



Essay

Sensing Difference Otherwise: Seniority and the Sensorial Constitution of Gender in (Post)colonial Ghana

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Abstract

In this essay, we challenge the compulsory presumption of gender as a primary lens for examining social relations in queer intercultural communication studies, preferring to instead embrace the instability, fluidity, complexity, and many contradictions that constitute cultural embodiment in (post)colonial contexts like

Ghana. In doing so, we perform—on the page—critical engagements with two interviews featuring Angel Maxine, a self-identified musician and transgender woman in Ghana, to examine how she navigates publics that are especially hostile to same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming folks in Ghana. In the end, this essay supports emergent scholarly discussions by queer intercultural communication scholars asking intercultural communication studies scholars to pay attention to culturally specific nuances of queerness and transness in transnational contexts.

Keywords

queer of color studies, postcolonial theory, Ghana, trans of color studies, globalization

Introduction

In her introduction to the special issue, “Pushing Boundaries: Queer Intercultural Communication,” editor Karma Chávez (2013) cautions that western sexual and gender discourses “travel by choice or by coercion, imposing western values and ideals on nonwestern cultures and societies” (p. 87). Said differently, the global flow of western gender and sexual discourses—including both what is reduced down to “queer” and “trans” in western academe, and to iterations of the LGBT acronym deployed in service of expanding liberal humanist projects—performs western imperialism, imposing western modes of corporeal and relational intelligibility globally (e.g., see Huang & Brouwer, 2018; Namaste, 2009)—what scholars have variously termed “gay imperialism” (Haritaworn, Tuahir & Erdem, 2008; see also Namaste, 2011) or the “Gay International” (Massad, 2008).

In western academe, U.S. English hegemony amplifies western epistemologies, effectively shaping “proper” objects *worthy* of study (Tsuda, 2013). In turn, questions of worth undergirding such disciplinary distinctions reveal U.S. racial capitalism and white supremacy as primary forces mediating (“queer” and “trans”) intelligibility in western academe *about* non-western contexts. As a result, the colonial civilizing impulse, embedded in contemporary western-based LGBT human rights activism, reduces gender and sexual multiplicity into binary categories intelligible to

western audiences, frameworks, and ultimately funders (Hoad, 2000). Consequently, this binary reduction reproduces and asserts epistemologies that hegemonically determine who or what does or does not fall under the purview of “LGBT,” and thus, who or what is worthy of support. In this vein, Massad (2008) argues:

[I]n contradistinction to the liberatory claims made by the Gay International in relation to what it posits as an always already homosexual population, ... it is the very discourse of the Gay International, which both produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology (p. 162-163).

We join Massad in interrogating western epistemologies as universalizing processes that govern corporeal intelligibility globally.

Within intercultural communication studies, the discursive and material means by which people of the Global South might disidentify with, or reconfigure western gender and sexual categories, in order to navigate frequently hostile environments, is an understudied area with rare exception (e.g., Asante, 2019; Huang & Brouwer, 2018). As a result, our work is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing on scholarship that examines ways the LGBT acronym is taken up in nonwestern contexts (e.g., see Altman 1997; Binnie 2004; Manalansan, 2003; Nagar & Dasgupta 2015; Otu, 2020; Lara, 2018). Similarly, while research *about* African communication and studies *by* African -affiliated authors are already limited in communication studies (Miller et al. 2013), research that centers the materialities and lived experiences of gender and sexual non-normative Africans, are especially limited with especially rare exception (Asante, 2019; Goltz et al., 2016). In fact, the limited scholarship on Africans that does exist—be it found in communication studies generally, intercultural communication studies more directly, critical intercultural communication studies more specifically, or queer intercultural communication studies in particular—tends to presume, rather than trouble, gender and sexual non-normative formations of the Global North, deliberately or unwittingly reproducing gender and sexual difference through the experiences of white cisgender male experiences of gender and sexuality. Thus, our essay implicates the universality of

western gender and sexuality *while* centering African queer and trans communication.

Central to this essay is building understanding about how Ghanaian trans subjectivities are constructed, how subject positions inform relations, and how these relations impact the negotiation of agency particular to women of trans experience in (post)colonial contexts. To help unpack this complex process, we use performance means to observe and engage two mediated interviews featuring Angel Maxine, a Ghanaian musician and transgender woman who has gained media attention, popularity, and presence in ways that other women of trans experience in Ghana have not. Angel rose to popularity with her hit debut song, “dedeede” (meaning sweetness in Twi). After gaining popularity with the song, she has consistently been invited to several Ghanaian radio stations and TV stations to speak about her experience as a trans woman. Angel has used such opportunities to educate the Ghanaian public about what trans means and her struggles as a trans woman in Ghana. She predominantly uses social media (i.e., Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) to reach her fans in Ghana and in the diaspora.

