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Sexuality in Folktales: Asset or Liability to Socialisation of Learners in Zimbabwean schools

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The portrayal of sexuality in folktale course-books that are prescribed for secondary school learners in Zimbabwe is indeed a cause for concern. Not much attention, if any, has been given to exploring the portrayal of 'sexuality' especially in ChiShona prescribed course-books. This article qualitatively explored through content and discourse analysis the portrayal of 'sexuality' in folktales prescribed course-books based on an Afrocentric perspective of *Unhu* and *Ubuntu*. The study sought to determine whether course-books are an asset or a liability for the socialisation of learners of both genders especially at the critical adolescence stage of development. This undertaking assessed gender attributes, norms, values, and behaviour patterns proffered in school course-books. The examination of the 'sexuality' portrayed in these course-books was based on the assumption that education is value-laden. The gender value inherent in these course-books being a vaccine for the social ills like gender inequalities bedevilling Shona communities. The major finding was that the portrayal of 'sexuality' in the course-books analysed in this study shows that they are more of a liability. The article recommended a gender discourse that evaluates and critically analyses the gender portrayals in the course-books to avoid losing the gender equality milestones achieved so far in Zimbabwe.

Contribution: The study examined sexuality sensibilities secondary school learners are exposed to through the authority of folktale prescribed course-books: Hodza's (1983) *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa* and Fortune's (ed. 1983) *Ngano* Volume 4. It adopted the Afrocentric perspective of *Unhu* and *Ubuntu* to assess the impact of these instructional materials on the learners' socialisation processes.

Keywords: Afrocentric paradigm; *Unhu* and *Ubuntu;* asset; liability; sexuality.

Introduction

This study examines 'sexuality' as portrayed in Shona folktale anthologies, prescribed for ChiShona secondary school learners in Zimbabwe: *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa* and *Ngano* Volume 4. The study is situated in the area of curriculum issues in education and in particular sexuality in folktale course-books prescribed for ChiShona secondary school learners in Zimbabwe from 2016-2022. The portrayal affects the social experience of scholars as male or female, woman or man, girls and boys, in their formative years. The study uses content and discourse analysis to explore the representations that pose women and men as binaries, opposites and enemies. Men do ugly things like cheating on women who are sometimes naïve and blind to obvious threats by men especially in courtship, love and marriage relationships. ChiShona culture thus appears to be structurally designed to favour the male gender; and to be male is to be privileged. This is biased against the female gender who are underprivileged.

Background to the study

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations gender equality conventions. It had a Ministry of Gender, which has been combined with youth and employment creation (2009). Currently, the ministry was renamed the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (2017). This alone is an evidence of the national commitment to gender equality in Zimbabwe. However, the combination with Community, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development might seem to weaken the gender commitment as attention is depleted and sometimes diverted to non-gender issues. The fact remains that setting up such a ministry and having 'Women's Affairs' in it as well as giving 'Women's Affairs' primacy in the naming of

the ministry are evidence of the high priority of gender equality within government policy. The president of the Republic of Zimbabwe appoints gender commissioners who oversee and investigate violations of gender rights which inevitably points to unwavering support of gender equality.

The only gap the study observes is that while these policies are well articulated and well-meaning, the intention of ensuring gender equality does not go into details of how equality should be implemented in the school curriculum. Neither do the policymakers make a follow-up on the problems arising from the implementation of such policies in the selection of gender balanced course-books. For example, the focus has been on quantitative issues like how many girls should be enrolled ahead of boys, what type and quantity of resources should be designated for girls compared to boys, and how are girls performing, all in order to institute some affirmative action in favour of the girl child (eds. Aikman & Unterhalter 2005; Herz & Spurling 2004; UNESCO 2003). The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) insists on gender equality as a human right. The weakness with this quantitative investigation is that it may concentrate on a physical numerical level, comparing numbers but ignoring an invisible obstacle to educational equality embedded in prescribed course-books. The hidden gender issues in the course-books may need qualitative exploration to expose them and make authors of the course-books aware of the imbalances right from production level. The study assumes that schooling is an agent of culture dissemination and course-books are gender socialising tools for girls and boys apart from being sources of curriculum content and examination questions.

Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the portrayal of 'sexuality' in prescribed Shona secondary school folktale course-books and whether the portrayal is an asset or liability to the possibility of fostering a Zimbabwean community beyond gender equality by 2030. The assumption is that uncovering 'biases and reflecting upon their potential influence on pupils' learning experiences on their self-image may possibly 'empower teachers to become more culturally responsive and to motivate their pupils to take charge of their acculturation process and actively participate in the transformation of current unfavourable societal realities' (Ndura 2010:150). This study primarily assumes that the school is a social experience in which social values and attitudes are transmitted, and course-books prescribed are some of the agents of this transmission. Therefore, course-books are powerful tools in shaping children's views of society during their formative years while at secondary school level. Mwamwenda (1995:163) notes that adolescence is a challenging period of human growth and development where they experience physical, social, emotional, physiological, and psychological changes. At this stage, they are neither children nor adults and they are characterised by a search for consolidation and identity and have hypersexual drive (Mwamwenda 1995). It is,

therefore, important that the content of these course-books be studied to reveal whatever gender messages are conveyed through their authority and give insights to producers, implementers and selection panellists of the course-books for guiding future decisions.

Motivation for the study

As indicated earlier in the background, the issue of gender in education is of critical importance in Zimbabwe which is a signatory to many gender conventions. The subject of gender that is under study is topical. A number of researchers have studied gender representation in textbooks, but the majority of those studies have focused on primary school textbooks, and at the secondary school level, focus has been on other subjects such as history. Very few, if any, studies have focused on ChiShona prescribed course-books. What particularly justifies this study is its focus on the ChiShona folktales as distinct from the textbook proper. An ordinary textbook is generally written to present facts in the discipline concerned. The ChiShona folktales, like all similar literary forms, are a deposit of a people's norms, values and culture as a whole. Certain folktale course-books are written not necessarily to present facts in a particular discipline but to express aspects of a people's culture, usually in a bid to transmit desired models of social behaviour, norms and values.

Several researchers, for instance Wilson, Marlino and Kickul (2004), Mawere (2013), and Sadker and Zittleman (2009), have conducted research on gender sensitivity in relation to equity and equality, and quite a number have carried out research on gender access. Sadker and Zittleman (2009) published their findings in a book edited by Brunei (ed. 2004). Researches that are of particular interest to this study include that of Mutekwe and Modiba (2012),Chirimuuta, Gudhlanga and Bhukuvhani (2012), Tahiri and Moradpour (2014), Chick and Corle (2006), Dudu et al. (2008), and Hall (2014), because of their focus on textbooks. While these previous research endeavours focused on textbooks, the majority of them primarily employed feminist theories to unpack and interpret gender issues.

The choice of ChiShona folktale texts has been prompted by evidence that 'schools serve as important agents in shaping children's gender-based attitudes and behaviour' (Jackie & Peter 2010:121). Texts also play a significant role in shaping womanhood and/or manhood. So, just like textbooks, folktales are a 'powerful social instrument of representation because they use literary devices such as characterisation, plot and setting to construct a community's shared gender meaning within a cultural space' (Zulu 2012:58). This view is in sync with Vollmer and LaPointe's (2009:89) observation that, 'The strong messages in America's powerful mass media such as television and film are reflectors and creators of culture and cultural values'. Thus, ChiShona folktales have an impact on how we react to issues of gender, sexuality and transgression. Thus, narrations of gender are social processes of their times and communities.

Overall, the study benefits the stakeholders who are teachers, administrators and curriculum planners, course-book authors, selection panellists and the learners through giving them insights on the portrayal of sexuality in prescribed folktale course-books. The insights will uncover the sexuality portrayal so that the stakeholders are aware of them and mind about them as they implement, supervise, produce, select and learn in the educational business in schools.

