

‘Entering the Liminal’: Campus Cultures, Retreating Femininities and Sexual Disempowerment at the University of Zimbabwe

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Résumé – Cet article analyse la manière dont les cultures institutionnelles, expression d’un agenda caché au sein des espaces universitaires, contribuent à reproduire les inégalités entre les sexes grâce à des identités de structuration de la masculinité et de la féminité. Cette tendance émergente de l’inégalité entre les sexes et les développements autoritaires associés, montrent clairement que les universités sont encore des lieux de production de connaissances liés aux pouvoirs qui reproduisent de nouvelles formes de féminités et de masculinités. Cet article traite de la politique de cultures institutionnelles et de la façon dont ils affectent les identités sexuelles des jeunes femmes sur un campus du Zimbabwe. Auparavant, les débats sur les cultures institutionnelles et les identités sexuelles des jeunes au sein des espaces universitaires africains, et plus particulièrement zimbabwéens, étaient séparés. Ce texte pose une question essentielle : comment les institutions culturelles normatives structurent l’accès des jeunes femmes à leurs droits sexuels et reproductifs, et l’expression des identités sexuelles spécifiques ? Les données exploitées ici ont été recueillies grâce à un projet de recherche-action qui a utilisé des ateliers, des entretiens, des discussions de groupes et des représentations théâtrales appliquées.

Mots-clés: Liminalité, féminités, renforcement, Zimbabwe, liberté académique.

Abstract - Institutional cultures are positioned in this article as part of the ‘hidden curriculum’ existing within university spaces that help to reproduce gender inequalities through structuring identities of masculinity and femininity. This emerging trend in gender inequality and associated authoritarian developments clearly show that universities are still places of knowledge production articulated through powers that reproduce new forms of femininities and masculinities. This article discusses the politics of institutional cultures and how they affect sexual identities of young women on a Zimbabwean campus. Previously, discussions of institutional cultures and

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sexual identities of young people within African and more specifically Zimbabwean university spaces have been separate. This paper poses one essential question: how do 'normative' institutional cultures structure young women's access to their sexual and reproductive rights and expression of specific sexual identities? Data for this article was gathered through an action research project which utilized workshops, interviews, focus group discussions and applied theatre performances.

Keywords: Liminality, Femininities, Empowerment, Zimbabwe, Academic Freedom.

Institutional cultures are positioned in this article as part of the 'hidden curriculum' existing within university spaces that help to reproduce gender inequalities through structuring identities of masculinity and femininity. This emerging trend in gender inequality and associated authoritarian developments clearly show that universities are still places of knowledge production articulated through powers that reproduce new forms of femininities and masculinities. This article discusses the politics of institutional cultures and how they affect and infect sexual identities of young women on a Zimbabwean campus. Previously, discussions of institutional cultures and sexual identities of young people within African and more specifically Zimbabwean university spaces have been separate. Accordingly, this article poses one essential question: how do 'normative' institutional cultures structure young women's access to their sexual and reproductive rights and expression of specific sexual identities? Data for this article was gathered through an action research project which utilized workshops, interviews, focus group discussions and applied theatre performances.

Orton (1994) describes action research as a process whereby the ownership of knowledge must be shared, requiring a collaborative relationship between the participants. Action research provided a 'creative map' to enter the unknown terrain of youth sexuality and more specifically young women's sexuality. Furthermore, I identified action research within the framework of qualitative research as the most apt methodology for my research following Tuhiwai-Smith's (2005:103) persuasive argument that:

it is the tool that seems most able to wage the battle of representation, to weave and unravel competing storylines, to situate, place and contextualize, to create spaces for 'decolonising', to provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced, to create spaces for dialogue across difference, to analyse and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities and realities.

Based on the above, I developed an action research project called 'Stepping Out... Youth Project'. With the concept of action research being 'action-oriented', the project sought to answer the question: what can be done about the marginalized (sexual) lives of young female university students? Thus the methodology sought to prioritize young women's own stories to retain their perspectives regarding their intimate lives and academic experiences on campus. This aspect of the project remains a particularly original contribution, as at the time of writing, no

Zimbabwean research had undertaken discussions with young women exclusively regarding their 'negotiated' sexual identities within contexts of a university and HIV/AIDS. The action research project from which this article is derived located young women's primary barrier to academic freedom and consequent success on the repressive terrain of campus culture which dictates against their sexual expression. The underlying argument that runs through this paper is that expressions of domination and power embedded within socio-sexual campus cultures have the potential to seep into young women's consciousness to prevent them from being full agents in their academic lives.