In an attempt at decentering the authority of our academic gaze, we additionally place our performance observations in conversation with Angel herself. The lead author is a same-gender-loving cisman from Ghana who shares social networks with Angel in Ghana. It is in this vein that we invited Angel to join us as collaborator of this text. The second author is a non-binary, trans feminine person who studies gender difference through an intersectional lens, and is particularly reflexive of the ways Western modernity constitutes a global form of respectable transness, against which gender diverse persons outside of the specter of the Global North, are rendered knowable at all. Both first and second author talked at length with Angel in preparation for writing this essay.

While insights gleaned in postcolonial studies, as well as queer and trans of color criticisms help to shape our findings, it is Angel’s vantage that helps us to ground our work. We believe dialogic and theoretical intersections offer a unique means to examine how macro structures—the globalization of LGBT human rights through neoliberal expansion—intersect with meso contextual cultural factors—such as seniority—to produce sometimes contradictory and paradoxical enactments of agency in (post)colonial contexts such as Ghana.

Examining the effects of macro structural intersections presses us to re-evaluate, if not reject, western bio-logic dis/connections to the body. Here, we draw on Oyewúmi's (1997) trenchant claim that social differences in Yoruba communities, and by extension in certain African communities, may be sensed otherwise. Taking her lead, we theorize difference in ways that resist the colonizer's *literal* gaze—in particular, its visual disciplinary means—in favor of broader sensorial means for perceiving cultural performances of difference and hierarchy (Yep, 2020). Riffing on Chávez's (2013) words, this essay pushes the boundaries of queer intercultural communication (QIC) research by advocating for a unified sex-gender-sexual formation that can privilege other forms of knowing, sensing, and performing that refuse western modernity's visual grasp.

Our essay includes the following moves: First, we explore the historical context of gender non-normativity, often mediated in local sexual terms, in (pre-/post-) colonial Ghana. Second, we explore theoretical resonances and dissonances between postcolonial studies and queer and trans of color criticism, while centering African feminist critiques of gender that evade the colonizer's visual gaze. As a result, we theorize seniority as a sensorial means of embodying gender otherwise. Third, we engage two of Angel's mediated interviews, archived on YouTube, and place our sensed observations in conversation with Angel, through personal correspondence, in order to explicate how she navigates her world as a form of survival in a context that remains hostile to same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming folks. And fourth, we close our essay theorizing the implications of our findings, offering alternative points of departure for imagining and sensing gender and sexuality differently and otherwise.

Imagining Gender Otherwise: (Pre-/post-)colonial Potentialities

The multivalent meanings attached to gender in the region—where the colonial boundaries of Ghana are situated—emanate from a configuration of historically sedimented power relations that span long before European colonization and that simultaneously include the emergence of (post)colonial nationalism; the insistence of Christianization; the globalization of LGBT identities; and the proliferation of neoliberal economic reforms. These historically sedimented and co-constituting

macro and meso structures mediate the discursive construction of Angel's body in micro contexts. In particular, we acknowledge both continually shifting and historically situated understandings and performances of gender in Ghana. Thus, we use "gender nonconformity" and "trans," noting their western origin and bend while exploring the particularities that enable local sex, gender, and sexual meanings to emerge. Indeed, unreflexive engagements with gender nonconformity, including transness, can fail to capture the contextual complexities co-constituting gender and sexual formations that intersect with religion, ethnicity, nationalism, indigeneity, and globalized popular culture in (post)colonial contexts (Mathebani & Msibi, 2015).

Often associated with the transnational LGBT acronym, transgender, as a distinct iteration in (post)colonial Ghana, is locally contested despite ample anthropological evidence detailing cultural practices that nurtured gender diversity, often in sexual relational terms, among precolonial Ghanaian societies. For example, Signorini (1973) observed that the Nzemas of Ivory Coast and Ghana were said to have practiced a same-gender marriage custom known as *agnowole agyale* (friendship marriage). These marriages involved friends of the same gender who were sexually attracted to one another. Signorini explains that these marriages were contracted in identical form to heterosexual marriages and included aspects such as the payment of bride-price and the sharing of a matrimonial bed. The Ashantis and Denkyiras in Ghana practiced the *kra* (soul) tradition, which facilitated homoeroticism (Ellis, 1883). Meanwhile, the Fantes in Ghana believed that sexual attraction originated from the *kra*. Persons with a "heavier" *kra* were said to be attracted to women, while persons with a "lighter" *kra* were said to prefer men (Christensen, 1954).

