

Women and Sexuality: Representations of Female Sexuality in Selected Zimbabwean Newspaper Stories

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ABSTRACT For many years, women in most cultures have not been able to freely express their sexuality. Zimbabwe, like many other countries in Africa, has traditions and customs that sanction women and deny them space to express how they feel about sex and sexual relationships. In Zimbabwe, particularly in Shona culture, it is a taboo for a woman to speak openly about sex or to be implicated in sex-related matters. In recent years, these traditions have been challenged. This paper is a qualitative analysis of selected sex related stories published in Zimbabwean tabloids. Six stories are identified from Zimbabwean newspapers. The selection is informed by research questions that guide the paper. The objective is to examine expressions of female sexuality in the selected stories, and the extent to which these stories challenge long-held cultural beliefs and traditions. The paper concludes that female sexuality in Zimbabwe has undergone significant transformation in recent years.

INTRODUCTION

The paper discusses representations of female sexuality in selected Zimbabwean newspaper stories. Sexuality is a broad term that can refer not only to the physical attributes we associate with sex, but a great deal else including the way we dress, sit, walk, talk, and laugh, as there are feminine and masculine ways of doing these things both across sexes, and also within sexes depending on the social position of the person (Lee 2011). Sexuality is not only about sexual acts, but also about the meanings they carry, the desires motivating them and the social interaction through which they are accomplished, and sexual acts themselves encompass a range of possibilities beyond those implicated in reproduction (Scott 2010). This implies that individuals and communities have different ways of conceptualizing sex and sexuality. In a study on sexual motivation among women, Armstrong and Reissing (2015: 992) found that emotional satisfaction was the most important motivation for sex among women of different sexual orientations. However, there were other factors such as physical attraction, the need for pleasure, emotional closeness and stress relief. While it is clear that women have their own way of thinking about sex, most societies do not allow them to openly speak about what makes their sexual world go round. Masvawure (2013) notes that

sexuality is shaped by social and political forces and connects in important ways, to relations of power around class, race and especially, gender.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed (2006). On the other hand, gender refers to all aspects of the division and difference between women and men (Scott 2010). Scott (2010) makes a distinction between sexuality and sexualities. Sexuality is a sphere of human, social activity and a field of sociological inquiry, while on the other hand sexualities refer to individual sexual practices, lifestyles or identities. Oakley (2015: 77) acknowledges that there is confusion in the use of the words “sex” and “sexuality”. Sex refers to “biological maleness or femaleness”, while sexuality refers to “behavior related to copulation”. This paper interrogates both the sexuality of women and their sex-relationships represented in the selected newspaper stories.

Female sexuality has for many years, been considered to be intricately linked with male

sexuality. In fact, the majority of women the world over, continue to enact their sexuality in the world of men, and usually marriage. The acceptable and 'natural' face of sexuality is represented by the adult preferably married, able-bodied, heterosexual couple (Khana and Price 1994). In a study on dominant discourses on female sexuality, Shefer and Ngabaza (2015: 64) argue that the sexuality of young women is often denied within a framework of protection, regulation and discipline. Society seems to be preoccupied with the regulatory imperative especially when it comes to female sexuality. This is the case in sex education initiatives such as Life Orientation (LO) programs in South African schools that continue to associate young people's sexualities and desires with danger and disease. Young women are denied space to express themselves sexually because doing so would lead to social ills such as teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV and AIDS. What is interesting is that this "protection, regulation and discipline" approach is not strictly imposed on young men.

Lloyd (1993) argues that female sexuality is not determined, or activated, by male sexuality. In fact, women have a separate sexuality, which is not necessarily dependent on male sexuality. Often, the literature on female sexuality in Africa portrays women in one of two ways: as sexually passive and unwilling participants in the sexual act, or as sexually 'immoral' and 'loose' if they show any interest in sex at all (Masvawure 2013). Both portrayals are problematic in that, as with all dichotomies, one can only ever be one or the other, never both and certainly never something else entirely.

