



AFRICA REGIONAL SEXUALITY
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Patriarchal Ideology and Discourses of Sexuality in Nigeria

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Point of Departure

I offer here a text based on my recent interrogations of the social production of sexualities in Nigeria. This piece and my other shorter works (Izugbara, 1996, 1997b, 2000a, 2001c, 2001b, 2002a, 2002c, 2003b, 2004c, 2004e, forthcoming b, forthcoming c, forthcoming e, Izugbara & Ukwayi, 2003, 2004, Izugbara & McGill, 2003) represent my initial attempts to come to grips with the socio-cultural dynamics of sexual identity formation in contemporary Nigerian society. In my opinion, a thorough discussion of the complexities of sexuality in Nigeria has yet to take place and there is much room for dialogue and debate. My contribution here is offered in keeping with this spirit.

In specific terms, the present work extends my fascination with and consideration of sexuality as a human-made space rather than a natural given. I share the persuasion that sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and that it encompasses sex, gender, identities, and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction, and is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. I hope, in this expose, to show that prevailing codes of sexuality and sexual conduct in contemporary Nigeria are socially produced and fed by oppressive patriarchal subjectivities and ideologies that try to instil a sense of what is normal sexually-speaking, for us all. I suggest that these oppressive, male-biased discursive subjectivities have three familiar traits: They are, (1) homophobic (i.e. support the hatred and fear of men who step out of or challenge traditional male roles), (2) penis-centred (i.e. glorify and idolize traditional imageries of masculinity and male sexual prowess and encourage the objectification of women and their body), and (3) male-privileging (encourage the ideology of double standard in which males feel morally and physically edified by multiple sexual encounters while women are held as morally and physically tarnished by the same).

In making these arguments, I assume my audience to be quite familiar with the concepts of sex and sex roles, and gender and gender roles. Therefore, I do not therefore intend to waste time interrogating these tangential and well-worn concepts before this erudite audience. In what follows, I briefly relate my authorial space. I will then explore the dominant discourses on sexuality in Nigeria. In particular, I will show that these discourses project and celebrate sexual identities and behaviours that encourage male domination of women. I conclude with the possibility of interrupting and transgressing these dominant, dangerous discourses of sexuality in Nigeria.

Authorial Positionality

My approach in this work is not entirely new; I rely on poststructuralism as the theoretic device to deconstruct dominant sexuality discourses in Nigeria. Ritzer (1996) understands poststructuralism as a perspective that privileges language and recognises its constitutive power. Within the poststructural space, cultural texts (including written and oral narratives, and even silence) are seen as embodying meanings which allow for certain expectations to be considered normal and others abnormal. Sexual behaviour and sexuality like other human experiences are often discursively constructed. These, as Foucault (1980) points out, “have been taken charge of, tracked down, as it were, by a discourse that aims to allow them no obscurity, no respite”. Discourse, itself is a technical term for an exhaustive representation, a term which says everything and leaves no gaps or silences. It is through discourse, which is often verbose and clear, that expectations, experiences, and events are constituted and constructed (Foucault, 1980). Often concealed in discourses are layers of signification that actually inform what is said, why and how it is said, what is not said and why and how it is not said. Foucauldian social science recognizes discourse as involving power, because it is about knowledge. Language and narratives are the key vehicles for producing knowledge. Power is thus a multiplicity of force relations of which discourse and knowledge are key elements. As such, language is power, which is not merely repressive but actually productive of knowledge (e.g. of the nature

of sexuality or about ‘proper’ sexual conduct). Part of the ambition of this paper is to uncover the textual sources and cultural scripts that encourage certain notions of sexuality and discourage others in Nigeria, i.e. that attempt to define masculinity and femininity in certain terms. My insights have come from years of ethnographic research on many aspects of sexuality and sexual behaviour in societies and communities especially in southeastern Nigeria. My limited primary data have been complemented with published and unpublished secondary information on gender socialization and constructions of sexuality in Nigerian societies and cultures. These were accessed from international and local bibliographic archives and the Internet.

It must be noted that the present discussion has some limitations. First, the rich cultural diversity in the country is ignored in a search for cultural regularities and homogeneities. The study also relies heavily on secondary data sources, which makes it susceptible to reporting errors and superficial descriptions.

Context

Nigeria, which easily qualifies as Africa's demographic giant, is a colonial invention. European colonialists, who paid little or no attention to ancient tribal cultural differences and similarities, produced the boundaries. Several different peoples were thus pooled together to form Nigeria. About 300 distinct ethnic groups make up the country. The Hausa/Fulani constitute 29%, the Yoruba 20%, and the Igbo 17% of the country. The remaining one-third belongs to other ethnic groups. The country's religious profile shows that Muslims comprise half the population. The Christian population is put at 40%. Indigenous worshippers, adherents of other religious groups, atheists, and agnostics form 10% of the population (Esiet, et al, 2001).

Forty-five percent of Nigerians reside in the urban area. The country's population is decidedly youthful with persons aged less than 35 constituting almost two-thirds of the population. Men comprise a little above half of the Nigerian

population (PRB, 2004). Education in Nigeria is tuition-free and the constitution says free for persons ages 6-12. But only 42% of young Nigerians currently attend elementary school. Surveys put the literacy rate in the country at about 56% (PRB, 2003). English and Pidgin-English are widely spoken, and are respectively the official and unofficial *lingua franca* in the country. Also widely spoken are Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo (Modo, 2004).

Current studies on sexuality in the country, though very scanty, show that many Nigerians become sexually active pre-maritally (Goddard, 1995, Izugbara, 2001c, Izugbara & McGill, 2003). Fifteen years is the current average age of the sexual debut in Nigeria (Esiet et al, 2001, Izugbara, 2001c). Nationwide surveys conducted in the 80s and 90s show that about 80% of males and 65% of females have sex before turning 20. In one study, sixty-six percent of the males and 31% of females ages 9-19 reported having sexual relations with two or more partners (Onah, 2000). Married Nigerians are also known to maintain extramarital relations. In Asuquo (1999), 65% of married men ages 30-65 confirmed having extramarital sexual relations. Ten percent of women in the study reported similar behaviours.