As Ghana began to obtain independence in 1957, knowledge of these cultural practices was slowly grafted over by a neocolonial Christianized cisheteropatriarchal narrative that maintains and asserts that Africans are inherently heterosexual and, in turn, normatively gendered (Epprecht, 2008). The gradual erasure of precolonial relational formations can be traced to African oral traditions. Prior to colonial conquest, orality was the primary mode for many African societies to transmit their histories and cultural practices. However, sexual practices were rarely preserved through oral tradition, thus, opening the way for colonial narratives of sex and gender duality and binarism to eclipse and control precolonial multiplicities (Andam,

2019). Moreover, colonialism introduced formal education and boarding schools that restricted, if not barred, intergenerational familial contact between grandparents, parents, and children. Taken together, precolonial knowledges about gender and sexual diversity, and the cultural systems and relational formations that made possible such diversities, largely eroded into a colonial hegemony of Christianized cisheteropatriarchy. Today, the increasing influence of Ghanaian Pentecostalist Charismatic churches proselytizing against a backdrop of support from Ghanaian political elites—for whom gender and sexual diversity is equated with “primitiveness” and amorality, and/or, paradoxically, as a western secular force threatening traditional African culture—play an especially hostile role in the continued demonization and criminalization of gender and sexual difference (Asante, 2020).

Currently, same-sex sexual relations continue to be a criminal offense in Ghana under the carnal knowledge clause— a left over law from colonial times. In spite of the contemporary criminalization of same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming folks, there is robust LGBT rights activism in Ghana (for example, Solace Brothers; Courageous Sisters; LGBTRights+ Ghana, among others). LGBT rights activism in Ghana is embedded in a network of international organizations and western governments whose support has come at a cost, however. That cost includes the interpellating power of a global hierarchy asserting gender and sexual non-normative intelligibility. As a result, a majority of LGBT rights activist organizations in Ghana have overwhelmingly focused on same-gender-loving folks who are presumed to be gender normative (e.g., cisgender LGB women and men), thus, leaving persons of trans experience—whether heterosexual or LGB—largely out of the dominant discourses constituting “LGBT rights” in Ghana. Mbugua (2013) calls this phenomenon the “gaynization” and “lesbianization” of trans lives where transgender people are reductively lumped into the LGBT acronym despite trans issues varying greatly from that of cisgender LGB issues and regularly neglected as “same-sex” issues. As such, the Ghanaian public’s general unfamiliarity with trans and gender nonconforming issues opens the door for the re-negotiation of cultural norms that constrain gender multiplicity beyond western hegemonic epistemologies of gender. In turn, we are prompted to theorize gender otherwise.

Theorizing Gender Otherwise: Communicative Agency in Postcolonial Ghana

While a concerted focus on transness—and on trans/gender folks especially—is an emerging area of focus within the communication discipline (see Spencer & Capuzza, 2015), QIC studies has been especially amenable to the deliberate centering of trans folks of color (see Eguchi & Calafell, 2019 Yep et al., 2015). Our essay is firmly situated in conversation with QIC studies, an onto-epistemic project centering materiality as constitutive of queer of color communication in intercultural contexts (Chávez, 2013; Eguchi, 2015; Eguchi & Calafell, 2019; Yep et al., 2019). To focus our QIC energies, our argument is shaped by theoretical developments in postcolonial studies (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Shome & Hegde, 2002) as well as in queer of color (Alexander, 2017; Eguchi & Asante, 2016) and trans of color criticisms (LeMaster & Tristano, 2021). Moreover, our work responds to disciplinary calls to internationalize queer studies (Atay, 2021; Chan, 2017), to theorize transness in trans-affirming terms (LeMaster & Stephenson, 2021), and to complexify queer communication theorizing (Manning et al., 2020).

Taken together, these varied critical projects prioritize means of survival of/as the dispossessed over improving communication with so-called others (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020). Likewise, rather than detailing the epistemic contours discursively articulating Angel's transgender identity in western terms, our work centers mundane means of navigating social conditions that are especially hostile toward same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming folks. To do so, we attempt to make sense of the (post)colonial landscape of Ghana via Homi Bhabha's explication of liminality. After, we explicate how that context of liminality influences the formation of gendered and sexual subjectivities that African feminists have theorized as African sensibilities, to gender and sexuality, outside of the visual markers of difference. Finally, we argue performance approaches to intercultural communication provide the theoretical and methodological elasticity to capture the nuances of cultural performances in postcolonial contexts such as Ghana (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020; Willink et al., 2014).