Objectives

The paper is guided by three objectives. Firstly, to investigate the intercourse between patriarchy and female sexuality in selected Zimbabwean newspaper stories. Secondly, to identify and discuss emerging and/or alternative sexualities in Zimbabwe by analyzing selected newspaper stories. Thirdly, to interrogate the intercourse between female sexuality and criminality as represented in Zimbabwean newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

In recent years, particularly between 2013 and 2014, numerous stories that articulate fe-

male sexuality were published in Zimbabwean newspapers. The current paper employs textual analysis in an attempt to investigate female sexuality as represented in newspaper stories. The stories were selected on the basis of whether they had potential to shed light on these questions or not. Although the researcher intended to represent at least all the major newspapers in Zimbabwe and the sex-related stories they published, priority was given to stories that provided answers to research questions. Moreover, stories that directly captured voices of persons involved were preferred as opposed to those that focused on opinions of reporters. This was done in order to capture not only how women were represented but also how they represented themselves in newspaper stories.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework

Several studies on female sexuality have been conducted in recent years. Shefer and Ngabaza (2015) conducted a very interesting study on dominant discourses of women's sexual desires and practices. The study interrogated Life Orientation (LO) programs that are being promoted in South African high schools in an attempt to curb teenage pregnancy, unprotected sex and the danger of contracting sex-related diseases and HIV and AIDS. Although the initiative has good intentions, it continues to emphasize the dominant trope of danger, risk and consequence, in which young women are constructed as those responsible for avoiding such consequences, both for their own sakes and for the larger social and moral landscape (2015: 74). Such an approach tends to, inadvertently, deny and silence female sexuality by associating it with moral degeneration. Women that want to have sex are thus constructed as a danger, not only to themselves but also to society at large. In a study on the representation of female sexuality on pornographic websites, Shim et al. (2015: 55) found that stereotypical representations of female sexuality continue to be promoted through the Internet. This is so particularly because pornographic websites have until recently been dominated by men who portray women as sexual victims and men as sexual perpetrators. The sexuality of women thus continues to be constructed by "outsiders" rather than by women them-

selves. Cultural and religious beliefs related to sexuality often impose stricter sanctions on women than men. In a study on the sexual debut of men and women in Lebanon, Yasmine et al. (2015) observed that women delay the onset of coital for a longer period than men because of different kinds of inhibitions imposed by society. They also argue that in many societies, men tend to associate sex with power and masculinity while women are taught to associate it with immorality and the possibility of falling pregnant. In order to conform to these norms, women often delay their sexual debut. Evidently, scholars seem to agree that female sexuality, as we know it today is, by and large, constructed by society.

This paper is underpinned by social constructionism, a theoretical perspective, which is premised on the idea that human life is shaped by social and interpersonal relationships (Gergen 1985). Social constructionism hypothesizes that apart from the inherited and developmental aspects of humanity, *all* other aspects are created, maintained and destroyed in our interactions with others through time (Owen 1995). Social constructionism is a broad theoretical paradigm, which has been conceptualized differently across disciplines. Therefore, it is important in this paper to zero in on specific theorists. Firstly, the paper draws insight from Gagnon and Simon's social scripting theory (1973). According to social scripting theory, a great deal of sexual behavior seems to follow scripts similar to those used by actors in a play. Social scripts instruct members of a society as to appropriate behavior and the meanings to attach to certain behaviors (Wiederman 2005). Gagnon and Simon (1974) identified three interconnected dimensions of social scripting: the cultural, the interpersonal and the intrapsychic. Cultural scripts are the cultural discourses constructed around sexuality that provide guidelines for sexual conduct. Interpersonal scripting happens in daily conversations, not only in terms of negotiating sexual relationships, but also in discussing about sex with others. Intrapsychic scripting occurs at the level of our individual desires and thoughts, the internal reflexive processes of the self (Scott 2010). Intrapsychic scripting is that process through which we make sense of our environment and relationships by reflecting within ourselves. Through our inner life, we experience

desire, reflect upon sexual experiences and construct fantasies.

According to Kenneth Gergen (1999), social constructionism is premised on four hypotheses. Firstly, the way in which we understand our world and ourselves is not demanded by that which exists (Gergen 1999). In other words, our understanding of the world is constructed discursively. Therefore, everything that *is* can be described differently. Applied to female sexuality, this hypothesis would imply that what is known about female sexuality is not natural but socially constructed, therefore it is susceptible to change. Secondly, Gergen hypothesized that the way in which we describe and explain things is rooted in relationships among people. The implication is that meaning of the world is not something peculiar to separate individuals but forms part of the coordination of actions among individuals (Hermans 2002).