Use of safe-sex methods in non-marital sexual relations is reportedly low in Nigeria. Abia (2001) holds that only 11% of young sexually-active Nigerians regularly use any form of safe sex skills. In Asuquo (1999), only about 40% of married people who reported involvement in extra marital sexual activity consistently used condoms. Scholars have associated the high incidence of HIV infection, unwanted pregnancy, and abortion in Nigeria to low contraceptive use and frequent involvement in risky sexual practices (Izugbara, 2003c; Araoye & Fakaye, 1998; Adegbola & Babatola, 1999). Despite pretensions to the contrary, homosexual and ambisexual relationships exist in Nigeria, and there is little evidence that they are foreign impositions. Research has documented not only the incidence of homosexual behaviours in a variety of Nigerian cultures, but also patterns of identity formation and indigenous cosmologies that give lie to the

notion that such sexualities emerged as a result of contact with foreign cultures (Becker, 2002; Desai, 2000, Murray, 2000; Murray & Roscoe, 2001, Boykin, 2002). Evidence, indeed suggests, that in many cases, homosexual practices, while not always explicitly discussed or identified as such in the larger public imaginary were often treated with more tolerance in pre-colonial Nigeria than during and after the colonial period (Desai, 2000, Boykin, 2002, Murray, 2000).

Currently, same-sex sexual relations have been reported among young Nigerians. But the practice tends to be more prevalent among adults. Francour, Esiet and Esiet (2000) argue that despite the acknowledgement of the existence of homosexuality in many Nigerian cultures, the practice appears to be unpopular. Nigerians tend to view homosexuals as sick, subnormal, and dangerous people. Homosexuals dwell at the very margins of respectability in the larger Nigerian public imaginary. Homosexuality is also frequently associated with witchcraft, magic, and the possession of diabolical powers (Izugbara, 2004c).

Significant unconventional sexual behaviours such as rape, sexual harassment, and paedophilia occur throughout Nigeria (Esiet, et al, 2001). Men are often the perpetrators of such acts. Most of these men go unchallenged, unreported, and unpunished owing to several factors which include culture, popular beliefs, ignorance, and statutory constraints.

Nigerian cultures frown against the open discussion of sexual matters and desires. As I suggested elsewhere, a great deal of the pressure to remain quiet about sex in Nigerian cultures is rooted in socio-cultural values, customs, expectations, beliefs, and ideas about what constitutes good and bad behaviour (Izugbara, 2001c). Words commonly used to depict sexual desires, parts of the body, sex, masturbation, and menstruation in many Nigerian cultures are often ambiguous and indirect, reflecting the cultural quietude expected on sexual matters. This notwithstanding, sexuality remains a key issue commonly and

publicly commented upon through a variety of discursive activities (see Esiet, et al 2001).

Little research has however examined the discourses surrounding sexuality in Nigeria. Put differently, the dominant narratives of sexuality in Nigeria have yet been investigated for the core ideas which they purport. At a time when popular discourses surrounding different aspects of human existence are being deconstructed, this paper offers to interrogate sexuality discourses in Nigeria. The central hypothesis developed in this paper is that sexuality discourses in Nigeria primarily endorse hetero-patriarchal ideologies and norms.

Patriarchal ideology and sexuality discourses in Nigeria

Although the list may be much longer, only three discursive trends surrounding sexuality in Nigeria are analysed in the present work. These are the cultural, religious, and political discourses.

(a) *The Home and Cultural Front*

People do not become men and women in the sterile environment of the womb (Shepard, 1998; Izugbara, forthcoming c). Rather, they do so in specific social and cultural contexts. In Nigeria, the social production of masculinity and femininity is often begun at home through socialization practices, which aim to instil specific personalities and identities into male and female children. Ejikeme (2001) reports that the male child is often and simply the preferred child in many Nigerian cultures, and that several couples go to the extent of consulting oracles to ensure that they will give birth to a male child. Okezie's (1999) multiethnic study found out that 85% of unmarried Nigerian adolescents would want their first child to be a male. Yet 45% of the same sample would want both their first and second children to be males. When given the choice between having children who were all males and children who were all females, all respondents chose the latter. Two percent of the study sample noted that they preferred remaining childless to having children who were all females.

The preference for male children in Nigeria is considered one of the strongest in West Africa (Ibanga, 1994). Male children are less likely than female ones to suffer rejection, prejudice, discrimination, and abandonment. They are also more likely to be sent to school. Many girls in Nigeria are often left at home to do domestic work or engage in child labour as a way of life or as a means of supplementing family resources. Ejikeme (2002) has found evidence that during emergencies and disasters, many Nigerian parents selectively attend to the male child. Nwosu (1972) has reported that during the civil war in Nigeria, many parents fled with their sons, livestock, bicycles, clothing, and jwelleries, leaving their female children behind.

Male Preference

In most Nigerian cultures, the birth of a male child is often heralded with greater joy than that of a female child. Usmanu (1990) reports that among the Anaguta of Plateau state, a woman who gives birth to a female child undergoes a purification rite to cleanse her from the pollution and ill-luck associated with female children. Ukonu's (1990) study of Igbo and Ibibio names has shown that male children are named to represent strength, hope, and fulfilment. Ukonu establishes that the longer it takes to have male children the more anticipation, if not anxiety, mounts in the home. When the boy-child finally arrives, he is named with relief – *Obisike*, *Obiesiemike*, *Obidike* (my heart is strengthened) *Ebisike* (I now live stronger), *Nwokedi* (there is a man here), *Obiajulu* (my fear has calmed), *Ujoadi* (no fears again), *Asagha* (the one I urgently wanted), *Ubokudom* (my right hand person), *Iberedem* (my comforter), etc. Until the arrival of the male child, the names of female children before him will also boldly declare the crisis of anticipation in the family. They will be named *Ogadinma* (it will soon be better), *Ndidi* (patience), *Anaelechi* (I hope on God), *Anaedi* (I continue to persevere), *Chikanele* (on God, I continue to trust), *Otuomasirichi* (however God wants it).