Understanding Ghana's (Post)colonial Context

In light of globalization and modernity, (post)colonial contexts are spaces of liminality marked by contradictions and paradoxes. Here, attention to the liminality of the (post)colonial context, in which Angel finds herself, can be instructive in our theorizing of gender otherwise. In his foundational text, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) draws on Victor Turner's (1992) idea of liminality to describe the disembodied form of signification that constitutes the postcolonial condition and related postmodernist and poststructuralist discourses. The border space that Turner describes as liminal, is what Bhabha theorizes as the "realm of the beyond" (p. 1). Here, Bhabha's idea of beyond does not gesture to liberal utopic fantasies, nor to an overdetermined space, but to a post-dialectical moment marked by ambiguity—when/where subjects reject structure and rework hegemonies while navigating heterogenous space-time (see also Kalua, 2009). Moreover, in (post)colonial settings, the uncertain whims of globalizing forces position what we understand as flux and flow—the capacity to respond and reconstitute oneself in real time to pressing material conditions beyond oneself—as pre-conditions for (post)colonial subjectivity. Here, subjectivity refers to the ways that individuals are responding/re-orienting themselves within the transnational flow of queer and trans politics and sometimes reactionary local queer activism, politics, and governmentality. Our view of subjectivity is drawn from Foucault (1976) who argues that individuals become subjects through various practices and discourses that are shaped by power relations. Ultimately, subjectivity is about the enactment of agency within the structures, institutions and representations, which shape queer experiences.

Liminality guides this essay by rejecting modernist appeals to identity as postcolonial sites are constituted in confusion, paradox, and liminality—all of which provide reprieve for the queer subject for whom survival depends on satiating *while* evading corporeal intelligibility. Thus, liminality offers a lens to understand Angel's relational ambiguity and paradoxical intercultural performances which evokes the senses other than the visual to make sense of embodied gendered and sexual difference.

Theorizing Gender Beyond the Visual

African feminist theorists focus our understanding of the capacity to satiate—*while* evading—intelligibility in (post)colonial contexts like Ghana. In particular, Cruz (2015) focuses our theoretical lens in ontological (in movement away from “dualisms and binaries” [p. 29]); epistemological (centering “political aspirations...buried in everyday and mundane communicative interactions” [p. 30]); and axiological (praxis that “works against victimization” [p. 30]) terms (see also Cruz, 2020). In addition, Pindi (2020) teaches us to theorize in ways that are distinctly of, and particular to, African women’s lives. And in her ardent critique of the western feminist preoccupation with patriarchy as a translocal category, Oyewúmi (1997) provocatively contends that prior to colonization, gender was not a key organizing principle in Yoruba culture. Advancing what she calls a “world-sense”—juxtaposed to a “worldview”—Oyewúmi argues that European cultures and intellectual histories prioritize visual facilities, placing an emphasis on appearance while exaggerating visible markers of difference (p. 3). More to the point, western onto-epistemologies draw on a compulsory “bio-logic” in which bodily difference is visually assessed, binarized, and categorized from the vantage of the colonizer (p. 11). In response, she advocates for decentering visuality in African contexts. She suggests that worldview is a western centered framework, and that world-sense better suits African ways of sensing and knowing because African cultures are not, and have not been, historically ordered around a logic of vision, but of senses otherwise. Ghana is no exception, then. Yoruba culture has not traditionally drawn on biology as a primary means of explaining nor establishing social relations, subjectivity, positioning, or hierarchy.

While Oyewúmi’s (1997) argument has been well critiqued (e.g., see Bakare-Yusuf, 2003), we believe she presents a compelling case for evading the colonizer’s *literal* gaze. In particular, we turn to the sensorial to account for “smell, taste, touch, and hearing” beyond the visual (Cruz, 2015, p. 30). We find that the sensorial possibilizes Angel’s gender otherwise. Specifically, it is through the sensorial that Angel’s gender is relationally constituted otherwise. To get at the sensorial, we turn to the body and, in turn, to performance approaches to intercultural communication (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020). To focus our methodological approach, we turn to Yep (2020) who argues performance approaches to intercultural communication is theory

meshed with method, pressing us to attend to the body in/as cultural performances. Further, a performance approach allows us to interrogate “the relationship between embodiment and action, being and doing, to understand the cultural nuances and particularities of performance of human activities and to identify and reveal deep-seated power relations” (p. 491). In this light, the sensorial performs gender otherwise, in fully embodied and relationally responsive terms, which in turn, guides our understanding of Angel’s seniority status.