I) Conceptualising Space and Identity

Normative institutional cultures are boundaries that shape social interactions and establish control over social environments (Gerson and Peiss 1985; Hays 1994; Britton 2003). Rashawn and Rosow (2010) argue that normative institutional cultures are arrangements that identify social contexts whereby certain behaviours are more or less acceptable and certain structures hold individuals more or less accountable for their treatment of others. Such arrangements or cultures represent taken for granted assumptions that are external and exist outside of individuals. In this article, normative institutional cultures draw attention to the ways in which performance of masculinities and femininities are legitimized across different socio-cultural contexts, while analysing possible effects on young women's expression of themselves. Here, the paper seeks to showcase the implications of the intersecting forces of sexuality and gender by examining normative institutional arrangements or cultures. The structural mechanisms by which normative institutional cultures promote young women's subordination have been under-emphasized. Most scholars have called for a resurgence of such research pointing to the exploration of contextual and structural factors to uncover these mechanisms (Reskin 2003; Epstein 2007). There is neglect to the extent that cultural and social norms are embedded within and shaped by the structure of institutions and such cultures shape young women's responses and performance of their femininities. Central to both sociological and anthropological interpretations of culture are notions of generally shared custom and tradition, which are trans-generational, cumulative and symbolic (Buono and Bowditch 1989). Campus culture thus becomes the elements that are shared by members of the university and hold deep symbolic significance and influence behaviour. This paper therefore privileges an analysis of campus cultures prevalent

within an African university following Amina Mama's important reflection that:

African universities are key sites for examining questions of citizenship, democratization and social justice. There are over 5million young Africans enrolled in the continent's universities, making them a major training ground for the next generation of politicians, public officials and corporate and civil society leaders. From a feminist perspective, the gender relations prevailing in the intellectual and institutional cultures of universities are important because of their implications for national and regional development (2008:1).

Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the organisation of collegiate social life can help to account for the specific sexual expressions of young women.

Sexuality refers broadly to personal feelings, desires and beliefs and socially accepted attitudes, norms, meanings and interactions with members of the same or opposite sex. Dixon-Mueller (1993:273) argues that sexuality is a more comprehensive concept than sexual behaviour as it is able to encompass physical capacity for arousal and pleasure as well as personalized and shared social meanings attached to both sexual behaviour and the formation of sexual and gender identities. Dixon-Mueller further points out that the distinction is especially significant when addressing determinants of sexual and behaviour change and that without a focus on sexuality as the basis of sexual behaviour, interventions targeting sexual behaviour change are likely to be superficial, short-lived and ineffective in the long-term. Sociologist Kenneth Plummer (1995, 1998) describes 'intimate citizenship' as a cluster of rights and responsibilities that have emerged in the twentieth century around issues of sexual partner choices, control over the body, reproductive rights, intimate bonds and sexual identities. In this paper, I use the term 'sexual citizenship' to refer to the same types of claims, particularly focusing on how young women have pursued rights to their sexuality within gendered spaces such as universities. Young people represent an 'inhibited category' in their exploration of sexuality not only in terms of heterosexual morality and gendered power relations but also due to their transitional status, accentuated by the 'liminal' phase of university.

The regulation and construction of young people's sexuality has been theorized as a site of both boundary-making and boundary-crossing (Bell and Valentine 1995). Aitken and Plows, interested in the bordered and bounded nature of children's lives, have argued that young people

are always on, in, around, or going through a border of some kind. They have argued that:

...although the socially and culturally constructed nature of ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ is today well acknowledged, social and political forces nonetheless reinforce borders between children and adults. These may be ill-defined or at times established with rigor. Forces are established to protect children from certain actions or to exclude children from certain places. Framed by issues of exclusion and inclusion, within these various bounded, bordered and embodied places, young people’s identities and bodies become a battleground through which identity and maturation are negotiated, acquiesced, moved and migrated. (2010:327).