The male child is clearly an important object of huge social and emotional investment in Nigerian cultures. He is valued more than the female child. And

quite early on, his worth and superiority over the female child is made clear to both him and the girl. Okanta (1992) and Izugbara (2004c) agree that Nigerian cultures tend to frame male and female children as separate people with different capabilities, potentials, and constitutions. Their socialization also tends to be tailored to produce them as different persons. While male children are socialized to see themselves as future heads of households, breadwinners, and owners (in the literal sense, sometimes) of their wives and children, female children are taught that a good woman must be an obedient, submissive, meek, and a humble housekeeper. A 1998 study of the language of child rearing among the Igbo and Oron of southern Nigeria concluded that it was gendered; aimed at training male and female children to grow into specific models of men and women respectively. The main reason for scolding and disciplining boys was found to be their failure to act, walk, eat, and speak, like males. Female children were also often scolded for not living up to expectations regarding femaleness. In these cultures as in many others in Nigeria, femaleness (femininity) and maleness (masculinity) are viewed as natural separate identities and models into which responsible women and men respectively must fit. The language of cultural socialization aims to instil into young males and females a good sense of what it takes to be men and women (Asanga, 1998).

Male Socialisation

Abia (2002) and Gbarale (1999) have described some of the key values around which Nigerian cultures construct ‘femaleness’ and ‘maleness’. These scholars believe that it is not uncommon in many Nigerian homes for boys who act violently, stubbornly, take risks, and talk aggressively to be depicted as acting properly. Boys who cry, are shy or easily frightened, avoid fights, or easily give in to bullying and intimidation by peers are often scolded and warned to stop acting like girls and women.

Ideal Man

In short, male socialization practices in many Nigerian cultures aim largely to train them to be domineering, ruthless, and in control, and to see themselves as naturally superior to women. On the other hand, female socialization often aims at making girls and women submissive, easily ruled or controlled, and to see themselves as natural inferiors to men. The Social Science and Health Research Network (SSHRN, 1994; 2001) shows that the key lay terms around which the ideal man is constructed in Nigerian cultures are ‘strong’, ‘hard’, ‘unyielding’, ‘vigorous’, ‘stout-hearted’, ‘resolute’, ‘aggressive’, ‘active’, and ‘tough’. The good/ideal women on the other hand is spoken of in terms of ‘dutiful’, ‘submissive’, ‘quiet’, ‘fearful’, ‘humble’, ‘faithful’, ‘patient’, and ‘careful’. My study among the Ngwa shows the common portrayal of masculinity in terms of ‘ruthlessness’, ‘risk-taking’, ‘adventure’, and lack of interest in the ‘idle chatters’, ‘childish emotions’, and ‘natural unreasonableness’ of women (Izugbara, forthcoming c).

Agenda of Cultural Socialization

These socialization experiences inscribe superiority into maleness and masculinity, and inferiority into femaleness and femininity. I see the agenda of cultural socialization to be that of locating men and women in specific places in (hetero) sexuality and endorsing the belief that the natural order of things is for men to control women. For me, this narrative inherently privileges masculinity equating it with autonomy – the freedom to explore, experience, and experiment – and femininity with danger, vulnerability, and weakness. Our cultures frame men as having a naturally stronger sexual drive and firmer control of their sexuality than women. We speak of women in terms of shame, lack of interest in sexual matters and as the ‘other’ to be conquered and demystified by the domineering active male. In my study of local notions of sexuality and relationships among rural Nigerian adolescent males, respondents told me, in blunt terms, that male sexual desires were natural, strong, and often uncontrollable. They depicted good women as lacking sexual desires and real

men as those who were ‘sexually active’, ‘hot’, and ‘strong’. Male dominance of the sexual scene and act, genital activity, penetrative sex, sexual aggression, and indifference to the voices of women emerged as the cherished qualities among the boys (Izugbara, 2004c).

Heterosexuality Celebrated

In the discourse surrounding sex in Nigerian local cultures, heterosexuality is celebrated as the natural order. The failure of men and women to fit into this expectation exposes them to taunts. These taunts, as part of cultural narratives are directed at males/females that deviate from ‘standard’ roles. Such men in Nigeria are called ‘women’, ‘weaklings’, ‘incapacitated’, ‘effeminate’, ‘girls’. These men are not respected. In local cultural imaginaries, they lack fit. Such women are called ‘men’, ‘masculine’, ‘wicked’, ‘stubborn’, and ‘tigers’. They are stigmatised. This is because our cultures view taking the role of the other (i.e. male taking the role of women or vice versa) as the ultimate humiliation, an unfortunate crisis, and a transgression. The labels and names applied to these ‘unfits’ aim at denying them proper humanity. This intensely discursive process (of negatively labelling people who transgress culturally-accepted codes of sexual identity and codes) is the objective condition for homophobia in indigenous Nigerian cultures. This helps to constitute men and women into ‘proper’ identities and to coerce them into what our local cultures hold as ‘proper’ sexually speaking, and for me this is the place where local sexuality discourse reproduces male dominance.

The young women I studied in Ibibioland (Izugbara, 2004E) like those studied by Holland et al (1998) reported being told a great deal about their reproductive capacity. They were repeatedly warned about men who are only ‘after one thing’. This serves to express a strong message of female passivity and the strength of male desire and its dominance. Consequently, physical desire, the clitoris, and masturbation are totally absent from home-based conversations about sex in many Nigerian families (Izugbara forthcoming a). Men and women learn the

boundaries of their sexual identity and the social mechanism of sexual reputation from cultural sexual prescriptions. The acceptable sexual practice and ideology – heterosexuality is then more than a sexual code. It is actually a cultural device to invoke compliance with mainstream group values and sexual identity. It embodies a range of gender relations, which in turn underscores patriarchal society. For instance our cultures place emphasis on children which marks out same-sex relationships as ‘unproductive’ and ‘unnatural’. Once conceived as unnatural and unproductive, homosexual desire is framed as an unruly force which threatens humanity at large and has to be kept perfectly under control, by violence, if necessary.

