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GENDERED PERSPECTIVES IN SELECTED ZIMDANCEHALL BILINGUAL SONGS: AFRICANA WOMANISM

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Abstract. There is no study which is based on lyrics of songs about a sextape. Hence, the purpose of the study was to understand the gendered perspectives of four Zimbabwe singers towards explicit recording as reflected in the lyrics of their songs. Africana Womanism was deployed as a theory on the relationship between black males and females. The methodology was Critical Discourse Analysis in which purposefully selected artistes' music lyrics were analysed. D Flexx's song, "Hombe Yalevels", "Ane hombe dzinotapira" (Ndunge Yut), "Tsamba kuna Levels" (Lorna Real Love) and Libronie's "Ane hombe" which were released after the sextape scandal were examined in this study. From the findings, we argue that singers of the four songs failed Shashl as a woman and fellow musician by focusing on DJ Level's perceived sexual prowess. Public figures ought to consult advisers, managers and veterans in their fields and government departments should partner stakeholders like businesses, brand experts and counsellors to explain the need for maintaining integrity.

Keywords: *codeswitching, gender, sextape, songs, recording, Zimdancehall.*

Rezumat. Actualmente nu se cunoaște niciun studiu care să se bazeze pe versurile cântecelor despre o relație de gen. Prin urmare, scopul studiului a fost de a înțelege perspectivele de gen ale patru cântăreți din Zimbabwe față de înregistrarea explicită, așa cum se reflectă în versurile melodiilor lor. Africana Womanism a fost implementat ca o teorie a relației dintre bărbații și femeile de culoare. Metodologia a fost analiza critică a discursului în care au fost analizate versurile muzicale ale artiștilor selectați intenționat. Au fost examinate cântecele lui D Flexx, „Hombe Yalevels”, „Ane hombe dzinotapira” (Ndunge Yut), „Tsamba kuna Levels” (Lorna Real Love) și „Ane hombe” a lui Libronie, lansate după scandalul sextapelor. Cântăreții celor patru melodii au discreditat-o pe Shashl ca femeie și colegă muzician, concentrându-se pe perceperea de gen a DJ. Level. Persoanele publice ar trebui să consulte consilieri, manageri și veterani din domeniile lor, iar departamentele guvernamentale ar trebui să asocieze părți interesate, cum ar fi întreprinderi, experți în mărci și consilieri, pentru a explica necesitatea menținerii integrității.

Cuvinte cheie: *comutare de coduri, gen, sextape, cântece, înregistrare, Zimdancehall.*

1. Introduction

Music is more than just arrangement of lyrics, vocals and chords. It is an aspect of identity and should contribute towards social transformation, such as gender equality. Zimdancehall has been the dominant genre in Zimbabwe in the last decade. Zimdancehall gained popularity around 2009, courtesy of increased access to cellphones which was facilitated by the government of national unity (GNU)'s liberalization of the telecommunications sector. Users could transfer files through infra-red and Bluetooth devices, memory cards, flash drives between phones and gadgets like laptops and tablets. The sudden upsurge in dancehall songs which were replete with 'antisocial' lyrics unsettled many elderly people in the predominantly Christian and traditional country who feared that it would lead to an erosion of moral values [1].

Though they differ on its implications, there is consensus among Zimbabwean scholars and citizens that use of explicit language is one of the easily noticeable influences that Zimdancehall adopted from "Jamaican dancehall as its progenitor" [2]. Vulgarity is "the hallmark of dancehall" [3], "Zimdancehall's trademark" [4] and "Zimdancehall is epitomised by the use of explicit vulgar lyrics". [5]. Fred Zindi, a Zimbabwean music expert, has been outspoken against vulgarity in Zimdancehall. He identified Killer T, Dhadza, Soul Jah love, Quonfused, Shinsoman, Level 2, Bounty Lisa "and many others" as culprits [6]. He concedes despite his artistic background, he does not understand Zimdancehall singers' preoccupation with vulgarity, adding that fellow Zimbabwean reggae/ dancehall aficionado, Terrence Mapurisana expressed dissatisfaction with excessive vulgarity in lyrics of Zimdancehall songs which he said negatively affects society especially young children.