Theoretical framework: The philosophy of *Unhu* and *Ubuntu*

The Afrocentric philosophy of *Unhu* and *Ubuntu* is the lens that illuminates the study in vetting how 'sexuality' is pictured in the selected secondary school ChiShona prescribed folktales course-books. The theoretical framework will also be used to assess whether the picture is an asset or liability to the general gender socialisation that learners are exposed to through the authority of the course-books they interact with for the 2 years of their course of study in ChiShona. A number of scholars defined the philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Unhu* differently. And most of them defined it in terms of its characteristics. Viriri and Viriri (2018:102) say that it is an African worldview. They further explain it as an African concept which represents and describes the way of life in African tribes and commonly representing a communal set of socio-cultural standards. In the philosophy, community members are supposed to uphold communal values. It is a philosophy referring to the qualities or attributes of being truly human or well cultured. In that view, one with *Unhu* is referred to as *munhu* [person] meaning that the person carries himself/herself in accordance with social-cultural values of the Shona society though the philosophy cuts across Africa. Bantu communities believe in the philosophy and are bound by the principle 'I am because we are' (Ramose 1999). So, the endeavour seeks to examine whether the portrayal of 'sexuality' affirms *Unhu* and *Ubuntu,* and whether it is an asset or liability in the dream towards achieving a gender fair Zimbabwean society by 2030.

Research methodology: The qualitative paradigm, revelatory case study design and variant model

The study utilises the inductive theory based on the qualitative approach and revelatory case study strategy because of its inclination towards dealing with a phenomenon where little is known. Murray and Beglar (2009:48) view a case study as an '... intensive, in-depth study of a specific individual or specific context or situation'. The strength of a case study method is its potential to illuminate a 'case', in this case, portrayal of 'sexuality' and whether the portrayal is an asset or liability towards the national vision of achieving a gender balanced community by 2030 in great detail, while placing the case phenomenon in real context [*in situ*]. According to Bryman (2012:6), the inductive theory is a set of theoretical ideas driving the collection and analysis of data. The study also adopts interpretivist epistemology. Thus, reality is a social construction phenomenon and there are multiple realities (Morgan & Sakler 2012:73). The study engages purposively selected Shona folktale course-books. Ontologically, we are informed by constructivism that, 'there are varied and multiple truths, leading the researcher to look for complexity of views rather than narrowing the few categories or ideas' (Creswell 2009:8). The selection is made in line with Punch's (2009:162) assertion that 'we cannot research on everyone, everywhere, doing everything' as the scope may be too wide. In the same light, I made use of a homogenous sample of two purposively sampled Shona prescribed folktales course-books. The two suffice to open a window and give insights on the representation of 'sexuality' in ChiShona secondary school folktale course-books. The author does not intend to generalise the purposively selected pair results to other course-books that are not part of the study. Transferability to similar contexts is possible depending on reader and reviewer's judgement and in instances when it happens, it is a bonus and not prescriptive. The study employs grounded theory as a method and coding scheme as well as web-like data analysis in weaving a coherent story about sexuality status of the course-books.

Presentation and discussion of findings

There are three main themes that came out from the analysis of the selected folktales in the two anthologies including Hodza's (1983) *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa* and Fortune's (ed. 1983) *Ngano* Volume 4. The themes are as follows: women are pictured in an ornamental picture, as sex objects while men are pictured as unattractive, women are pictured as evil beings while men are life saviours and heroes, and women are pictured as naïve and uncritical while men are critical and observant. These themes are discussed below.

Women are pictured in an ornamental portrayal, as sex objects while men are pictured as unattractive

Women are presented as very beautiful, which is an ornamental portrayal. It is their beauty that markets these women victims to men's abuse. Men choose them to be their partners in marriage because of their beauty. On the other hand, it is that beauty that makes them vulnerable to mischievous men who use them and sometimes later on dump them. This makes women objects for sex. This is espoused in the three scenarios given below.