Women Unimportant

Lay discourses on sexuality in Nigeria inscribe superiority on men and to the penis. This discourse ultimately dictates where the power lies. The key message in these narratives is that women are a gift to men and should be so pleasantly. A woman’s pleasure will then be in giving the man what and how he wanted. This means she has to curb her own desire if it would threaten men. Women who fail to align to this patriarchal order are cast aside as nymphomaniacs and whores. By centralizing the penis, lay sexuality discourses in Nigeria marginalize women’s genitals, sexual desire, and pleasure and make them to appear evil. Isherwood (2004) agrees that this is where women’s lack of autonomy, their inferiority and unworthiness begin to be embodied. Women then become the ‘unimportant’ other because they do not possess the penis.

(b) *Sacred Narratives: Christian and Islamic Discourses on Sexuality*

The ideology of manhood reverberates very clearly, too, in religious narratives on sexuality in Nigeria. The Koran and the Bible form the critical texts from which sexuality is situated and read out to be embodied by people in Nigeria. Christian and Moslem identities have become inseparable from certain forms of sexuality. These identities as I shall show are also largely hetero-patriarchal. Those who

fail to fit into these are framed as sinners, infidels, and ungodly people. Such people have embraced the profane.

The belief that God destined man to be in charge and women to be governed by men is evident in many passages of the Islamic and Christian Holy Books. The ascription of a powerfully significant first position to men intervenes to silence women and to discourage other oppositional tendencies. Religious narratives depict man as ‘God’s first born’. He is created to dominate the earth. Woman was created, the Bible suggests, only as a second thought, to provide comfort to the domineering active man. The discourse, which surrounds creation in Christian and Islamic texts, spills into their constructions of sexuality and sexual identities. Eve is formed from Adam’s rib. She is weak and must be supported. At first sight Adam recognised the inherent weakness in Eve and declared:

This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man (Genesis 2: 23).

The inherent weakness of the ‘second’ sex is played out most tragically in the narrative of the Human Fall from Grace. Adam, the explorer and fearless, is away into the heart of the Garden of Eden, and Eve, alone is tempted into eating the apple of knowledge by the subtle serpent. The person tempted, we note, was the woman, now alone and at a distance from the man. This narrative associates femininity with weakness and inferiority. Man’s constant supervision will help woman to avoid drifting from virtue. Both the Bible and Koran construct these qualities as genetic. So like the original sin, they are natural to humans. All women thus have the nature of Eve and all men the Adamic nature. That Eve in turn ‘seduces’ Adam into eating the critical apple depicts the inherent danger in women. A moment of lack of masculine assertiveness will cost man a lot. So he must refuse to do the woman’s wish. He should have little time for her idle chatters. The Biblical path to true manhood therefore consists not only in being

able to dominate women but also in resisting their treacherous capacity to unman and disarm men.

Male-Privileging Narratives

The Bible is awash with male-privileging narratives. The Christian God is depicted as a (jealous) man, men fought wars, were prophets, apostles, disciples, elders, and deacons. In the Bible, men are depicted as the natural possessors of rationality, analytical skills, and critical thinking. McColley (1992) writes that

Adam's naming of the creatures is proof of his intelligence. Eve was not ... part of naming, which denied her capacity for it. Adam's charge over nature puts him in the clear lead of Eve.

In the small space in which women feature in Bible accounts, they are regarded as successful only when they give in and are submissive to men as did Ruth, Esther, and Sarah. But when they assert their sexuality or become sexually agentive, they are framed in roguish terms as were Jezebel, Delilah, Lot's daughter, Potiphar's wife, and Tamar (Judah's daughter-in-law)

Christian discourse celebrates forms of sexuality and sexual practices tied with patriarchal forms of marriage, family, and gender relations. Christ, the head of the church is a man. The anti-Christ is, however, a woman, a whore. Many people (kings and common men) have drunk her wine of seduction. She is depicted as a sacrilege. She is unholy because she has broken the rules of patriarchy. She is framed as impure because she asserts her sexuality. She does what she likes with herself and her body. Indeed, she has refused to be held down and dominated by man. Here, *the adulterous woman is framed as the idolatrous woman*. Her punishment is hurtful enough. No woman is expected to challenge patriarchal domination. She is thus flung into the bottomless pit to be burnt with fire and brimstone (Rev. 17, 1-18).

The church is often constructed as the bride of Christ, who expects absolute chastity, faithfulness, and purity from her. She must strive to meet these basic requirements to be acceptable to the groom. This discourse privileges sexual self-donation by women as part of their Christian identity. Women are enjoined to submit to their husbands. They are to be occupied, inhabited, and claimed by their men and must, first of all, make themselves available. This way, Christianity produces men as superior and women as inferior – an object of rule by the superior other, i.e. men. Women are enjoined to seek satisfaction in their husbands only and by self-subjection and donation to them. The right to seek divorce is solely invested in men in the Bible. And adultery is the key ground upon which the Bible encourages men to divorce their wives. This is simply because infidelity by women constitutes a sort of rebellion against patriarchal domination and control of women's body and sexuality.

The belief that God created them *Adam* and *Eve* and not *Adam* and *Steve* is used as narrative basis to inscribe heterosexuality with normality. By framing heterosexuality as natural and divine, men and women are kept within the confines of their assigned roles. This process of religious socialization conditions Christian men and women to view homosexuals as the 'despised other' and to believe that associating with them threatens their relationship with God. The sociological function of such a narrative is to resist changes in the sexual order. As with homosexuality, birth control, abortion, sexual deviation, pornography, masturbation, adultery, prostitution, nudity, free love and other sexual practices, which challenge hetero-patriarchal domination, are often condemned as unchristian.