The third hypothesis intimates that by our description, explanation or representation, we simultaneously determine the future of reality. This implies that we have the capacity to create new realities and replace existing ones. By describing reality differently we transform our world (Hermans 2002). The fourth and last hypothesis is that our social constructions have a history. Good reasons, good explanations or good values always depend on some tradition, which accepts certain constructions as being right or real (Gergen 1999). Social constructionism echoes Howard Becker's (1963) labeling theory, which claims that criminality is more of a social construct than a trait endemic in certain individuals. The theory states that society creates deviance by ascribing labels to certain forms of behavior. Therefore, deviant behavior is constructed in process of identifying certain behavioral traits as abnormal. The notion of social constructionism can also be juxtaposed with Michel Foucault's (1978) conceptualization of sexuality as a discourse that was constructed in a certain way over time, which implies that what we know as "sex" today is a product of what has been written and said about "pleasures and bodies" over the years.

Patriarchy and Female Sexuality

The central thesis of social constructionism is relativism or the idea that nothing is absolute. The notion of sexuality, like other aspects of

human life, is in many ways, a social construct. That is, the nature and meaning of human sexuality is not self-evident but is historically developed and socially transmitted (Gagnon and Simon, in Weinberg et al. 1983). The idea that reality can be constructed socially is interesting in this paper because it allows one to explore how female sexuality is constructed, either through the actions of women themselves or societal structures that promote particular discourses. The fact that social scripts are created by human beings to regulate human behavior is also fascinating in that it gives us the liberty to question the status quo and explore alternative sexualities that are being scripted in Zimbabwe.

Kambarami (2006) observes that in Shona culture, certain practices promoted by patriarchy perpetuate gender inequality and deprive women of any form of agency in relation to their sexuality. Religion tends to collude with patriarchy to enforce the belief that women are appendages of men, and that their sexuality is subservient to male sexuality. Women are often tamed and coerced to submission through scriptures such as Paul's letter to the Colossians, which encourages women to submit to their husbands. The creation story, which states that Eve was created from Adam's rib, is also manipulated to treat women as "helpers" whose sole responsibility is to support men. Paul's letter to the Colossians (Colossians 3: 18, 19) encourages women to "submit to their husbands" and men to love their wives. Such interpretations of scripture tend to leave most women at the mercy of their husbands because obedience is easier to measure than love. If a woman does not do what her husband wants, it can be easily construed as disobedience. However, if a man does the same, he can still maintain that he loves his wife.

In a story, which was published by *The Herald* on 13th December 2013, church founder and senior pastor Martin Gumbura was found guilty of sexually abusing women in his church. The title of the story "RGM Church women belong to Gumbura" reflects the extent to which religious and cultural scripts can be appropriated and used to regulate and control female sexuality. The title itself is a form of discursive scripting because it plays with the culturally acceptable notion that married women "belong" to their husbands. According to *The Herald* (13 December, 2013), Martin Gumbura claimed that he had

the right to marry or have sexual intercourse with all women in his church, including married women. In fact, married women were given to their husbands on loan. Gumbura is a polygamous pastor with eleven wives, most of who were married to him by "divine" force. A testimony by one of his victims is explicit:

He forced me to sit on his lap and started kissing me on the neck and ears before raping me (The Herald, 23 December. 2013).

In this story, women are scripted as passive objects of male sexuality. As pastor and a man of God, Gumbura has a responsibility to lead women into communion with God and, with himself. In Shona culture, the man initiates every sexual move while the woman follows. In some cases, the woman has to be "forced" to realize what she wants. This notion resonates with Victorian culture, which promoted the idea of women as passive and incapable of initiating sexual desire without stimulation by men (Groneman 1994). It is also interesting to note that patriarchy represents sex as a symbol of male domination. A real man must use sex as a weapon of subjection to put a woman in her place. Sex (the act) is a site for exhibiting masculinity and demonstrating maleness as a superior sexuality. In fact, sex can be used as a form of punishment for women. In Shona culture, the phallus is a weapon that men wield and use to put women in their place. That is why impotent men are considered feminine or not man enough. Men in Shona culture tend to think that a stubborn or non-conformist woman needs a strong man to discipline her sexually. All women, according to Kambarami (2006: 9), are like birds of prey waiting to be shot by men's phallic darts. A testimony by one of Gumbura's victims illustrates this point clearly:

He started raping me around 7pm until around 11 pm and all this happened while I was crying for help but those who were in the house, including his second wife, Queen Bunga, ignored my screams. Instead they even increased the television volume (The Herald, 18 December, 2013).