In *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa, Murume aive Mvangamakomwe* [A Man who was a Trouble Causer], it is said:

> 'Harusi runako rwavakanga vakatakura vadzimai ivava. Munhu wose wepamutunhu uyu aikurukura nerunako ... Mutsipa wavaDambudzo wainge chikari chemaburo. Meno ... muchechetere mvura yeguvi. p. 137. Meso ungati ndeembiti. Muviri ungapotsa wati itsiru remhongora [She was so beautiful this woman. Everyone in the neighbourhood talked about her beauty. Her neck was so attractive. Her teeth were levelled. Her eyes were like those of mbiti (otter)] (p. 138, [author's own translation])

Like in most folktales, the storyteller gives an apt description of *VaDambudzo,* that she was beautiful. The storyteller diced her into pieces describing her eyes, teeth, neck and even the swiftness of the body. It is those good looks that objectified her when she attracted the man who was *Mvangamakomwe* [mischievous] who lured her from her husband, the headman and dumped her.

In *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa, folktale, 'Chinyamapezi'* [Leper] it is said, Kwakanga *kuine musikana ... akange aine runako rwaipinda zuva nemwedzi.* [There was a girl ... whose beauty surpassed the sun and the moon] (p. 108, [author's own translation]). The mental creation of '*runako rwaipinda zuva nemwedzi'* [beauty that surpassed the sun and the moon] (p. 109, [author's own translation]) that the storyteller vividly describes to readership makes the woman a victim of *Chinyamapezi* [the Leper]. It is the burden of the audience to then imagine and recreate their own picture of a very beautiful woman by their own standards.

Similarly, in *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa,* in the folktale, '*Chikava chaipinduka chichiva munhu'* [The Bush bark that sometimes turns into a human being], the storyteller says,

> *Vasikana havana kuziva kuti mukomana uyu aipota achipinduka achiva chikava, pamwe achiva munhuwo akaita saivowo … Chikava ichi chakatoreka mwoyo nomumwe musikana akange akarurama samare.* [The ladies did not know that this gentleman would sometimes change into a bush bark, and at other times change into a person like them. The bush bark was attracted to one of the ladies who was very beautiful] (p. 114, [author's own translation])

The description of the lady here is also vivid that it is up to the readership to recreate their own very beautiful woman *akarurama samare* [was unbelievably beautiful], according to their own standards of a beautiful woman. The bush bark still gets the most beautiful woman because it is among the male category. In addition, women are posed as naïve, in this instance the woman had no time to assess the bush bark gentleman. Men are seen by women as a means to an end which is marriage. The way men are valued in Shona communities exerts pressure on women such that some women do not scrutinise men who propose love to them as against men who are pressured to find beautiful women.

Similarly, *In Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa,* in the folktale, *Vakomana Vakapfuudzana Pamusikana* [The Gentleman who Snatched another Gentleman's Girlfriend] the storyteller says:

> *... mukomana ainzi chiwareware. Uyu mukomana zvaakaona kuti ainge akura, akafunga zvokuti atsvage musikana wekuti aroore ... Chiwareware akaona musikana akanga akarurama zvainwisa mvura.* [... a gentleman called Chiwareware. This gentleman when he realised he had become of age, he decided to find a lady to marry ... Chiwareware saw ... a very beautiful girl]. (p. 75, [author's own translation])

The storyteller is giving a vivid description such that the readership can recreate their own figure of an upright girl. Like in other excerpts above, men are pressured to look for very good-looking women, '*akarurama zvainwisa mvura'* while women are not supposed to vet men.

In the above scenarios from both *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa* and *Ngano* Volume 4, there is a common understanding regarding women. The women are described as very beautiful, as opposed to men who are either ugly, sick or crippled. The finding of the dividing line between men and women in representation resonates with Moran (2019), Shaheen, Mumtaz and Khalid (2019) and Hosseinpour and Afghari (2016). The way these ladies are portrayal is not without an effect in the minds of the learners who are subjected to the authority of these course-books. These stories convey a message that when searching for future wives, what matters most is physical beauty. Similarly, the various ways in which men are depicted, for example, *Mvangamakomwe* [Trouble Causer], *Chinyamapezi* [Leper], *Chiwareware* [an Escapist] and *Chikava* [a bush bark that sometimes turns into a human being], may mean that women do not need to scrutinise prospective husbands. Furthermore, the scenarios always have women as human beings while men are either nature, animals, or the sick and even cheats which implies the unpredictable behaviour of men. This indirectly justifies men's abuse of women and normalises men's careless behaviour in the guise of culture. The finding in this section resonates with Nenola (1999) who notes wretchedness of women's position or their status as victims. The result adds more evidence to Mustapha (2014:69) who argues that educational materials, school organisation, school content and structures among other elements of educational processes and practices are said to play an important role in socialising learners into different sex roles. This still resonates with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's view in Wallace (2005) that education systems perpetuate gender imbalance in that they mould women from infancy to be relative to men, please them, care for the old, advise them and console them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them. The position can be further buttressed by the Shona proverbial saying that, '*Musha mukadzi'.* [A woman makes a home]. And '*chero benzi mukaripa mukadzi rinodzikama'.* [Even an insane man will become sane if you give him a wife]. This means that while women are supposed to be groomed before marriage, men self-groom during marriage.