In Yoruba culture, seniority mediates social hierarchies and thus, communicative scenes. Rather than an age, however, seniority references context-specific relational situatedness that troubles western bio-logical assumptions for visually assessing manhood and womanhood. Seniority presses us to attend to the materiality, animating a context such that one knows how best to accommodate their communication, rather than to “bio-logic” bodies, in which western patriarchy pre-determines communicative dynamics between so-called men and women. In essence, a focus on seniority affectively situates our methodological focus to that of the sensorial constitution of gender and away from western pre-occupations with presumed genitalia, reproductive capacity, and ultimately sexual hegemony. However, seniority is not a system devoid of differences and power relations that sometimes reproduces, if not exaggerates, gender differences while constraining communicative agency. For instance, in the Akan context, Opanyin usually connotes what western audiences might call an older cisgender man, even though cisgender women can and do embody seniority status just the same. Indeed, such connotations do not necessarily reflect inherent gender differences. Rather, intersecting factors that mediate and ensure seniority have, since colonialism, benefitted men in areas such as social and economic status, family lineage (*abusua*), ability, and religion. Furthermore, seniority’s *de jure* representation in language is distinct from how it is manipulated and used to navigate a discriminatory system. Said quite differently, seniority is both tethered to Christianized cisheteropatriarchal vestiges of colonial control and rife with potentiality for change in relational context (Warren, 2008). For example, Bakare-Yusuf (2003) explains that some people can play with the normative structures of seniority to their advantage. In practice, a senior may tacitly relinquish their seniority status when dealing with a junior because they have economic and social capital which they might want to access. On the other hand, a

junior may show excessive deference because it may be in their interest to do so in order to gain political power or to satiate contextual needs.

In short, (post)colonial liminalities, and African sensibilities of gender and sexuality, commune together through the notion of seniority for Angel to assert communicative agency. For Collier, Lawless, and Ringera (2016), the capacity to enact specific communicative acts marks communicative agency. More specifically, communicative agency is enacted in spaces between socially constructed action and structurally produced contexts, and therefore, between subject positions and subjectivities. Christianized cisheteropatriarchy allows for the criminalization of same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming folks in postcolonial Ghana, revealing communicative agency for same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming folks to be complex at best. To have her gender affirmed otherwise, through seniority, gestures to Angel's communicative agency in (post)colonial Ghana and in sensorial terms to which we turn next.

Sensing Gender Otherwise: Seniority and the Relational Constitution of Transness in (Post)colonial Ghana

In this section, we exhibit embodied relational means by which Angel's gender is sensed otherwise. To do so, we couple dialogic engagement with Angel, along with the two lead authors' engagement with two mediated interviews, featuring Angel. One interview was conducted by Akwasi Aboagye on PeaceFM and produced by Despite Media (2020)—a Ghanaian radio station that utilizes one of the main local languages, Twi, rather than English. The second interview was conducted by Sammy Kuma on SammyKay Media (2020)—a popular YouTube channel that, like PeaceFM, utilizes Twi. At the time of writing this essay, SammyKay Media has 77,800 subscribers and the interview with Angel has over 11,000 views. Despite Media has over 231,000 subscribers and Angel's interview on YouTube has 8,594 views. Thus, both platforms are able to connect with a larger cross section of the Ghanaian public; notably, most interviews with LGBT folks are conducted in English—a point we explore below. While both platforms espouse anti-LGBT animus, PeaceFM is among the most socially conservative radio stations in Ghana. In previous years, the station has featured several anti-LGBT rights advocates while denying human rights activists the chance to denounce religious framings of same-

sex sexuality as demonic (Asante, 2020). We believe these platforms are interested in interviewing Angel because it will attract more listeners. Importantly, we assume they want to “stage” her to the Ghanaian public as the physical embodiment of LGBT rights and a symbol of why those rights should be resisted. Angel’s presence and popularity occurs within a legal backdrop where all non-heterosexual sexual relationships remain criminalized (Tettey, 2016).

As such, Angel’s appearance on these radio and YouTube platforms is significant because she is able to engage a predominantly Twi-speaking audience who constitute a large consumer-base for radio stations across Ghana. In addition, PeaceFM archives live interviews on YouTube for Ghanaians in the diaspora. For us, Angel’s archived interviews present opportunities to audience the sensorial constitution of gender otherwise and in relational context. Through our engagement with interviews featuring Angel, and in dialogue with Angel, we have split our observations into three subsections—*Articulating Gender*, *Sensing Gender Otherwise*, and *Sensorial Disruptions*—affectively moving us from gender articulation in neoliberal terms to genders embodied otherwise, effectively disrupting the hegemonic Christianized cisheteropatriarchal grasp on Ghanaian publics.

Articulating Gender

The propensity for violence against same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming folks—including effeminate men, who are understood to embody *authentic* homosexuality according to hegemonic political and religious discourses—locates Angel in a precarious place—too queer to be straight, too feminine to be homosexual. Whereas effeminate men can, in the end, claim maleness, gender nonconforming folks, including Angel, are denied similar access to identity-based protections; in the end, Angel is not a man nor is she an *effeminate* gay man. In this context, Angel navigates a precarious biopolitical terrain where her embodied resistance to (post)colonial gendered systems of intelligibility makes her vulnerable to violence and intimidation for failing to do gender “right.” Nonetheless, Angel aspires for normative citizenship but seeks to enact it otherwise. In other words, Angel’s discursive and performative tactics for navigating such hostile spaces do not exclusively challenge the normative bodies that lay claim to seniority in relational contexts. Based on these fragmented positions, Angel negotiates and participates in

multiple intersecting cultural normativities while simultaneously dis/identifying with them.