Ironically, some women have internalized cultural beliefs that justify the sexual abuse of women. This is evident in the way some of Gumbura's wives justified their subservient position in sexual matters:

When at Shewe's house we share bedrooms in pairs or in threes while waiting for our chance to be invited to the master bedroom (The Herald, 10 December 2013).

If it's not your turn, but feel that you want some intimacy with him, you just tell Shewe (The Herald, 10 December 2013).

These testimonies speak to a number of issues about the way female sexuality has been constructed culturally, politically and socially, in Zimbabwe. Firstly, as illustrated in the first quotation, sex is used as an instrument of perpetuating male domination. The word “*Shewe*” is used in Shona culture to show honor and reverence. Literally, it means “my king”, from the Shona word “*ishe*” “king”. When used by a wife, the word has overtones of both affection and reverence. Queen Bunga is a prototype of those women who have internalized traditional conceptions of female sexuality. Therefore, instead of supporting a fellow woman, she colludes with her husband to reinforce and enforce what is perceived as normative behavior for women. Secondly, the first quotation exhibits the belief that a woman never says yes to sex even if/when she wants it. Therefore, she should be persuaded and cajoled into accepting it. It is also apparent in the witness’ testimony that her assailant (Gumbura) conceived of her as an object of his pleasure. He does not see the need for a woman to reciprocate his sexual advances. In fact, he perceives sex as a process through which he satisfies his personal desires, and the woman is only an instrument of that process. Kambarami (2006) argues that in Shona culture, men initiate sexual relationships and they also set ground rules for sexual intercourse. Given that Gumbura is a man of the cloth, this can be construed as abuse of biblical scripting of female sexuality. One can also infer that Gumbura does not see what he has done as rape because his mindset is informed by the belief that women need someone to lead them towards what they really want.

While female sexuality has been constructed mainly by patriarchy over the years, women have also been responsible for scripting their own sexuality. However, this self-construction has largely taken place in collusion with patriarchy and its institutions. A statement by one of Gumbura’s wives is an apt example:

We make sure that we are clean and dressed attractively at all times in order to keep our husband interested at all times (The Herald 10 December 2013).

Such a statement implies that women are extensions of men, if not objects of male pleasure. It is the woman’s duty to keep the husband “in-

terested”. When one looks broadly at the dynamics of the Gumbura case, a lot of factors come into play in relation to female sexuality. Although church doctrine is manipulated and used to suppress female sexuality, there is also the economic dimension. Female sexuality in Zimbabwe is constructed against the backdrop of a harsh economic environment where most women are economically disempowered. A testimony by Teclar, one of Gumbura’s wives, illustrates this point:

I resigned from Founders bank, now Inter-market, in 1997 when I had my first child. My husband promised greener pastures by doubling my salary each month in addition to taking care of me and the child (The Herald, 10 December 2013).

Marriage, in this case, becomes a mere business transaction. The notion of “greener pastures” suggests better economic returns for one’s labor as if to imply that marriage is an institution where men employ women. However, what is clear in the statement above is that female sexuality is also shaped by economic conditions. In Zimbabwe’s harsh economic environment, some women have devised ways of manipulating cultural beliefs for their own ends.

In most societies, some constructions of female sexuality have crystallized into myths. There are myths about the nature of female sexuality, about how women must feel, behave, talk or respond to sexual advances. These myths are in turn used to construct women in a particular way. *The Herald* of 18 December 2013 quoted Gumbura as saying to his victim *Hazviite kuti kana watanga ngoma iyi woirega* (it’s not possible to stop sex once you have started it). This statement is derived from cultural myths, which tend to construct women as homogeneous. In Shona culture, there is a belief that a woman cannot leave a man who has either broken her virginity or has had sex with her. Sexual encounters are therefore used to corner women and lock them up in unhappy relationships. Some women have these views deeply entrenched in their minds, hence they participate in their own exploitation by remaining in abusive relationships.