In attempting to conduct an environmental analysis of young women’s sexuality and how it is structured by campus culture, the concept of ‘liminality’ is instrumental to emphasizing how the university is a transitional space. Conceptualizing the university space as liminal seeks to mark a boundary between the inside and the outside of the university. ‘Liminality’ which refers to ‘threshold’ is what van Gennep (1960:111) presents as the transitional step in ‘rites of passage’ (between separation and incorporation). Attending university and liminal periods have similarities because university students are no longer school children, but at the same time they are not yet fully developed adults with set roles in society (Skeiker 2010). Another aspect of separation for university students is that they often study away from home. Therefore, the university period of study becomes a ‘rite of passage’ to connect with Kesby (1994, 1999) who highlights that in Zimbabwean society, as in most communities, gendered adulthood has always been constructed socio-spatially. He points out that a girl leaving home was becoming a woman and a boy leaving his brothers’ shared bedroom and setting up his own hut, was becoming a man. Therefore, in the same light, university spaces must be treated as different socio-cultural spaces that yield distinctly different structural consequences for young women and men.

II) Background: ‘Policy(ing)’ Youth Sexuality in Zimbabwe

Before particular forms of young women’s sexual citizenship on campus can be discussed, it is necessary to address the macro-context in which their material construction has taken place. Since 2000, the government of Zimbabwe has faced immense pressure on socio-economic and political fronts and the issue of sexual and reproductive rights has also been imbricated in the discourses of nation-building and national identity. According to Franke (2004) contemporary Zimbabwe gained an

‘official sexuality’ as state power was being solidified in new forms. Franke argues that the management of sex has become a tool of governance that produces individual ‘unfreedom’ in the name of expanding national freedom or independence in an effort to deliberately erase colonial pasts and call forth a more authentic indigenous present. Furthermore, Zimbabwe is one of the countries in the sub-Saharan region hard hit by the crisis of HIV/AIDS. The unmentioned effect of the pandemic has been the hardening of sexual and reproductive policies as the crisis presented itself as an opportunity for the ZANU–PF led government to police sexual and reproductive issues within a fabric of ‘hetero-sexual nationalism’.

The sexuality terrain in Zimbabwe has been affected by many intersecting policies that the government has instituted to regulate sexual and reproductive issues in general which however have had devastating effects on young people specifically. Scanning through the intricate socio-cultural and ecclesiastical structures prevalent in Zimbabwe reveals that they negatively affect sexuality discourses, especially of young women. Mutupo (2006) argues that in Zimbabwe, there is a strong interaction between religious pluralism, health education and sexual and reproductive issues of young people specifically. Religious doctrines in their plurality, ‘...shape sexuality, marriage and family life... as they are modelled along chastity and sex as ordained for marriage only’ (Mutupo 2006:56). Sexuality is generally not a topic for open discussion in Zimbabwe as Epprecht (1998) argues: there is a deeply embedded culture of discretion, a ‘don’t ask-don’t tell’ culture. This approach of silence towards sexual issues has also permeated into the largely formal education system in the country. With growing modernization, traditional education systems have slowly been shrinking. This paper argues that such a scenario has aggravated the rise of ‘hidden curriculums’ to structure gender and sexuality, especially of young women within institutions such as universities. In the context of Zimbabwe, the role and position of men and women in society are strongly tied to socio-sexual cultural dynamics. Chikowore (2004) argues that these roles and positions have been shaped and reshaped by the ever changing socio-economic and political dimensions in the country which have taken place over the last century. He points out that the increasing importance of cash as a medium of exchange has fundamentally affected cultural institutions such as family and marriage and consequently practices such as paying of bride price and the sexual socialization of young people. The socio-sexual culture prevalent within

Zimbabwe reveals that there is a systematic subordination of women and that on a large scale women lack sexual authority (Chikowore 2004). This is due to the fact that in Zimbabwean society, which is largely patriarchal and patrilineal, sexuality is largely in the hands of males (Khumalo--Sakutukwa and Garbus 2002). The family, as the strongest social institution, has been identified by Kambarami as a 'brewery for patriarchal practices by socialising young people to accept sexually differentiated roles from a tender age' (2006:5). It is against such a background that this analysis was undertaken to investigate how university campus has been functioning as a new 'brewery' for maintaining patriarchal inequalities.