In general, I think that Christianity represents a powerful moralistic discourse of sexuality, condemnatory and hostile towards anything outside procreation, men's control of women's body and hetero-patriarchal sexual relations. The core of Christian narratives of sexuality is the belief that heterosexuality and patriarchy

are divinely instituted. Christian identity thus consists in embodying patterns of control, domination, and submission that put men and women in an unequal relational status.

Islamic Discourse

The Islamic discourse on sexuality is no more different from the Christian narrative. As Ilkkaracan (2002) opines;

Four UN conferences on population and development, ICPD in Cairo, the 1995 Beijing Conference, the 1999 Five-year Review of ICPD (ICPD + 5) and the 2000 five year review of the Beijing Conference (Beijing + 5), witnessed the Catholic and Muslim religious right engaging in unprecedented cooperation to oppose and restrict women's right to control their bodies and sexuality.

Several scholars have noted how original notions of gender equality in early and medieval canonical texts, traditionally accepted as establishing Islam's normative practices have been swept aside by patriarchal interpretations of male religious authorities aiming to privilege the male gender. Thus, one finds several logical discourses in the classical texts, *fiqh*, since they reflect two dissenting voices; an egalitarian voice inspired by revelation, *wahy* and a hetero-patriarchal voice incorporating the social order, regulating sexuality, and governing desire.

Mir-Hosseini (2001) contends that an analysis of the sexuality discourses based on the Koran and the early Islamic texts, shows that the voice of the patriarchal social order has displaced the egalitarian voice of the revelation, *wahy*. Models of sexuality and sexual identity celebrated in these early Islamic texts were grounded in the patriarchal ideology of pre-Islamic Arabia. These ultimately spilled into the Islamic era in modified forms through theological, legal, and social ideas and assumptions such as 'women are created of and for men' (Ilkkaracan, 2002).

Although the Hadiths recognised sexual fulfilment and the rights of men and women to seek it, permitted contraception, tolerated abortion, and approved of women's orgasm (Ahmed, 1989); male Islamic scholars continue to skew textual meaning in favour of men. For instance, the acknowledgement of female sexuality as active in the Hadiths has been reconstructed as an indication of its threatening implications for social order. The security of this order, which is blatantly patriarchal, is linked to women's virtue. Social order is constructed as requiring male control of women's body and sexuality. Male and female, particularly in terms of sex drives, are seen as opposites. Men are rational and capable of self-control and women are emotional, lacking self-control. Female sexuality, if uncontrolled, could lead to social chaos.

Women as Seductresses

The Quranic narrative surrounding Zuleikha and Yusuf, constitute women as beguiling seductresses, and men as susceptible to seduction, but rational and quite capable of self-control. In short, they are superior to women. Islam has many practices for disciplining women's sexual desire and expression (honour killing, stoning, and amputation for adultery, female genital cutting etc). Muslim women accused of adultery or who become pregnant 'extra-maritally' are at risk of amputation or being stoned to death. Often, nobody tracks down the men with whom these women had sexual intercourse. This is because the Islamic view of sexual conduct privileges men and depicts women as expendable. Female chastity is a celebrated value for Muslim women. To be chaste is to be a good woman and to remain so she must avoid publicity, loitering, and unnecessary intermingling with men. Thus, Good Muslim women are not expected to go out alone. They are to be accompanied by their husbands or must do so in the company of other women. Part of the emerging picture is also the identity of the good Muslim man. He protects his wife from publicity as publicity diminishes her value. This discourse transforms men into the protector of the weak, helper of the vulnerable, and controller of the untamed desires of women. Men are thus free

to walk about as they are not inherently disvalued by publicity, being a different, stronger, and better sex.

Quran Surah 33:32 admonishes women: ‘If ye fear God, be not too complaisant of speech, lest … man should lust after you.’ This restraint also extends to posturing and the display of femininity. Such acts of exhibition are framed as indecent in Islamic discourse and function to segregate the decent from the indecent, the good from the bad women. The prophet himself voiced the potential of the sexually unrestrained woman to destroy and destabilize order. ‘Verily, he says, a woman comes near in the form of a devil and goes behind in the form of a devil.’ He continues: ‘When you are attracted to such woman and she seduces you, be ye inclined to your wife and have sexual intercourse with her. It will help to drive away what is in your mind’.

Islamic discourse depicts unmarried adult women as ‘bad’, ‘unlucky’, ‘unhappy’, and ‘unfulfilled’. Such women constitute a threat to men. They can lure them from the path of righteousness. Similarly, the marriage of virgins and girls who have not started menstruation is celebrated in Islam (see Quran, Suratul Talaq verse 4). Evidently, the control of female sexuality has to be early enough before it grows into sexual self-discovery and becomes too assertive for men to deal with.

Jabir bin Abdullah narrates:

When I got married, Allah’s apostle said to me: ‘what type of lady have you married?’ I replied, “I have married a matron” He said why you don’t have a liking for the virgins and for fondling them …’

The male-privileging tone of mainstream Islamic discourse of sexuality is also evident in the analogy drawn between a man’s farm (*Tilth*) and his wife or (wives) by Prophet Mohammed himself. ‘Your wives are a *tilth* onto you, so approach your *tilth* when or how ye will (surah, 2: 223). Many Hadiths agree that ‘good’ women do not refuse their husband sex. The Prophet himself says “if a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she declines then angels send curses on

her till morning." This narrative inscribes men with power, control, and dominance and puts women in a position of sexual self-donation to the men. The question of what happens to the man who refuses his wife sex or fails to satisfy his wife's sexual desires and fantasies is muted. The Muslim Hausa of Northern Nigeria act out this discourse. Among them sexual acts are often initiated and directed by men. Sexual foreplay is frowned upon as un-Islamic. Intercourse usually occurs in the dark or semi-dark. The man indicates his readiness to penetrate by clearing his voice. This tells the wife to position herself. The woman is always clothed or semi-nude. Intercourse ends when the man ejaculates (Esiet, et al 2001).

All in all, the key plots that emerge in Islamic sexual narratives are the inferiority of the female, the unattractiveness of the un-dominated woman, and the ultimate power of the male figure. Men are viewed as superior to women and it is men's sexual needs and desire that are to be met.