“Unconventional” Female Sexualities

In most cultures, sexuality has been portrayed as a weapon in the hands of men while women are the targets of this masculine weapon

(Khana and Price 1994). However, a lot has changed over the years and women are beginning to assert their sexuality through demanding more freedom to express themselves sexually, be it in or outside marriage. While the Zimbabwean government continues to suppress alternative sexualities and promote heterosexuality, newspaper stories selected in this paper highlight the existence of “abnormal sexualities” beneath the veneer of a normative heterosexual society. These emerging alternative constructs of sexuality are best exemplified through a story, which was published by *newzimbabwe.com*, an online Zimbabwean newspaper. The story, which was entitled “Man gang raped by four women”, (*new Zimbabwe.com news*, 24 February 2010) shocked most Zimbabweans because it threatened the very foundations of established beliefs. Traditionally, rape is constructed as a male crime, and women are constructed as incapable of committing rape. However, in this story, it is reported that a group of women “forced a man to drink a strange liquid before forcing him to be intimate with all of them”. The “strange liquid” was used to stimulate sexual arousal. The newspaper also reported a similar incident where two women held a 33-year-old man for 4 days. He was “made to watch pornographic video to sexually arouse him, before being made to have sex with one of the women” (*news Zimbabwe.com*, February 2010). Incidents of women kidnapping men are shocking in Zimbabwe because they challenge scripts about the nature of female sexuality. Sex is something that men do to women and that women receive from men, hence the idea of a woman in the sexual driving seat is unthinkable. Traditionally, society believed that women could not rape because of their biological make. Rape was defined as being penetrated without consent as opposed to forcing someone to penetrate without consent. In this formulation, men were capable of rape because they possessed penises, which were capable of penetrating. Women were thus constructed as incapable of committing rape. According to this formulation, it is impossible for a man to be raped, or to have non-consensual sex. However, as it is reflected in these incidents, some women have devised strategies to arouse men and force them to engage in sex, thus reconstituting alternative constructs of female sexuality.

In a story that was associated with ritualistic sperm harvesting in Zimbabwe, three women

were arrested on allegations of sexually assaulting men. The Nhokwara sisters were arrested after the police discovered 13 used condoms in their car (*newzimbabwe.com*, 11 October 2011). When the case was taken to court, the sisters argued that they were simply hard working prostitutes and had no time to dispose used condoms. The matter was later thrown out of court for lack of evidence. However, cases of male abductions for sexual abuse have caused alarm in Zimbabwe so much that most people no longer hike private cars. Commenting on the incident, one man, as recorded by *newszimbabwe.com* said:

We are shocked with what is happening in our society where women are now sexually abusing men. It seems now the tables have turned (*newzimbabwe.com*, 11 October 2011).

The growing economic challenges in Zimbabwe have driven some women into unconventional ways of earning a living. However, because of the stigma associated with being raped by a woman, some men are afraid to tell the world that they have been raped.

Another story entitled, “Woman lives with husband and lover” (5 March, 2013) which was published by *newszimbabwe.com* reveals that female sexuality is not a natural state of things but a social construct, which can be deconstructed. The title of the story highlights existing parameters within which female sexuality can be expressed legitimately. A woman can express her sexuality through her husband in a marriage institution. Alternatively, she can express herself through a lover in courtship. However, culture prohibits her from expressing her sexuality through both at the same time.

In the story, a Zimbabwean woman who lives in the UK by the name Maria Vogel turned culturally constructed notions of female sexuality upside down. In Zimbabwe, the marriage institution is the only legitimate space through which women can access sex and express themselves sexually. In most African cultures, only men can marry more than one wife. Contrary to established traditions, Mary stays with her husband and lover in the same house. This is a story that promises to reveal more about changing perspectives on female sexuality. Firstly, women are not only receivers of sex but givers too. In an article on sex and sexual adventures of young women in Zimbabwe, Masvaure (2013) argues that sex is not something men “do” to women.