Women are pictured as evil while men are pictured as saviours and heroes

In the folktales in both *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa* and *Ngano* Volume 4, women are depicted as evil beings who ruin other women and in other cases, they are presented as naïve, uncritical and not observant. This is in contrast to men who are represented as saviours of the victims and heroes. The portrayal brings an intra-gender dimension where women ruin other women. This is captured in the folktale, '*Mudzimai akadyiswa muko'* [The Woman Who was Made to Eat Her Totem], in *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa,* where it is said:

> *Vakaranga vakasara voisa muto wetsoko munyama iya yakanga yasara iri pachoto ... Nenguva isipi akabva asanduka achiva tsoko manheru mamwe chete iwayo.* [The second wife remained and poured the stock of monkey meat in her boiling beef ... she turned into a monkey that same evening.] (p. 60, [author's own translation])

The scenario is picturing this second wife as evil for pouring the monkey soup into a pot of beef which made the senior wife to turn into a monkey. She knew very well that the senior wife's totem is the monkey and was not supposed to eat the monkey meat.

The scenario is the same as the one captured in *Ngano* Volume 4, on *Mukadzi aisadya Mbizi.* [A Woman Who Did Not Eat Zebra Meat]. After the junior wife had been told by the husband that the senior wife does not eat zebra meat, out of jealousy she said,

> *... vanobairwa mombe ndivo vakaita sei? Ndovaisira muto wembizi. Vakangoseva musuva umwe chete, ndokubuda mvere vosiya mwana vachimhanyira kubani kwaive nedzimwe mbizi* [... she has a cow slaughtered for her, why? I will pour in the zebra meat stock. After she had it just once, she had fur growing on her body and she immediately turned into a zebra and left the baby as she ran to the pastures where other zebras were] (p. 13, [author's own translation])

In the same manner, the storyteller pushes uncritical readers into blaming the junior wife for being jealous. She is pictured as evil as she poured the zebra meat stock into the pot of beef meat belonging to the senior wife. In this case, it is worse that she had been warned by the husband. The storyteller is making an effort in this case to exonerate a man, the husband that he had warned this junior wife not to mix the two meat types. To this end, women are subjected to circumstances that make them to react negatively as they vent out their anger. Furthermore, men, in this case the husband, seems to be quiet or posing in a non-interference way because he benefits from the rivalry and oppositional positions women take. He eats food prepared by these different women which means he eats meat from the senior wife's kitchen as well as from the junior wife. Thus, the husband receives and eats both types of meat, so he enjoys quantity and variety in polygamous set up. The finding is essentialist in that poses females and males in binary, oppositional and hierarchical state. This adds more evidence to Moiyviati (2017), and is in line with the community's gender ideology as noted by Siddique (2014).

The situation in the two scenarios above is the same as that which happened to the man who was also jealous in the scenario on page 86 in *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa*, in the folktale, '*Vakomana Vakapfuudzana pamusikana*' [Gentleman who tricked Each Other over a girl]. where it is said:

> *Mumwe mukomana ainzi Gwashure akambenge ambonyengawo, Haruchemwi akarambwa akaenda muruvande kunze kwemunda kwakange kwakuhwidzwa moto naChiwareware ndokusvikosasika madzvinyu mashanu pamoto iwoyo ... Ndokubva varambana vasati vambobika vose. Gwashure ndiye akazosara oroora Haruchemwi.* [Another gentleman known as Gwashure (the Breaker) who had also proposed *Haruchemwi* and was turned down he went secretly at the edge of the field where *Chiwareware* had set a fire point and put five lizards on the stove ... and the two divorced before even staying together. *Gwashure* later on married [*Haruchemwi*] (p. 87, [author's own translation]).