III) Institutional History: 'Creating an Exclusive Community'

The bulk of data on the founding processes of the University of Zimbabwe is provided by Michael Gelfand (1978). Then known as the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN), a federal institution, the university was established through a Royal Charter in 1955. Gelfand highlights that the institution was supposed to be a beacon of hope and provide a place of respite from colonialism, racism and parochialism engendered by the environment which was stifling of the learning and open debate desired by some liberal sections of the colonial communities. Despite these liberal desires, the university degenerated into a centre of dominant racist culture which was:

exclusionary of, and alienating to blacks, while the gender culture tended to be very white and masculinist, exemplifying settler/frontier militancy, especially after the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence (Gaidzanwa 2008:63).

With the increasing black student population, the university became one of the few spaces in Southern Rhodesia where blacks and whites were forced to interact as 'equals'. Amongst the black students, the masculinist gender culture was dominated by peasant and working class norms overlaid by liberal masculine values (Gaidzanwa 2008:63). Gelfand describes the university during this time period as 'a non-racial island of learning', making it an exclusive community in order to integrate black and white students. I argue that this 'exclusivity' has not changed, but that the indices of exclusivity have been changing. The University of Zimbabwe has remained an 'island' of specific political, gender and sexual identities.

After independence in 1980, the decade that ensued was transformative as blacks were appointed to lectureship and administrative positions, and

curricula were revised to include African perspectives in the arts and humanities. However, Gaidzanwa (2008) highlights that due to the absence of black women in senior ranks of the university these fundamental changes only benefited black males. Therefore, the campus became a place of 'male' engagement and ferment, and a centre of 'male' political, economic and other spheres of intellectual leadership. This structure has largely been maintained, albeit with devastating and debilitating consequences for issues of gender and sexuality, especially for young women. This echoes Amina Mama's (2003) assertion that African universities have remained highly male-dominated places, functioning as 'exhibitions of patriarchy' (Mama 2008:1). This brief history of the university highlights, and reiterates, that 'all institutions are historical sites of cultural production and these sites are gendered' (Gaidzanwa 2008:62). The institution's history is replete with tacit assumptions of masculinity and femininity and this article attempts to answer Mama's (2008) question about gender: do African universities sustain or transform the region's conservative legacies of colonial and nationalist patriarchal cultures?

The University of Zimbabwe is the oldest higher education institution in Zimbabwe, which offers undergraduate and postgraduate studies in ten faculties. It is a resident campus, but due to the continued increase in enrolment, university accommodation now caters for only a few students. According to the Assistant Registrar's office, since 1979 and after independence in 1980, student enrolment figures remained at around 75 per cent males and 25 per cent females until 1999. With increased affirmative action promoting female students, female student numbers have steadily increased especially in the Faculties of Arts and Social Studies. The university campus has been described as 'male-dominated' (Gaidzanwa 2001; Gore 2001) in its enrolment and staff:

The University of Zimbabwe is one of the institutions which clearly show a very masculine gender culture prevailing in various socio-economic and political activities on campus. The University is run by men, largely for the benefit of men (Gore 2001:35).

It is largely against such a background that the university space begins to operate as an important avenue for the structuring of specific masculinities and advertently specific femininities.

IV) ‘College Politics’: Structuring Masculinities and Femininities

The university operates as an important platform for young men to ‘harden their masculinities because of their dominance over campus politics, religion, recreation and academic pursuits’ (Chagonda 2001:5). For example, student politics at the university has remained a traditional avenue for male students who refer to themselves as members of an imaginary community called the University Bachelor’s Association (UBA). Student politics is a contested terrain characterized by hegemonic forms of masculinities exhibited through high competition, beer drinking and violence (Gore 2001). Gore highlights that on this rocky terrain of politics, female students and disabled men are excluded because they do not have and cannot exhibit the essentialist trait of maleness in the form of the aggression, violence, competitiveness and harshness expected from a member of the UBA. Female students pointed out that they did not participate in campus politics due to the violence and harassment associated with campaigning and voting.