In fact, women are neither passive nor indifferent participants in the sexual act. In analyzing the Gumbura story, the researcher highlighted that female sexuality in Zimbabwe is constructed in the context of a harsh economic environment. This implies that given a different economic context, female sexuality is likely to be constructed differently. The story of Mary Vogel reconstructs female sexuality in a first-world context where women have become financially independent and can make decisions about how they want to live.

Maria's story reveals that in the context of changing roles of women, there is need to review traditional constructions of female sexuality. Popular discourse on sex and sexuality in Zimbabwe emphasize that women should be modest; they should keep themselves pure (as virgins) until they get married and they should also be able produce children. Virtue and sexual honesty as exemplified in motherhood and wifehood are viewed as admirable feminine qualities (Spronk 2005). Middle class married motherhood is the icon of respectability in the normative order (Kielmann 1997). While it is common for economically disempowered women to stay in loveless relationships, financially independent women can challenge some cultural constructions of their sexuality.

In Shona culture, sex outside marriage is unacceptable. However, this cultural sanction is more flexible to men than it is to women. It is more dishonorable in Shona society for a woman to fall pregnant outside wedlock than it is for a man to impregnate outside wedlock. In her story, Maria challenges male-centric constructions of female sexuality by openly speaking about how she feels towards one man even when she is married to another. Talking about how she met her lover, she says "*we smiled at one another; I could feel the chemistry straight away*" (newzimbabwe.com, 5 March 2013). In most African cultures, "decent" women are not expected to reciprocate chemistry as openly as Maria did. Men are supposed to initiate desire and target it towards a woman in such a way that the woman would eventually tune in and feel likewise. Even when she reciprocates her desire, it should not be overt, but subtle and suggestive. The man should infer and act upon his inferences.

However, Maria's confessions show that women have active emotions just like men:

When Paul put a hand on my leg...my whole body began trembling with desire. I knew it was wrong but soon we were sleeping together (newzimbabwe.com, 5 March, 2013).

In Shona culture, men are constructed to be promiscuous by nature. This is evident in sayings such as *varume ipwere* and *varume imbwa* ("men are children" and "men are dogs" respectively). Therefore, society understands when men engage in extra-marital relationships. Women, on the other hand, are expected to exercise sexual restraint or suppress their feelings. However, in this narrative, Maria shows that women have desires that are, at times, uncontrollable. To say she was "trembling with desire" would, in the traditional context, imply that she is a prostitute. Yet, if a man says the same, it would mean he is potent and therefore a real man. A critical analysis of Maria's confessions unveils a number of issues about female sexuality. Although Maria has broken cultural barriers to freely express her sexuality, she still assumes some responsibilities that, in Zimbabwean society, would be considered feminine. Contrary to the biblical script that says it is the duty of a man to love and that of a woman to submit, Maria initiates love in both relationships.

So after work I would go and clean and cook for Paul and the kids and then go home for Peter (newzimbabwe.com, 4 March, 2013).

People might think it's weird but I love both men and I couldn't choose between them.

It is fascinating to note that Maria feels responsible for the sexual satisfaction of both men. Unlike in the traditional setting where men make the first move and women keep their feelings to themselves, Maria is in control. She tells the men what to do just as men in polygamous relationships would do.

Peter sleeps on the sofa while Paul has a room upstairs. Maria shares a bedroom with her eldest daughter.

If Paul is out, then Peter and I might make love, and vice versa, but both men turn a blind eye and we never discuss it with one another.

Although one cannot say this is an ideal situation for women, Maria's experience deconstructs patriarchal fallacies about women and sexuality. It raises questions about the future of sex and the place of men in this future. Polyandry may not be ideal for all women but as Mary says, it comes with benefits: "*children benefit from three adults able to help with school work*

or give them lifts. Financially too, it makes sense as the bills are split three ways" (*newzimbabwe.com*, 5 March 2013).