(c) *The State and Sexuality in Nigeria: The Official Endorsement of Hetero-patriarchy*

The state, the national, and local state policies and public discourses in general though appearing asexual, always have sexual categories and preferences embedded in them. The state both has sexual foundations and regulates other sexual sites and practices, and these are completely entwined with questions of gender ... Indeed it is hard to conceive of a version of a nation that does not address its citizens more or less explicitly, in sexualized or gendered terms ... (Epstein & Johnson, 1998: 5).

Sexuality has historically constituted a focal point of macro national political debates and discourses in Nigeria. In the colonial Nigerian state, i.e. interaction between the native and the colonizer was determined by the belief that the colonizer and colonized were two distinct people and that their sexualities

differed. We can read this out of the large scale belief systems structured by discursive frameworks and given credibility and force by the power relation due to imperialism. In defining colonial discourse, Peter Hulme (1986: 2) asserts that it is

an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified
in their common deployment in the management of
colonial relationships, underlying the idea of colonial
discourse ... is the presumption that during the
colonial period large parts of the non-European world
were reproduced through a discourse that imbricates
sets of questions and assumptions, methods of
procedure and analysis and kinds of writing.

The discursive structures circulating within the nineteenth century in particular informed the way knowledge about local people was produced. Seemingly objective statements were in fact produced within a context of evaluation and denigration. Value-laden statements about the inhabitants of colonized areas were presented as ‘facts’ against which there was little possibility of argument. Even anecdotes and fictitious information began to accrue themselves factual status because of their production within the nexus of colonialism. The fact that sweeping generalizations were made about local cultures made them less communities of individuals than an indistinguishable mass, about whom one could amass knowledge or stereotypes; the inscrutable Chinese, the untrustworthy Arab, the docile Hindu, and the infantile and libidinal African, etc (Mills, 1997).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the human features of native people were muted in colonial discourses. They were cast as anomalous in relation to a western norm. They became an exotic spectacle. The depiction of the African as the ‘other’ in a racial hierarchy of being cast local sexualities and sexual conducts as the teleological necessary and lowest form of sexual evolution. Part of the colonial mission otherwise called the *White Man’s Burden* consisted therefore in salvaging and re-socializing the sexually-crude Nigerian described often as primitive, promiscuous, and hypersexual, etc. The colonized peoples of Nigeria were in fact invested with a type of sexuality and became the object of sexual fascination and exoticism. In this context, colonialism can be viewed as a space within which the colonizer tried to determine what goes into native sexualities. I contend therefore that a key goal of colonialism was to tune natives into sexual frequencies deemed proper and harmless for colonial relations.

European Constructs

To be sure European notions of ‘activity’, ‘rulership’, ‘governance’ work, ‘militancy’, ‘power’, ‘leadership’, as male and ‘followership’, ‘submission’, ‘idleness’, ‘activity’ and ‘home’ as female gave colonialism a patriarchal bearing. The British who usurped power in Nigeria only recognised the male *obi*, male monarch to whom they even offered a monthly salary while completely ignoring the female *omu*, female monarch (Tamale, 2000). This way colonialism defined women as objects of men’s rule. Colonial norms of gender discrimination play out very well in its emphasis on ‘able-bodied men’ as the most important qualification needed to work as guides, servants, tax collectors, cleaners, and stewards for the colonizers. By reproducing and reconstituting meanings of gender and culture, colonial state policies constructed natives in ways that invested control over everybody in the colonizer and those native men who have Europeanised. The colonial lockout of women as the ‘unable other’ casts femininity as subordinate and inferior. The important role of men as rulers and their natural superiority emerged as the proper order of things.

Colonial Schools

Colonial schools, informed by Victorian vision of the natural position of men and women in society were typical sites for the production and regulation of sexual identities. In these schools, most of which were single-sexed, socialisation followed specific directions. Boys were taught civics, law, and politics to equip them for leadership and control. Education for women was geared towards sustaining their role as housewives, home keepers, and the inferior ‘other’. They were taught domestic skills, nutrition, home economics, and management. As in imperial Europe, not only were educational opportunities disproportionately provided to Nigerian males, men’s education was also accorded higher priority than that of women. Of course men were women’s natural superiors.

Socialization in colonial schools aimed at denying or forbidding the struggles over sexual identities by young people as sexuality was taken as a given which could not be negotiated. The (false) binary of male and female was taken as a natural order and ‘proper’ sexual behaviour and identity was taught in gendered term (Desai,2000). Heterosexual teachers, expected to lead exemplary sexual lives, disciplined students who did not fit the sexual ‘graph’ of the colonizer. My own father told me of his colleague in standard II who was expelled from school on the excuse that he consistently acted like a girl. In this sense, colonial education was a project of social engineering which aimed to inscribe superiority on sexual formations which aligned with colonial notions of ‘good’ identity. Civilized and ‘proper’ men were expected to behave like European men in everything including sexual conduct. Civilized and ‘proper’ women were those whose sexual conducts were in line with Victorian codes. Heterosexual marriage was seen as normal, and the natural assertiveness, leadership disposition, and aggressive sex drive of the male were endorsed. Colonial privileging of such formations marginalized alternative sexual expressions and constituted homosexuality, same-sex erotic desire, and relationships that do not clearly reinforce male control of life spheres as ‘improper’ if not dangerous.

The colonial portrayal of indigenous sexuality as primitive and crude powerfully reinforced imperial modes of sexuality, and subjected a good number of local sexual practices to an overtly hostile treatment in the larger imaginary of the colonized. To this end, the rise in homophobia – the fear of men who challenge traditional male roles – in the colonial period in Nigeria has been reconstructed as the direct result of the psychological and cultural wounds visited by the colonial encounter (Boykin 2002; Desai, 2000). Portrayed as the ‘sexually-backward other’, Nigerians, like other colonized people sought to resist these negative imageries by denying homosexuality as an indigenous cultural practice; and expressing heteronormality and their allegiance to heterosexist patriarchal values which celebrate male superiority and cast women and their body as objects of control, subjugation, and subordination by men.