Consequently, the hardening of masculinities on campus has resulted in ‘retreating femininities’. Accordingly, female students are forced to withdraw from participating in campus politics and consequently relegate themselves to the peripheries of campus life as they are more concerned with their ‘safety’ which can be achieved by avoiding ‘public’ involvement around the university. The public/private space dichotomy emphasized through political interaction on campus can be understood from a gender-sexuality perspective. It is evident that dominant campus culture is against the ‘deployment or display of female bodies in public’ (Gaidzanwa 2001:129). Female students who dare ‘deploy’ or ‘display’ their bodies on campus have been branded ‘prostitutes’, which does not refer to sex workers, but as an identity marker to denote any supposedly ‘unrespectable’ woman, particularly those who move into a space that is considered to be male territory (Gaidzanwa 1995). The identity marker of ‘prostitute’ has sexual and political connotations, denoting hyper-sexuality, looseness and dissidence. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity imposes subservient femininities on young female students, quickly punishing those who do not conform. Such responses, to expressions of female agency, visibility and power expose how campus culture produces hardened masculinities which in turn reproduce passivity and conformity as ‘respectable’ traits of African femininity. Sexuality is therefore used as a paradigm of domination and control, reducing young women’s opportunities for participation and development as active citizens on campus and beyond.

IV) ‘Everyday Pornography’ and Sexual Objectification

My participatory action research also revealed that beyond student politics, the development of femininities outside the lecture room was also highly structured by hegemonic masculinities. Female students complained that there were specific spaces on campus they avoided in order to escape the ‘male gaze’. As also confirmed by Gaidzanwa (2001), female students did not for example participate in sporting activities on campus as male students tended to ogle, jeer and stare at sporting women and women’s bodies whenever they encountered them, making female students withdraw from public participation. Jane Caputi (2002) has conceptualized this ‘male gaze’ at women’s bodies as ‘everyday pornography’, defining it as a kind of pornographic impulse that has crept into so-called normal life to generate a new kind of cultural lexicon surrounding women’s bodies, desires and needs. Young women at the University of Zimbabwe avoided a space they called ‘Facebook’ where young men sat and watched young women passing through to their residential places. They pointed out that young men who sit at this place commented on the dress and body structure of young women. The young women changed their relationship to the campus space as a result of such harassment. Furthermore, it was revealed that young women with ‘big’ bodies suffered from the ‘penetrative male gaze’ even in ordinary campus spaces. Young women with big bodies complained that young male students and even university support staff such as grounds persons and office cleaners passed sexual comments about them which affected their confidence and self-esteem. Such forms of sexual objectification constitute street harassment and end up dictating women’s ability to have full rights in a public space. In a forum theatre discussion, young male students defended their ‘Facebook’ activities arguing that ‘female student dressing left a lot to be desired and [that] female students must always be aware that they could not wear anything they wanted on campus’.

What is evident from the above is that aspects of student culture at the University of Zimbabwe enforce gender conformity on female students. Campus culture is coded to ‘reiterate and rework conservatism and function to constrain women’s participation in associational life and knowledge networks’ (Adojide 2008). While males are expected by their imaginary community of UBA to exhibit essentialist masculine tendencies, female students are expected to express traits of domesticity and silence. The female student is trapped in the traditional discourses of female respectability which serve patriarchal agendas (Hungwe 2006:49). Somerai (2001) concurs with this view, pointing out that the subordination of young women is systematically engineered at the university, making it difficult for female

students to redefine their femininities as they break away from home and start new lives as adult women at university. The physical, psychological and emotional violence that young female students experience on campus confirms the objectification theory put forward by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) who posit that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on the self has the potential to lead to habitual body monitoring, which in turn can increase women's opportunities for shame and anxiety, reducing opportunities for peak motivational states and diminishing awareness of internal bodily states (Wilson 2013).