According to Groneman (1994) sexual freedom for women threaten foundations of "civilization" such as control and discipline. What is interesting about the notion of controlling desire is that it is seen as women's responsibility. Men can jeopardize civilization all they want; society will provide mechanisms for damage control, yet when women do the same they are labeled "prostitutes". In Zimbabwe, this is reflected in laws that regulate sexuality and decency. The laws focus on apprehending prostitutes while their male clients are ignored. This legal framework assumes that excessive desire for sex among women is a threat to social norms and values, while men's sexual behavior cannot degrade society. Pan-Africanist thought and Afrocentrist philosophies provide an ideological justification for the exclusion by many African post-colonial states (including Zimbabwe) of a variety of sexual experiences, expressions, and desires from the realm of respectable citizenship (Ndjio 2013). Zimbabwe embodies these Pan-African philosophies through customary laws that continue to give women a junior position in marriage and other sexual relationships (if they are tolerated at all).

Criminal Sexualities: Breaking the Boundaries

The Oxford dictionary defines crime as an action or omission, which constitutes an offence and is punishable by law or an action or activity considered to be evil, shameful, or wrong. This section of the paper analyses overlaps between sexuality and criminality. Social construction theory postulates that sexuality is a construct, which can be reconstructed. However, in every society, sexuality is constituted within the confines of legal boundaries. In a story entitled, "First wife bashed for demanding sex", which was published by *News Day* (30 August 2014), a polygamous man by the name Stephen Samson assaulted his first wife for demanding sex. In the story, Stephen Samson is married to two 17-year-old women. Both women, being young, need sexual satisfaction. However, the husband cannot sleep with both at the same time. When his first wife demanded her fair share of sex, Samson allegedly beat her with booted feet and fists:

I wanted the three of us to share the same bed, but she (Mary) could not hear of it, so I slept on the floor with my second wife and she woke up saying I should come sleep on the bed as it was now her time to have sexual intercourse with me.

What is fascinating in this story is that Stephen's wives are teenagers. Zimbabwe's Marriage Act [Chapter 5: 11] of the Old Constitution provides that a girl between the ages of 16 and 18 may, with the joint consent of her mother and father, enter into a civil marriage. However, in terms of the new Constitution the liberty to marry and start a family is limited to those who have reached 18 (the age of majority). The discrepancy in these two documents clearly shows that sexuality and criminality are socially constructed. In terms of the new constitution, Samson could be convicted of rape but under the old constitution, the two 17-year-old girls are adults. This also shows that notions of childhood and adulthood are not given but constructed. According to Scott (2010), the minimum legal age for marriage in England, and the age at which it became lawful for a man to have sex with a woman, had been set at 12 in the thirteenth century. This remained the case until 1875 when it was raised to 13, finally being raised to 16 in 1885. Scott (2010) goes on to argue that childhood and adulthood are social and cultural constructs, and the boundaries between them shift historically, contextually and across cultures.

The story, "First wife bashed for demanding sex" highlights the violation of the right to privacy for women in this marriage. Samson wants to sleep with both wives on the same bed, which suggests that the women are owned by him and have no personal right to privacy. Moreover, Samson expects his first wife to remain silent while he is having sexual intercourse with the second wife on the floor. Although the story highlights the abuse that women endure in some polygamous marriages, the title of the story seems to celebrate Samson's act of 'bashing' the first wife. The juxtaposition of the words "bashed" and "demanding" suggest a balancing of scales, as if to say the woman deserves to be "bashed" because she "demanded" sex—something which is a taboo. Clearly, the story is situated in cultural discourses that perceive women who openly demand sex as wayward. Ideally, women should not ask for, let alone demand it. In Shona culture, women are sexually

constructed as receivers of the male seed. In his plea of not guilty, Samson dismissed Mary, his first wife, as a jealousy wife who only reported the case out of anger:

She reported the issue out of anger and because she is jealous of my other wife, I never assaulted her with booted feet and clenched feet (News Day, 30 August, 2014).

Samson's defense is evidently embedded in a socio-cultural discourse that believes that women are overly emotional and sometimes, emotions overrule their minds. Men in Shona culture often claim to know what women want, which is the framework on which Samson's statement is premised. It is also a fact that excessive desire among women has over the years been seen as madness, infliction by demons, and a psychological problem. According to Groneman (1994), the cultural notion of nymphomania in western society classified women with "excessive" sexual desire as abnormal. In the 19th and early 20th century, doctors categorized as nymphomaniacs those women whose "symptoms" included committing adultery, flirting, being divorced, or feeling more passionate for sex than their husbands. The category of nymphomaniac also included all those who tried to seduce men by adorning themselves, wearing perfume or discussing marriage (Groneman 1994). Based on this construction, Samson's first wife could be categorized as a nymphomaniac.