Male-privileging imageries of sexuality continue to live on actively in post-colonial official discourses and imaginaries of national identity, family, marriage and sexual conduct in Nigeria. Particular forms of sexual identity and family life have been discursively produced as the norm, and made to function as meta-narratives for national identity.

The rise in sexuality and gender consciousness in post-colonial Nigeria, which followed the emergence of legal and constitutional codes that supported freedom in the everyday lives of people have translated into little, at the level of praxis. National narratives are still awash with patriarchal themes that support the socialization of males and women in ways that promote the domination of the latter by the former. As proof of this, the Gender Empowerment Measures introduced in 1995 by the UNDP ranks Nigeria among the world’s lowest. The report submits that the management of sexuality in Nigeria continues to re-echo powerful male-privileging ideologies (Ilkkaracan, 2002).

In Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, the feminist movement of the 70s was based on an analysis and critique of the official discourse which claimed that

modernization has solved the gender question. The establishment of hospitals, rise in employment opportunities for women, the appointment of women into leadership positions, and building of schools have allowed women to participate more actively in nation-building. But official activities continue to associate men with leadership and women with followership. Men control the political landscape and often co-opt women primarily as entertainers or praise-singers. There is good reason to believe that the use of women and women's wings of political parties in Nigeria for purposes of entertainment and praise singing (otherwise called ululation culture) is not accidental. It is borne out of the official construction of women and their body as naturally created to satisfy men and therefore inferior to men and men's body. Ranking male public functionaries in Nigeria usually talk of women and girls (bush meat allowance) as part of the appurtenances of office. Women and girls are thus often arranged from colleges and campuses for the sexual entertainment of male public functionaries.

Women Denied Rights

Many bureaucratic practices provide cover for the official assertion of the superiority of the males over the females in Nigeria. For instance, the police deny women the right to act as surety in an application for bail although the legal provisions which regulate bail practices stipulate that 'any and proper persons' can surety a bail applicant. This extra-legal denial of right to bail, for me, is borne out of the official construction of women as lacking membership in the category of 'fit and proper persons'. Further, the language of governance and official conduct in Nigeria continues to distinguish between what is good for men and women. Politics in Nigeria is often framed as a 'hard', 'difficult', and 'dirty' business, too corrupting and exacting for educated, devout, good, and real women. She is often seen as the 'weak other', naturally too weak to withstand the rigours of this sphere of social existence (Pearce, 2001). Often debates and policy about women and men in Nigeria are constructed around such terms as responsibility, good parenting, and gender roles etc. Questions surrounding sexuality are depoliticised with the focus being on the efficient and pragmatic

management of motherhood and family planning, effective protection from diseases and violations, and the promotion of responsible fatherhood. In this discourse, women emerge simply as nurturers of the nation's children and wives of men. Their sexuality becomes a source of reproduction and maintenance of national identity. Men are also produced as controllers of the 'other' spheres (especially the political) and as the husbands of women. This way, men and women enter national imaginaries differently: The men as actors, leaders, providers for their families, and natural household heads, and the women as spectators, followers, housekeepers, and submissive bodies.

Pearce (2001) asserts that the contemporary Nigerian state celebrates men as aggressive and domineering and therefore denies women's right to naming and controlling their sexuality and body for their own joy. For instance, fearing that Nigerian men and husbands will express displeasure over the new freedoms that modern contraceptives might bring for women, the Nigerian government was forced, in 1988, to reconstruct the population policy in ways that supported the subordination of women and their body to male sexual needs and pleasure. The population policy document was therefore caused to read that *the patriarchal family system in the country shall be recognized for the stability of the home* (FMOH, 1988, 19). Pearce adds that given the state's perspectives on marital and reproductive behaviour, the rights and freedom of husbands and women have thus been constructed as significantly different and unequal. Consequently, none of Nigeria's recent health programmes is a practical attempt to stop levirate, seclusion, childhood marriage, female genital cutting, and the corporal punishment of wives. I suggest as does Pearce that this is simply because the state also considers these necessary for the 'stability of the home'.

The value placed on the 'stability of the home' and the 'traditional' roles of men and women in national policies privileges patriarchy and male-domination. Government policies elaborate male leadership as part of the identity of proper Nigerians. In the Nigerian curriculum for sexuality education which was ratified in

2001, after years of resistance by traditional patriarchal forces, male control of the family is presented as the acceptable social practice and men's sexual behaviour as superior to women's by narratives that celebrate the dominant roles of man in sexual activity and the aggressive nature of male sexual desires. Currently, schools in Nigeria are key sites through which the official discourse on sexuality is realized. Nigerian culture, taught in primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions (as social studies or Nigerian peoples and culture) usually depicts men as heads and women as home keepers. And this is also usually constituted as part of the natural history of Nigeria. In Nigerian primary and secondary schools, boys and girls are taught that they are different. Their games differ. They dress differently. Girls are not permitted to play with boys because boys' play is viewed as hard, dangerous, and risky. It is believed that 'Good' girls do not get involved in such plays. The readers and textbooks officially permitted to be used in Nigerian primary and secondary schools normally contain stories of boys who run, kill snakes, ride bicycles, fight, travel out of the home on holidays, go fishing, play football, are hard, rough, help their father in changing the tyre or painting the house, and who want to be policemen, doctors, lawyers, soldiers, or politicians. Girls appear in these stories as people who sit, sweep, sing, clap, and help their mothers cook, run when they see snakes, fear to leave the house, stay at home to watch TV and movies, get sick, keep quiet, are soft, and clean, and want to be nurses, secretaries, models, and newscasters.

Nwogugu (1974) has also detailed how several statutory codes are relied upon by the Nigerian state to privilege men. For instance, when applying for a passport, married women are required by the state to submit a letter of consent from their husband. She cannot also include the names of her children on her passport without written consent from the husband. Men, however, do not need their wives' consent for these things. Such codes re-enact *the men-are-superior-to-women-and-have-to-control-them theorem*.