As we noted above, seniority is an organizing principle within Akan cultural systems. We noted, further, that seniority is dynamic and fluid. In its contemporary cultural enactments, seniority intersects with neoliberal ideologies to produce material and symbolic effects that reconfigure how bodies are read, used, and translated in Ghanaian societies. For Harvey (2007), “Neoliberalism proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p.71), all of which take precedence over government interference, local entrepreneurship, labor interests, and social services. But as Sharma (2008) and Ong (2006) explain, neoliberalism is best understood when grounded in specific spatial and temporal contexts. In the Ghanaian socio-political context, neoliberalism may offer limited and constrained possibilities for social change. As neoliberal ideologies merge with social hierarchies, such as the cultural politics of seniority, both are reconfigured in significant ways. We assert that it is the (pre-/post-)colonial cultural versatility of seniority, as it intersects with (pre-/post-)colonial neoliberal ideologies, that enable Angel to navigate cultural spaces that have typically excluded other gender nonconforming folks. In this vein, Angel, through seniority sensibilities, embodies the conflict with neocolonial Christianized cisheteropatriarchal norms that valorize men and masculinity as societal “heads” and natural elders. In the following, we explicate how Angel re-writes (pre-/post-)colonial hegemonic gender scripts through our correspondence and performance engagement with her interview texts.

In our personal correspondence, we asked Angel why she believes she has been able to successfully navigate a sexually conservative Ghanaian public sphere even though other people in the LGB categories have been denied similar opportunities. Angel responded:

I want to be seen as a musician and not as trans or a homosexual. Most people in the LGBT community just discuss sex and the media pick up on sex as a fixed visual image of the Ghanaian LGBT community. I don't want to be seen based on my sexual object choice. I want people

to invest in my music career because I am very hardworking (Personal Correspondence, August 17th, 2020).

In the era of neoliberal governmentality, Angel's seniority is not read and sensed through a western-based LGBT rights framework but as a productive and laboring body that is able and ready to work. Angel's economic-centered framing of herself punctuates the praxis-oriented focus in African feminisms in which African women are focused on meeting immediate material demands (Cruz, 2020). For Angel, that includes a focus on her trade: her music. In most of her interviews, Angel reinforces her productive and functional body by redirecting attention back to the fact that she is a hardworking musician, an entrepreneur, and a Ghanaian woman— notions that are often eclipsed by the ideological constraints attached to the sign of the homosexual in the Ghanaian public sphere. In this framing, the aesthetic and performative demarcation between homosexuality and womanhood is crucial to Angel as she navigates ideological constraints projected on to her person as an effeminate man, and therefore, as a homosexual. To counter such assertion, she performs neoliberalized seniority that centers her functional and productive body over her gendered and sexually different body— thereby, re-writing postcolonial hegemonic gender scripts. In this vein, Angel plays with and against the normative structures of seniority to her dis/advantage by highlighting through her body what makes her a neoliberal subject and a Ghanaian woman: productive labor potential. Simultaneously, she strategically de-/emphasizes both her transness as well as her position on trans rights. In fact, Angel rarely addresses trans rights nor transness. Rather, she tactfully redirects interviews away from her gender difference and toward her capacity to be read in neoliberal terms. That is, to be seen as an entrepreneur, self-reliant, and responsible citizen. The redirection opens the space for an alternative intercultural experience to occur. It is an experience that is not captured by a western "bio-logic" that focus on her body but through gender sensed otherwise, and against the human rights framework that has failed to adequately garner support for LGBT folks in Ghana.

Sensing Gender

Having articulated Angel's gender otherwise—in neoliberalized terms of productivity and labor, which enables her to embody a senior status among a room full of non-trans interviewers conducting an interview on a socially conservative and typically anti-LGBT radio station—we turn now to the sensorial, focusing in particular on the ways that Angel's neoliberalized senior gender is sensed otherwise and ultimately in gender affirming terms. Sekimoto and Brown (2020) explicate that the senses mediate “natural” and “cultural” in relational terms. As such, critical explorations into Oyewúmi's (1997) conceptual framing of “worldsense,” as perhaps an alternative modality to explore gendered social hierarchies in Africa, might reveal the relationship between culture and human sensorial experiences, thereby fundamentally disrupting discourses of the “natural” while concomitantly unraveling that which is taken for granted as constituting the “cultural” (Sekimoto & Brown, 2020). Opponents of LGBT rights in Ghana have vehemently described all forms of non-heterosexual embodiment and sexuality as “unnatural” and therefore as public health threats to be contained. Asante (2020) explains that these anti-LGBT discourses are persuasive while dangerous because it aligns what is natural with what is healthy, effectively justifying anti-LGBT violence as inherent to preserving African culture. Additionally, sight is privileged as the primary sense used to prove the natural. In this western ideological architecture, gender is bio-logic, natural, and can be proven through visual means, which are allegedly self-evident. All other configurations that may be sensed otherwise are discarded as unnatural and/or as distractions from coloniality's visual fetish.