Criminal female sexualities as conceptualized in this paper are aptly exhibited in three stories that were published by *Bulawayo24news*, *News Day* and *Manica Post*. The story "Woman accused of raping boy, 7", which appeared in the online tabloid *Bulawayo24news* (11 April, 2014) reflects sexualities that transgress socio-cultural boundaries. In the story, a married woman by the name Gugulethu Ncube "raped" a 7-year-old boy after promising him a pencil and snout apples. Gugulethu "*allegedly undressed the boy...and asked him to hold his penis, which she inserted into her private parts and forced him to suckle her breasts*". According to the abused boy's grandmother, Gugulethu "*asked him to comment on whether her breasts were tasty*" (*Bulawayo24news*, 11 April, 2014). This story exhibits a dissident female sexuality, which is suppressed by culture and legislation. It would be easy to dismiss Gugulethu as a mental case but she is not and this makes her behavior difficult to categorize. The International Criminal

Court defines crime against humanity of rape, Article 7 (1) (g)-1, as:

Invasion...committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, against such person or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or the invasion was committed against a person incapable of giving genuine consent (ICC, official website).

Although there is an element of criminality or even inhumanity in the act, what is elusive is the motive. According to labeling theory (Becker 1963), what singles out this act as deviant is the fact that it has been identified by others (the journalist in this case) as deviant. Society has constructed the 7-year-old boy as an innocent child who should be protected by adults. Yet one has to remember that the notion of "childhood equals innocence" is socially constructed. Scott (2010) argues that in medieval times children were included into adult life far more than they are today, but once children were no longer seen as inherently sinful, it was possible to think of safeguarding them against temptation, and especially sexual temptation. In this story, Gugulethu is not mentally disturbed, hence her actions fall within the sphere of what society deems "normal". It is probable, given that Gugulethu is married, that she is sexually starved, or that her husband does not treat her with respect. Hence, she needs someone, anything, to assure her that her breasts are tasty.

The story, "Woman jailed for bedding teenager", which appeared in *News Day* (28 May, 2013) further illustrates that sexuality is not natural but socially constructed. In the story, a 22-year-old woman, Shelter Chimusaru, was sentenced to nine years in jail for sexually abusing a teenager under the pretext that she was "initiating him into adulthood". The notion of initiating the boy into adulthood draws from cultural practices where the transition into adulthood is seen as a process of becoming sexually active. Chimusaru is said to have lured the teenager into her house: "*When the boy entered the house, Chimusaru closed and locked the door after which she undressed and ordered the minor to have sexual intercourse with her*". When the boy refused, Chimusaru "threatened to kill him with a knife, forcibly grabbed him, removed his trousers and forced him to be intimate with her". After the incident, Chimusaru referred to the boy

as “my husband” each time she saw him. Such teasing of young boys by older women is common in Shona culture. What is interesting in this story is that Chimusaru’s behavior is not feminine in the way femininity has been constructed by society. It is also possible that Chimusaru, being single at 22, is under pressure to conform to societal expectations. The fact that she calls the boy “my husband” may imply that she needs a husband, and thus she makes up for this void by abusing the boy.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that female sexuality is by and large a social construct, which can be reconstructed and reconstituted in time and space. However, the notion of social constructionism does not mean that there is no objective reality; it simply shows that some things that we consider natural are, in actual fact, manmade and thus can be deconstructed. Female sexuality, as it is known today in most societies, is mainly constructed by patriarchy and most women express their sexuality within institutions and structures provided by patriarchy. The newspaper articles that have been analyzed in this paper show that women are getting more and more involved in constructing their own sexuality. In fact, the stories analyzed in this paper point to emerging female sexualities that challenge pre-existing culturally instituted norms. Against the backdrop of the sociocultural rules that seek to regulate what it means to be a woman, some women have gained agency by taking charge of their own sexuality. Finally, the paper has attempted to look into criminal female sexualities, which in the spirit of social constructionism, can also be seen as alternative sexualities that society continues to suppress.

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