities' and men perhaps want to maintain their supremacy of being higher than women.

In addition, despite of doing same jobs with men, women including those in African countries are still earning little wages regardless of their professional capabilities which has persisted inequalities in pay gaps (Counts, 2018). Although gender equality is needed to protect human rights for all people (Anyanwu and Ibagere, 2012), basing on observation, women in Africa still face the outcome of gendered behaviors in communities they live yet they should enjoy their rights and social norms favoring them in societies. Positively, according to quantum leap for gender equality report of 2019, "in 2018, African women were likely to get employed at jobs taken to be low-skilled and to face very poor working conditions than men, women also do vulnerable works like domestic or home based work".

However, despite their hard work to be equal to men, the report added that in women Africa's sub-Sahara countries are more exposed to informal work than men with over 90 per cent and also some factors like ethnicity, Human Immune Virus (HIV) status and disability worsens women's working conditions in Africa. So, women may be ready to participate in activities which were anciently known to be for men, but they are restricted by factors such as body weaknesses, cultural norms and 'unavoidable' diseases among others. Therefore, like at other continents in the world, gender inequality and discrimination in Africa is also mainly caused by social cultural and social economic factors as a result of male-controlled systems (Mutume, 2011) like inequality in legal system, ethnic discrimination, inequality in politics, education, places of representations like banks and media, employment and public service (Olatunji, 2013). Consequently, African women might not be able to influence policies in their countries' ruling governments, have no chance for decision making, and they are likely to work in the formal sectors with low wages accompanied by violence at work.

On the other hand, some scholars believe that the problem of gender inequality in Africa is resulting from foreign cultures, others argue that the problem started from within Africa while others believe that inequality is caused by multiple factors in Africa. As it was articulated in Olatunji, (2013), Sarah Nuttall argued that it is not fair to blame Africa's problems to foreign factors but instead she says that all the problems originate in Ethnic cultures themselves, for example, in some parts of Africa they still believe in widowhood practices in which widows are restricted from some common hygiene practices like hair treatment, changing cloths, bathing, and women should spend nine moth without social interactions following the death of their husbands yet widowers can freely remarry after the death of their wives.

Gender inequality is also more serious in Africa during adolescence at the period when girls are forced into marriage by their families for economic gains before reaching 18 years (Susheela, and Samara, 1996). These leads to early pregnancies, high spread of HIV, gender based violence as well as much school

dropouts which increases high illiterate rate of women at the continent when these girls grow up. This can be summarized up as gender inequality due to poor economic status at the continent. In the same line, girls with such health or social problems in some African countries are taken to be failures in life. Therefore, the suppression and violation of women's rights in Africa needs a serious cure than just saying that cultures ought to be respected at the continent with intentions to maintain the status quo (Olatunji, 2013).

In some countries where kingships exist, African history is full of stories of women abuse and violation of their rights both by peasants and kings who persistently attribute it to the traditions to defend their cruelty towards women (Olatunji, 2013). By observation, in some African cultures, inequalities between men and women come as a result of men's perspective to 'respect women' because, it is customary to see men engaging themselves in physical activities like hunting, cattle rearing, and search for water claiming that allowing women to participate in physical activities with men would be seen as exploitation of women. Many women love to live in such a comfortable life where men do everything for them, they even believe that it is one of the ways through which they exercise their rights as women. And some think that men who treats them like queens are 'the real men'. It means we are still confusing gender equality with human rights at Africa continent, however, when we fail to understand and learn to differentiate the two, we may lose one of them or both.

In some parts of Africa, women are not expected to have tasks out of their homes with claims that it is not part of the culture for women to compete with men (Olatunji, 2013). In contradiction, according to the Global institute for women's leadership's report of 2019 on essays on quality, not allowing women to compete with men is mistaking confidence for competence which leads to few women in political and administrative positions which makes women poor leaders and incompetent in doing some social work in Africa. This weakens hard-working and charismatic women as a result of closing them outside due to gender and sex discriminations. Therefore, we need to consider and value various features other than gender while choosing leaders to improve the quality of leadership and increasing number of women in leadership positions.

Today, we have seen continuous global effort to end discrimination and inequalities basing on economic status, ethnic origins, political ideologies as well as differences based on gender and sex. Various models of solutions have been put in place for economic, social and psychological empowerment of women and "others suggest that there would be the need to first demilitarize maleness either through affirmative action or through the conquering of the culture that stimulates masculinity", (Olatunji, 2013). According to UNICEF (n.d), knowing gender inequities and responding with gender-equitable programs is important to be considered for development in Africa. "Prevention of child marriage and

providing care to adolescent mothers are among the most important interventions that UNICEF undertakes to reduce gender inequality in Africa and to support girls and boys to enjoy their rights fully. Adolescent girls and boys should also be considered in policies and program development” (UNICEF, n.d).

In the same direction, a report on essays for equality (2019), also adds that, “gender equality is not a zero-sum game, but a shared responsibility for creating societies that work for everyone”. Therefore, policies and special measures need to be adopted to tackle gender inequalities in practice and strengthen women’s voice and participation in different activities together with men freely (Leo Haller).

Conclusion

Our own thinking about biological sex, gender and gender equality has developed and changed over many years of thinking about these issues, and it will undoubtedly continue to change as we continue to explore gender issues in our research and in our lives. As we understand that perspective, the basic capabilities, rights, and responsibilities of women and men are far less different than we commonly thought. In this article, I offered evidence that these differences in what happens to women and men are from people’s mutually developed beliefs about sexual difference, their interpretations of its significance, and their reliance on those beliefs and interpretations to justify constant unequal treatment of women or men. Therefore, creating gendered power equality or inequality in our societies will always depend on our social beliefs about gender. However, much has been written in this article on inequality against women in Africa, and on gender inequalities against women in Africa, governments must solve such problems through creating institutions that enable equal rights to all human and creating an environment that favors all people regardless of their sex or gender.

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