During an interview on PeaceFM, the hosts and panelists are puzzled that they cannot distinguish Angel's womanhood from that of a non-trans woman's womanhood (Despite Media, 2020). Their embodied struggle to assert a definitive gender identification fosters a corporeal fascination riddled with visceral responses to Angel's senioritized body—opening up the space for Angel to re-write (pre-/post)colonial hegemonic gender scripts in real time. Early on in the interview, radio host, Aboagye, states rather surprisingly, “wu hume se obaa” (you breathe like a woman). Aboagye's assertion punctuates an especially prolonged silence, rendering the scene all the more awkward. Aboagye's remark is especially revealing as it reinforces gender stereotypes, on the one hand, while it legitimizes Angel's gender

embodiment of womanhood, on the other. Tina, a non-trans woman panelist, then queries Aboagye on whether women have a particular way of breathing. Aboagye responds, attempting to clarify his point, that Angel's breathe "wu humie bon se obaa obaa" (smells like that of a woman). Here again, Angel's gender embodiment of womanhood challenges (pre-/post-)colonial hegemonic gender scripts that orients the senses and desires towards particular bodies. By subduing the colonial gendered scripts that privilege "sight" as the primary means by which to confirm a gendered body, Aboagye *senses* Angel's gender embodiment otherwise. What is understood as "natural" to womanhood is displaced, if not expanded, to account for that which is sensed otherwise. In this case, through smell.

Sensorial Disruptions

Having articulated Angel's gender otherwise, through neoliberalized seniority, we have explored sensorial means by which Angel's gender is sensed otherwise, as through smell for instance. In this closing observation section, we discuss the implications of our findings, particularly as it pertains to the embodied ways in which gender sensed otherwise necessarily unravels western presumptions of/for gender intelligibility. Like PeaceFM, SammyKay Media is a popular YouTube channel that offers news programs in Twi. In an interview with Angel, Sammy Kuma demanded to know whether Angel enjoys anal sex (SammyKay Media, 2020)—a question that seeks to reinforce her maleness, gayness, and eventually the homosexual scourge allegedly undergirding her gender. Angel explains that she is "not interested" in sex "at the moment" and actually has "not engaged" in anal sex before.

Stunned and perplexed, Kuma looks to the camera/mediated audience and back to Angel, astonished at the possibility that womanhood can exist fully realized outside Christianized cisheteropatriarchal expectations for penetrative sex and reproduction. Kuma's affective response revealing organized structures of sensations and feelings, purportedly shared with his diasporic viewers, through his mediated affective performance of shock. His sense of shock, suggesting Angel's trans-temporal rearrangement of gender, body, and desire, is perhaps unthinkable, if not improbable. However, Angel's gender embodiment, her very being amidst unraveled corporeal responses, gesture toward gender and embodiment otherwise and beyond binaries and dualisms. Conceivably, the visceral functions as an

embodied sensorial site where the inter-relationship between cultural embodiment and affective experiences coalesce to craft dominant meanings about gender and sexuality. Here, we follow Cvetkovich (2003) who illustrates the productive and creative work that can emerge when feelings are treated as significant public acts. She argues, “Affect . . . serves as the foundation of public cultures . . . rather than [as] a model in which privatized responses displace collective political ones” (p. 10). Cvetkovich troubles attempts to distinguish between individuated and collective affective response such that we might more effectively affirm how “affective life can be seen to pervade public life” (p. 10). Concurrently, we believe Angel’s gender embodiment is articulated between what Oyěwùmí (1997) contends as the tension between a western epistemological approach that prioritizes a worldview and African forms of knowing that engage senses beyond the visual; senses otherwise including that of shock, of the visceral.

Similarly, in a PeaceFM interview (2020), we observe Aboagye’s performance of visceral confusion on how best to engage Angel (Despite Media, 2020). He slouches in his chair, contemplating Angel’s presence, silenced. Angel is meticulously dressed in a red blouse that covers her arm all the way to her wrist. Aboagye sits stunned and perplexed; Angel sits cool, confident. Unraveled, Aboagye offers several sighs, trying to hide an ever-emerging flirtatious smile. While questions have yet to be asked, the interview has begun—Angel’s comportment, in light of the host’s visceral response, serving as the affective grounds out of which Angel emerges cool, confident, and senior. Here, Angel’s flesh, her corporeal presence, is not simply matter but, rather, “the very sensibility of the seen and the very sight of the sensible” (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001, p. 5). The periperformative scene reveals affect—the “fleshy interface” between bodies (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001, p. 1)—to be an intercultural site of co-constitutive becoming. We find that visceral responses to Angel’s body are indicative of a sensorial process, where discourses that insinuate LGBT issues as a colonial import, and Western in character, are not only challenged but reconfigured. That is, Angel is Ghanaian, speaks Twi fluently (as opposed to most interviews with LGBT rights advocates, that are conducted in English), and is intelligible as a neoliberal senior subject, who happens, also, to embody gender in non-normative ways. Taken together, Angel’s presence troubles the presumption of LGBT as a foreign import. Thus, Angel’s intercultural performances of identity draws on, but