V) Campus Culture: Socio-sexual Culture

So far, this paper has highlighted how female students exist within a relegated and 'silenced' zone on campus. Female students at the university make up their own imaginary community called University Spinster's Association (USA). The existence of highly exclusionary 'imaginary communities' of male and female students in the form of distinct 'bachelor' and 'spinster' associations is an important indication of the consciously constructed gendered and sexualized nature of the university space. Masvawure (2010) explains that university campuses offer many opportunities for romantic and sexual relations to occur. For Epstein et al. (2001:156), 'university offers a legitimate entry into the adult world of sex'. Analysis here of socio-sexual cultures is connected to issues of gender empowerment and academic freedom following Grosz's (1994:14) argument that:

As a concept sexuality is incapable of ready containment: It refuses to stay within its pre-designated regions for it seeps across boundaries into areas that are apparently, not its own...it infests all sorts of other areas in the structures of desire...It refuses to accept the containment of the bedroom or to restrict itself to only those activities which prepare for orgasmic pleasure.

Therefore, following Grosz's argument, sexual cultures can point towards 'other' issues; in the case of this paper, conceptualizations of gender and their association with the academic freedom and success of young women at a university campus. Due to its highly permissive environment and lax regulations, the university campus provides optimal conditions for the development of sexual relationships and experimentation. Male sexual socialization on campus is heavily influenced by sex as an expectation within a male-female relationship. Chagonda (2001) notes male virility as an important identity theme on

campus; failure to exhibit this trait is construed as weakness. For example the following was said in one interview with a male student:

If you are going out with a female student, you are under a lot of pressure, especially from your peers to have sex with her. If you fail to do so, you are not considered as man enough. The other fear I have is that if you don't have sex with your girlfriend, then she might be having it with other guys outside campus. So you have to ensure that her sexual needs are satisfied (quoted from an interview, 2013).

The young man's response is a poignant example of Dworkin's 'eroticization of dominance and submission' as the sexual act asserts power over the young woman and makes her his property for safe-keeping. What can be deciphered from the above is a 'question of (sexual) performance' (Fahs 2011: 222), revealing a nuance about the interplay between performance, power and sexuality. Campus sexual relations therefore function as a medium devoted to the male gaze and are invested in inequalities as their fundamental tenant, revealing how the female body is located within a matrix of power and domination. Furthermore, the 'dominance narrative' exposed by the young man reproduces the larger cultural narrative that mandates male domination and female submission in Zimbabwean socio-sexual culture, and by extension socio-political and economic culture. This defines student femininity as passive, and receptive of and to male dominance, while at the same time reproducing the stereotypical labels of young female students as 'prostitutes', hyper-sexual, needing to be satisfied. It is interesting to note the ambiguous relationship young men have to campus cultural discourses that sustain their simultaneous domination and objectification of young women. While they want affirmation and approval from peers, they also sense the coercive and powerful dynamics of female sexuality.

Furthermore, the pressure to demonstrate male virility and experiment sexually is expressed in a highly competitive sexual culture called 'gold rush'. By this phenomenon, male students in their senior years on campus compete for first year female students during the first weeks of the new academic year, with the single intention of having temporary relationships for sex. First year female students are considered naïve and immature by most senior male students, but more importantly virgins who offer greater opportunities for the expression of male machismo. Many female students have fallen pregnant in these encounters, and in most cases only discover that they are pregnant when the relationship has been terminated by the young man. From this phenomenon, it is

evident that violence informs the erotic and distorts and alters the way young women experience their bodies and relationship to men as Fahs (2011:222) points out:

Society dictates that women must present themselves as hegemonically beautiful and desirable. Men's sexual access to women are overwhelming, as men reject women who refuse to play along in terms of beauty standards, sexual norms, but at the height of women's obedience to cultural norms, women's risk for sexual violence potentially increases.