Chillspport Recordz, the country's biggest dancehall stable was founded by "DJ Levels", henceforth referred to as Levels, Arnold 'DJ Fantan' Kamudyariwa and Tafadzwa 'DJ Ribhe' Mandaza in Mbare in 2012. Levels is arguably Zimbabwe's most successful producer and co-owns the country's largest Zimdancehall stable meaning that he is approached by many female artistes. Zimdancehall artistes have grappled with allegations of plagiarism, substance abuse and indiscipline mainly through explicit lyrics and promoting antisocial behaviour [7]. At a time, the genre seemed to gain traction, Zimdancehall was left reeling when Levels was arrested on charges of rape and contravention of the Data Protection Act on the 5th of December 2022. Prior to this incident, on the 27th of November 2022 a sexually explicit video recording of Zimdancehall singer Ashley 'Shashl' Moyo and "DJ Levels" went viral rekindling debate about the logic, morality and risks, of (especially public figures) recording such sensitive content. Though Levels was already popular when the sextape went viral, many Zimbabweans knew him from songs in which artistes chant his name. Barely after the explicit recording went public, memes, reels and conspiracy theories emerged and, in the process, Levels' fame soared.

The purpose of this paper was to understand the gendered perspectives of four popular singers in Zimbabwe towards the publicized explicit recording of one of their own and how their perspectives are reflected in the lyrics of their songs.

2. Theoretical Framework

Through Africana Womanism, we heeded Aldridge's [8] call for studying relationships between black males and females. Africana Womanism, which is inspired by Afrocentricity's valorization of culture and history, was propounded by Clenora Hudson-Weems during her

first year as a student at the University of Iowa in 1988 [9]. The theory emerged due to concerns with older female movements.

Black Feminism emerged in the 1970s fronted by the likes of Bell Hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins following complaints that feminism only benefitted white women [10]. In 1983, Alice Walker coined the term womanism which she felt was more inclusive. However, with the premise, “naming something gives it essence”, Hudson-Weems [11, p.18] formulated Africana Womanism. Besides Africana Womanism’s seeming objection to Womanism’s accommodation of lesbians due to the former’s Afrocentric influence, the two are almost identical. According to Asante [12], prefixing ‘Africana’ to Womanism was necessitated by Europeans ‘contamination’ of Afrika by replacing “K” with “C” during their colonization of some African countries. Hudson-Weems clarifies that Africana Womanism is “neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism... (it) is not black feminism, African feminism, or Walker’s womanism.... It is grounded in African culture” [13, p. 138].

The fundamental difference between feminism and Africana Womanism is that, unlike the former which cites gender as its main concern, the latter only places it after racism and classism [9]. Hudson-Weems [10, p.83] quips: “We are and have always been co-partners with our male counterparts” (Men and women are regarded as “the flip side of the (same) coin”) [13, p. 138] in African culture. Hudson-Weems [9, p.6] adds that “the battle of the sexes” is alien to non-western countries which are characterized by what Ani [15, p.75] calls “appositional complementarity” between men and women. Cooperation between men and women is the sine qua non for a progressive society according to Afrocentric rubrics.