Official Silence

Further, official silence seems to surround the problem of sexual abuse of women in Nigeria. Although available data suggest that the sexual abuse of women is common in Nigeria, and are sometimes committed by state agents (army, police and ranking politicians), mum is often the word. The police do not always take reports of sexually abused women seriously on the excuse that they (the women) cause their own sexual harassment by exposing their body or that women lie a lot (Izugbara, 1997b). Sometimes, the false belief that men's sexual desire is naturally uncontrollable is used to excuse their sexual intimidation of women as recently dramatized in the home video, *Last Girl Standing*. State licensed media houses and filmmakers in Nigeria also help to flesh out the official view that men's control women's sexuality is part of our national identity by castigating and framing as unnatural, sexual behaviours that do not endorse hetero-patriarchy. The *Daily Sun*, for instance recently reported the case of two lesbian students of the Federal Polytechnic, Oko. The newspaper described their act as unnatural, ungodly, sinful, un-Nigerian and devilish and enjoined the school authorities to expel the students. It described lesbianism as a social vice comparable to secret cultism.

To be sure, the official Nigerian discourse on sexuality frames men as dominant, in charge, sexually-potent, survivalist, violent and encourages the socialization of males to see themselves as the heads, lords, and masters of women in all spheres. Men are constructed as born to deal with more important stuff such as providing for the family, sustaining and protecting our democracy, building, defending, and running the country, and making more money.

Coming (In) From The Cold: Interrupting Dominant Discourses

Dominant sexuality discourses in Nigeria are premised on patriarchal ideologies which privilege men and encourage their socialization into forms of masculinity that are domineering. The discourses also demean women and support their socialization into forms of femininity that are submissive. The narratives upon

which these ideologies are based are penis-centred and homophobic. They celebrate male ruthlessness, control, and rule of women. The key plots in these discourses are the inferiority of women and femininity, the unattractiveness of the sexually-assertive and agentive female, and the natural differences between men and women. Males are framed as naturally superior to females and ‘proper’ masculinity in terms of ability to control women, assert oneself, take risks and conquer women’s body. These discourses generally produce women as chattels of men (Pearce, 2001). Men are encouraged to explore, experiment with, and exercise their sexuality as an expression of their virility and uncontrollably strong natural sexual instincts. Women are however viewed as demeaned by sexual experimentation. Homosexual practices are constituted as sinful, ungodly, anti-cultural, and un-Nigerian, because they do not clearly reinforce patriarchal values and mainstream sexual ideologies

There is a burgeoning body of empirical studies pointing to the role of patriarchal ideologies in the development crisis and HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa (Abia, 2002; Engelhard & Seek, 1999). These studies show that patriarchal ideologies and views of sexual identities encourage sexual risk-taking and irresponsibility among men and prevent women from challenging men’s sexual conduct and behaviour. This brutal and yet routine socialization also explains why men will rape women, beat women and take decisions for them. It also explains why women conceal their sexual abuse, express shame about their bodies, apologise for their bodies, and lose touch with reality or what Alice Walker (1992) calls ‘The Secret of Joy’.

By depicting men’s control and rulership of women as natural, divine, cultural, and or normal, these discourses make it difficult to promote rights to choices, sexual freedom, and positive, healthy, and respectful sexuality. For instance, we are currently inundated with calls made on Nigerian women to conform to traditional roles as care givers and nurturers. Further, Nigerian women’s struggles for individual freedoms, social autonomy, and bodily integrity are often

publicly invalidated or curbed by cultural, political and religious narratives that construe such choices as un-natural, dangerous, ungodly, irresponsible, and selfish. These discourses therefore have the potential to frustrate positive change in sexual behaviour and gender relations. There is also evidence that changing political, cultural, and religious discourses of sexuality is a complex task. For those who have worked for decades to liberate men and women from the shackles of hetero-patriarchal discourses, it may even feel absurd to suggest a blueprint for change-oriented action. Several things make this so. These include questions of where to begin, who to involve, what to begin with, how to begin, how to involve people, etc. Further, although these discourses converge and overlap their sources differ, suggesting that change in one discursive sphere may not necessarily imply change in another.

Yet all hope is not lost. Events in societies with similar discourses (such as Algeria, Turkey, India, The US, The UK, and Japan, etc.) point to the possibility of transgressing these discourses and redefining sexuality beyond reactionary and conventional cultural, religious, and political narratives that cast hetero-patriarchy as traditional, natural, and divine.

Way Forward

Scholars, the media, and indeed everybody involved in public education must be in the forefront of interrupting these discourses of sexuality. We need to begin to clearly show through teaching, writing, public lectures, and other forms of mass education that sexuality and sexual identities are not fixed categories that humans are destined to inhabit and that sexuality is indeed too complex and diverse for there to be truths about it. Reinserting a rich account of cultural lifeways and individual agency in discourses of sexuality is the very place to start reconstructing the very lives of sexual minorities and the cultural and historical forces that produce them (which have been particularly vulnerable, to partial representations). Lesbians, gay men, heterosexuals, bisexuals, queers, transgendered individuals, and others must be situated within discursive

structures that recognise persons as esteemed agents with full rights and duties. Unpacking patriarchal discourses and their regimes of the normal is the necessary *point de départ* of this project of discursive interruption. This also entails de-masculinizing and de-patriarchizing our key social institutions and establishment forces. People at all spheres and levels in the society must begin to learn , think, and act differently toward the issue of sexuality and understand sexual freedom and expression and gender equality as the inalienable rights of all humans. This new discourse, which has already begun in the form of queer theory (Halperin, 1990, 1995 Hostetler & Herdt, 1998)), will enable Nigerian men and women step out of the prevailing, bounded, and limited notions of hetero - normative sexuality. This new discourse will help us see the patriarchal cage for what it is – carefully-placed bars that keep us locked within suffocating spaces efficiently reproduced by an uncompromising male-privileging system. My expectation is that further social investigation will begin here where my own deconstruction of dominant discourses ends.

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