VI) More than Sexual Disenfranchisement: Gender and Violence on Campus

The question of performance and male students living in reference to their campus cultural scripts and norms carries with it a host of repercussions for young female students. Within the imaginary of the socio-sexual cultures prevalent on the university campus, there is exposition of the interplay between patriarchy and performance to intensify processes that foster the internalization of young women's passivity, receptivity and submission that is likely to be transferred to other spheres such as academic life. Campus culture foregrounds deep and pervasive contestations around gender and sexuality that are manifest in different forms of violence that powerfully affect young women's sexual citizenship. One such powerful format the University of Zimbabwe is sexual harassment of young female students by male lecturers and campus staff. Numerous studies have confirmed that sexual harassment of female students at the University of Zimbabwe is part of the university sexual culture (Zindi 1994; Shumba and Matina 2002; Gaidzanwa 2001). These studies highlight that sexual harassment is very rife and goes unreported because students fear victimization not believing that the present university policies and structures can protect them. As a sexual culture, male lecturers use their patriarchal power to victimize and instil fear into female students so that they can get them to comply with their needs and desires (Shumba and Matina 2002:57). Therefore, female students at the university experience negative sexual citizenship through 'unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, unethical intimacy and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature' (Zindi 1994:177). Such 'eroticised transferences' (Zindi 1994) reproduce serious power differentials which produce negative psychological effects such as depression, stress, loss of self-esteem, feelings of humiliation and vulnerability. It is against such a negative background that female university students are initiated into adult sexual culture. Sexual harassment as a sexual culture, I argue here, helps reinforces negative identities of

women as vulnerable and exploited compounding the already ‘pervasive, confusing and conflicting messages about sexuality and gender’ (Gordon 2010:2) young women receive as they are socialized. Therefore, the university as an institution of ‘secondary socialisation’ (Gaidzanwa 2001) is complicit in reproducing gendered inequalities and creating unsafe and dissatisfying environments for young women to experience and initiate positive sexual development.

Conclusion: Femininity, Power and Freedom

This article has presented an overall picture that does not point to a liberated sexuality for young women on a university campus. Rather, the socio-sexual cultural analysis undertaken in the paper revealed that there is prevalence of systematic subordination of young women and that on a large scale women lack sexual empowerment. This is due to the fact that Zimbabwean society is largely patriarchal and patrilineal sexuality is largely in the hands of males. The university has been presented as a strong socio-academic institution for cementing patriarchal domination. This socialization process has negative effects on the sexuality of women who are encouraged to develop qualities such as gentleness, passivity and submission. Such practices lead to the control of female sexuality. However, from the applied theatre projects where I worked with young female university students, I found out that due to their exclusion and marginalized positions on campus, female students have over the years ‘silently’ developed mechanisms to cope, challenge and resist male dominance by developing ‘alternative body images’ (Gaidzanwa 2001:109) which facilitate their participation in everyday campus activities. For example, senior female students do not date university male students as a rule, and instead enter into relationships with males from outside campus who have the ability to support them financially. From a traditional perspective, this casts negative connotations on the identities of young female students such as ‘materialist, gold diggers’ who ‘date sugar daddies’. Against this background, female sexuality on campus suffers from stigmatization, stifling women’s attempts to negotiate their sexual needs, desires and preferences in light of cultural scripts that prioritize phallogentric sexuality. Sexual experimentation and agency of female students are frowned at on campus, especially by young male students who become violent against ‘outside males’. As such, young women’s sexual freedom and experimentation can be positioned as an act of reconstituting power and domination within the socio-culture to disrupt the normative entrenchments of silence, passivity and submission. Such

instances of liberated sexuality have the potential to constitute a progressive break with the repressed socio-cultural matrix of campus life even as the young women desire mutuality and emotional connection with partners. Young female students who participated in forum theatre discussions and interviews emphasized that young male students did not fit the type of men they wanted. They emphasized that they needed men who were financially stable and who were able to provide for their needs on campus. These needs ranged from material to sexual, with the obvious possibility for marriage. Here too, young women seem to have an ambivalent relationship to cultural discourses of submission and male domination which sustain their simultaneous vulnerability. However, on another level, their agency and power of choice need to be emphasized and contextualized against forces which dictate their obedience and conformity, fitting with previous research that has shown a ‘missing discourse of desire’ and erotic silences within young female students.

Further research and theorization needs to be undertaken to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the sexual cultures of young women on campus and how do they collude or resist impositions of patriarchy?
- b) To what extent are the emotional and sexual narratives of young women politically relevant?
- c) What can be gained or lost by considering young women’s sexual cultures as avenues of expressing gender power on campus?

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