Walker is scathing of Womanism, describing it as a fundamentalist ideology, “a mythology that is racist” [9]. However, Africana womanism enjoys cordial relations with other African feminisms as it “underscores a closer affinity among all African women globally” [16, p.25], dismissing allegations that it seeks to be the only women’s movement. Asante [12] observes that Umoja supports diversity among women’s groups and underlies the ‘mosaic’, diverse nature of formations which lobby for rights of African women. Similarly, Kaiwada womanism is open to adjustments provided that African values are upheld. However, every theory should be constantly aligned with changing times. Karenga and Tembo [17, p.42] declare that as “our experience and knowledge expand, we can and must change it without discarding its essential elements”. Hudson-Weems’ “Africana-Melanated Womanism” is “a terminological, rather than conceptual evolution of Africana Womanism” [9, p.2]. Africana Womanism is an inspiration for development of newer models [11]. As an antidote to African challenges, Africana Womanism must be constantly remodelled to tackle “coloniality”, a term which denotes colonialism’s tendency to renew itself [18, p.1]. Achebe [19, p.47], cites Abraham, who states rhetorically that since African scientists, historians and political scientists seek African solutions in their fields, “why should African literary creators be exempted from the services that they themselves recognize as genuine?”. African feminisms and Africana womanisms are, therefore, predicated on African knowledge systems [20].

3. Literature Review

Mulvey [21, p.17] coined the term “male gaze” in which she discusses Freud’s ‘scopophilia’, deriving pleasure from looking which is found in “the voyeuristic activities of children”. Mulvey splits this pleasure “between active/male and passive/female” [21, p.19] and applies Lacan’s “mirror phase” [21, p.18] which notes that before a child can talk or walk, it acquires a “self-awareness” from seeing its image in a mirror which leaves a narcissist

attitude in the child. Pornography, graphic display of sexual organs in a way in which actor(s) may arouse feelings of the audience, has grown in leaps and bounds. Broader sexualisation of culture in the “mainstreaming of pornography” [22, p.1] has culminated in an “attention-economy” [23, p. 138]. Sexually explicit issues were a rarity in African societies. However, innovations have increased the influence of western cultures resulting in cultural erosion; pornography is a “symbol of decaying culture” [24] and “sextapes are an indication of moral decay” [25].

Revenge porn is “a newly developed genre” which is “flourishing in new media” as seen by terms like “pornification” [22, p.1]. In popular discourse, revenge pornography “is called do-it-yourself pornography or “sex tapes” whilst in scholarly discourse it is referred to as “sexual media production” [26, p.1]. The term ‘revenge porn’ is problematic because some people capture explicit images for sharing with their intimate partners whilst others share them out of excitement to brag about their relationship with people who are in the images. Therefore, there is a “slippery terrain” between sharing of pornographic footage by a partner out of excitement or to spite their lover [27, p.13]. Nguyen [28] argues that revenge porn “implies victim-blaming” so the correct term should be “image-based sexual abuse, or non-consensual pornography”. Nabil’s study revealed that release of sextapes is not only inspired by liberatory and/or victimizing motivations [26, p.1].

Women are the main gender that usually suffer the most after the release of explicit images in which they feature [29, 30]. After the release of their sextape, former Studio 263 actress and ZiFm presenter Tinopona Katsande, popularly known as ‘Tin Tin’ spent “years in the wilderness” whilst her former boyfriend Brian Munjodzi “emerged unscathed from the fiasco” [30]. Commenting on her leaked sextape in August 2023, South African DJ and social media influencer, Cyan Boujee said, “I’ve never been this broken” [31]. She briefly withdrew from the media whilst Prince Kaybee, who recorded their sextape, continued with his work, releasing a single which was well received [32]. Nancy Masiyambiri uploaded an eight-minute video in which she laments that she has been ostracized by her neighbours because of a sextape in which she featured with her former boyfriend, actor, Denzel ‘Jabu’ Burutsa. Jabu was not bothered despite issuing what appears like a half-hearted apology on social media days later [32]. Kim Kardashian broke down after her son showed her an advertisement which referred to her 2003 sextape with singer, Ray J who retained copies of other explicit recordings which he has threatened to release [33].

Notwithstanding how they may try to move on, women will always be reminded for featuring in sexually explicit images. Any news about a woman who once featured in a sextape that is shared on social media attracts responses referring to the scandal. In African countries, the public often reacts to revenge porn by “slut-shaming, blaming the victim...for ... an act that occurred within the context of (what she/he most likely thought to be) a trusting relationship” [29, p.2]. Tin Tin’s sextape “overshadowed all her previous achievements” as an actor and radio presenter [34]. As if this is not enough, search engine algorithms are replete with images relating to their scandals [29]. In a “web that never forgets” [35, p.1], the images become permanent because even if the original post is deleted, some users would have already saved the images through third parties for resharing. Rosen [35] suggests that search engines should not be allowed to index such images.