When a clever woman, *Haruchemwi,* made her choice to take *Chiwareware* over *Gwashure,* she is punished and forced back to the first suitor *Gwashure.* Thus, women have their flying wings clipped and they have no freedom of choice when it comes to selecting husbands. To that end, men initiate love relationships and they select their spouses while women simply have to comply.

Overall, the scenarios give evidence of the fact that jealousy knows no gender. Rivalry is natural if humanity is posed or pitted against an opponent. In addition, competing is not always a sign of being evil but a reaction to circumstances in which people are subjected to. It is a form of stress and depression management. This is likely to mould male learners into being tricksters as it is taken as heroic and not punished among men. Instead, men get what they want through unethical and fraudulent means. The findings in the section add more evidence to Mustapha (2014:83) who notes that, 'educational institutions are powerful ideological transmitters of dominant values and functions as mechanisms of social control'. The reversal of the gender stereotype is showing learners that both men and women can be jealous. This may less likely to be remembered by learners if we consider Rice's (2000) observation that, leaners are used to traditional stereotypes, hence are less likely to remember feminine traits of male characters.

Women are pictured as naïve and uncritical while men are pictured as life saviours

In some circumstances, women and men are portrayed as opposites. Women are pictured as naïve as contrary to men who are pictured as observant and innovative which then makes them life saviours and heroes. This is captured in the folktale on page 19, '*Vasikana Nevakomana Shumba*' [Girls and Boys who were Lions], in *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa*, where it is said, 'ka*Tezvara kakaruka nhava* ... [*and*] *kahanzvadzi ndokubva kapinda munhava pamwe nehanzvadzi dzako vodzokera kumusha*'. [The young brother wove a flying basket ... the young brother got into the flying basket with his sisters and returned home] (p. 20, [author's own translation]).

In the scenario, the young brother despite being the youngest of them all was observant. He notices that the gentlemen were changing into lions which the older sisters failed to realise. Furthermore, he was innovative that he wove a flying basket that he used to escape with his sisters from being eaten by the lions. The girls only realised it when they were being chased by the lions in the flying basket on their way back home. The young brother, being male, is portrayed as a saviour of his four sisters, who are all older than him. This is against the view that the sisters had tried all efforts to leave him home which could have risked them to be eaten by the lions. Culturally, the small and despised become victorious and heroic. This is in line with the Shona beliefs of respecting individual differences and the so-called *vanhu vaMwari* [God's people] who should not be looked down upon in communities.

Tsuro [hare] is pictured as the saviour of naïve women and children. This is captured in *Ngano* Volume 4, when the hare

says, '*Mhembwe* [duiker] *mira samamiriro awanga wakaita. Iwe Shumba mira zvawanga wakaita. Zvino ndinoda kukusunga zvawanga wakaita chaizvo. Iwe mhembwe, ziva kuti kubatsira mhandu hazvina kunaka. Anokudya.* [*Mhembwe* (duiker) stand where you were. You, lion stand where you were. So, I want to tie you exactly the same as was the case. You, *Mhembwe* (duiker), know that helping an enemy is not good as he will eat you]'. (p. 2, [author's own translation]).

In this scenario, the hare helped *Mhembwe* [duiker]. *Mhembwe* [duiker] could have been eaten by the lion whom she had assisted. She had all her four children eaten up by the lion that she had untied from the snare. This woman *Mhembwe* [duiker] is pictured as naïve as she untied the lion after he had pleaded that he will not eat her. The scenario depicts a woman, mother *Mhembwe* [duiker] as the victim of male trickery in which she lost all her four children and almost have herself also eaten.