re-writes, precolonial dominant scripts of seniority and (post)colonial neoliberal embodiment, to resist cisheteropatriarchal constructions of Ghanaian citizenship. Given the rearrangements of temporal (same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming cultural performances pre-date colonialization of Ghana) and geospatial orientations (LGBT is a western idea), Aboagye is unable to express what he feels through language. The boundaries separating objecthood and subjecthood have collapsed, opening space for alternative ways of feeling, of sensing, and of being human otherwise, and unbeknownst to Aboagye and, perhaps, his transnational audience.

To Sense Difference Otherwise:

Towards (Post)colonial Queer Intercultural Communication

More than mere visceral responses to gender difference, Aboagye and Kuma's respective—though resonant—responses implicate the Christianized cisheteropatriarchal sexual politics mediating visceral responses not *to*, but *with* Angel's gender otherwise. Indeed, while we narrow in on the sensorial responses of interviewers, it is Angel's capacity to satiate—while evade—the (post)colonizer's *literal* gaze that reveals the vaster sensorial as relational grounds for imagining and theorizing gender otherwise. Because Aboagye and Kuma sensed Angel's womanness otherwise, through the sensorial, we might characterize their visceral responses as “queer feelings” precisely because their sense of comfort in cisheteronormativity is disrupted by Angel's sensorial gender (Ahmed, 2015, p. 144). Queer too, then, in the sense that the presumably cisheterosexual hosts are forced to reconcile the compulsory limits of their own so-called cisheterosexual desire (Johnson & LeMaster, 2020). Indeed, transness unravels the borders seeking to constrain and contain corporeal and, in turn, sexual intelligibility. Caught up in hegemonic performances of gender, and as public voices of Ghana's mediated and diasporic communities, the interviewers are compelled to respond with repulsion and surprise because to do otherwise might gesture toward homosexuality, should the interviewers affirm the heterosexual woman of trans experience before them.

Angel's skillful capacity to navigate the interpellating grasp of Christianized cisheteropatriarchy through sensorial means reveals satiating—evading as a dialectic tension mediating survival of/for/as same-gender-loving and gender nonconforming

folks in (post)colonial contexts. In revisiting their work on dialectics, Martin and Nakayama (2010) remark, that a dialectical approach focuses our attention to the relational where “one becomes fully human only in relation to another person and that there is something unique in a relationship that goes beyond the sum of two individuals” (p. 66). The sensorial thus mediates Angel’s relational constitution of womanness through seniority, which in turn, forces the presumably cisheterosexual men to or to not affirm Angel’s gender otherwise through their own capacity to relationally admit to, or deny, a sense of desire toward trans femininity. While the hosts vacillate between affirmation and denial, Angel responds in kind, relationally navigating the flux and flow of having to satiate—evade Christianized cisheteropatriarchy’s interpellating grasp in (post)colonial Ghana.

Our essay intervenes in the compulsory production of cisnormative (queer and non-queer) epistemics that predominate queer intercultural communication, critical intercultural communication, intercultural communication, and communication studies writ large. In particular, our observations engage the necessarily incommensurable contours that animate queerness from transness in relational terms. As a result, our work implicates unreflexive and imperialist employments of the LGBT acronym, which tends to collapse intracultural nuance and difference, especially in (post)colonial contexts like Ghana. Moreover, our essay contributes to developments in trans and queer of color theories that work to not only theorize racialized gender and sexuality but to also affirm corporeal unintelligibility as an embodied means of survival and navigating especially hostile publics. To that we add that corporeal unintelligibility implicates the colonizer’s gaze while the sensorial dynamics disrupt and necessarily complicate the colonizer’s *literal* gaze. Angel is not disruptive in a white western queer political sense (Rand, 2014; Slagle, 1995), but through a subtle and sensorial trans of color political sense, in which survival supersedes certainty (Bey, 2019; Green, 2016). Trans and gender nonconforming folks of color the world over exist fully realized with and without the colonizer’s exclusionary eye and, in turn, outside of coloniality’s constraining logics and discourses. We invite queer intercultural communication scholars to join us in imagining and theorizing difference differently and otherwise.

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