In the folktale, '*Muteyi Wamaduwo Nemukadzi wake*', [The One Who catches fish with fishing nets and his Wife], in *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa*, the hare rescued the woman again (p. 87). In the folktale, the one who catches fish and his wife were worried that they always find the heads of fish in the nets without bodies. They planned to be at the point early morning one day and found the crocodile in the fishing net. The woman complained and carried the net with the crocodile inside to have him give back her husband's fish he had been eating all the time. The crocodile said they are at his home, in the water. This is captured in:

> *Chifumi chamangwana vakaenda achiri mangwanani, ndokuwana garwe richitodya zvaro hove riri muduwo. Mukadzi ndokubva akutakura duwo riya ndokupinda rwose mudzivana Katsande. Iko Tsuro kakange kagere hako pagwenzi ndokuona inga mukadzi ave kunodyiwa negarwe mudziva maari kuenda negarwe.* [*Tsuro* (Hare) intervened and said] *Aa, ndazvinzwa zvino ... iwe mukadzi tura garwe iro pasi ... Edzeserai kubaya garwe iri tione. Murume akaedzesera chete. Tsuro akati, Baya chaizvo. Murume uya akabva ari baya baya garwe riya ndokubva rafa. Garwe raida kuti asvika pakati pedziva robva ramudya.* [The following morning they went there early morning, and found the crocodile eating fish inside the net. The wife carried the net with the crocodile inside and heading into the water. Hare was hiding behind a shrub realised that the woman will be eaten by the crocodile upon getting into the water. [Hare intervened and said] Aa, I have heard you now. You, woman, put down that crocodile ... You, man try to stab this crocodile so we can see. Hare said, 'Stab it. The man finally stabbed it and it died. The crocodile aimed to eat her upon getting into the water] (p. 88, [author's own translation])

In the two scenarios above, women are pictured as naïve. If it was not for *Tsuro* [hare], the women would have lost their lives. This resonates with Mburu and Nyagah (2012:100) who noted that there is a subtle inculcation of roles from early childhood which builds the women's sense of dependence on men and subsequent acceptance of othering. Also, women's naivety risks children, for example, in the above-mentioned story, mother *Mhembwe* [duiker] had all her four children eaten by the lion. According to Stromsquist, Lee and Brock-Utne (1998), formal curricula cover the knowledge and skills which schools officially seek to transmit via specific programme of studies, courses and course-books. If the study goes by Stromsquist et al.'s (1998) view, the authority of the course-books leaves lasting influences in learners' memories through the stories they tell about men and women's conditions. This resonates with Moiyviati (2017) who proffers that female and male characters in folk tales serve as role models for learners. The view is in sync with Siddique's (2014) argument that literature plays a role in furthering the community's gender ideology. In the same vein, Tsao (2011) labelled folk tales as the home of stereotypes while Kuykendal and Sturm (2007) sum up by saying that folktales are a tool in shaping children's gender personality. It can only take the few intelligent learners to see gender beyond essentialist view of binary divide. Based on the research results, the study recommends a gender checklist for guiding course-books selection panellists in selecting gender-balanced course-books. Also, while the study may not be prescriptive in terms of rewriting the folktale course-books with regard to sexuality, it suggests a checklist to guide authors in future to avoid glaring sexuality imbalances as well as critical analysis for stakeholders to read, understand and interpret gender anew.

Conclusion

The study sought to examine the presentation of sexuality in folktale anthologies, namely *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa* and *Ngano* Volume 4 prescribed for ChiShona secondary school learners in Zimbabwe. Through the content and discourse analysis that was undertaken, it is revealed that representation is authoritarian, it poses women and men in binary, oppositional and hierarchical. Men and women are portrayed as enemies. Men are there to cheat women who are sometimes naïve and blind to obvious threats by men especially in courtship, love and marriage relationships. In this case, ChiShona culture as presented in the prescribed folktale course-books is appearing like it is structurally designed to favour male gender. Thus, in these course-books, to be male is to be privileged and to be female is to be underprivileged. The sexuality status of the course-books downgrades women and girls which refutes the principles of *Unhu* and *Ubuntu* that insists on respect for others and humility.

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Data availability

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