Nonetheless, some women employ what Spivak calls “strategic essentialism” [36, p.3], simulating female stereotypes of them as vulnerable, ‘docile bodies’ [37, p.13] to achieve their ends. In the recording alluded to earlier, Nancy Masiyambiri narrates her ‘ordeal’,

alleging that Jabu connived with her former friend, Luciana, to release the sextape in the public domain. Masiyambiri, however, confesses that she knew that Jabu was married and cheated with him on her 'serious' boyfriend who provided for all her needs. Though she apologizes to Jabu's wife, Masiyambiri blames Jabu for being manipulative which makes her appear to be playing the victim card.

Boujee's remarks like "my only issue is my n****s (boyfriends) are all gonna dump me today" and bragging that she continued to get bookings after her sextape suggest that she prioritizes money over dignity [38]. Similarly, despite claiming that Ray J had drugged her and leaked their sextape, Kim Kardashian later revealed that she provided graphic details of the sextape on her family reality show, "Keeping up with the Kardashians" because she knew that "producers would love that" [39]. Ray J claims he and Kim had planned with Kim's mother, Kris Jenner to sell the recording yet she was now shedding "crocodile tears" [40].

In a bid to fight chauvinism, the media can inadvertently widen rifts between men and women through overgeneralizing. The Herald [25] posits that women often allow "themselves to be captured whilst their partners remain behind the camera". This, however, seems far-fetched because in many sextapes; Ray J, Stunner, Zhetstar (Tererai Mugwadi's former partner), Levels and Jabu are all facially identifiable. Prince Kaybee and Joyce's former partner are the only males whose faces do not appear in their sextapes.

Men have also accused their former female partners of leaking their sextapes which shows that they are just as vulnerable. Nox and Qounfuzed accused girls who they interacted with on videocall, of recording them without their knowledge [41]. In 2016 alone, Nox had explicit images of himself leaked on social media on two occasions for which he blamed his former girlfriend, only identified as 'Mai Gamu' (Gamu's mother) [42]. The two musicians' accusations were enhanced by the fact that their private parts appear in the video recordings, but their partners' do not. Mai Tt is the only female musician to have suffered a similar fate.

4. Materials and Methods

Using keywords such "as songs with explicit/ vulgar language in dancehall/Zimdancehall", "Levels and Shashl Sextapes", "Zimbabwean celebrities recorded/featured in leaked sextapes", "Fred Zindi on Zimdancehall", we searched in the Google search bar. An avalanche of data emerged which we sifted to determine its relevance. We added "PDF" to our searches to enhance chances of getting downloadable information from reputable sources. We employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method which guarantees collection of data which falls within the purview of the study. This sampling method "is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest" [43, p.2]. Just as we did with documents and information that we saw on different sites, we identified Zimdancehall songs which contain vulgar lyrics. Thereafter, we undertook the painstaking exercise of screening songs which were released after the 27th of November 2022 when Levels and Shashl's sextape was leaked.

Five songs which explicitly refer to the Levels- Shashl sextape were initially identified. However, we dropped Ane hombe by Ndunge Yut and left his other track, "Hombe dzaLevels" because it makes more reference to the sextape. For ease of illustration, we coded the four tracks according to the order in which they were released meaning that "Hombe Yalevels", by D Flexx (1 December 2022) became 'Song 1', hereafter, 'S1' "Hombe dzaLevels" (Ndunge Yut, 11 December 2022, S2), Libronie's "Ane hombe" 18 December 2022 ('S3') and "Tsamba kuna

Levels” (Lorna Real Love, 23 December 2022, ‘S4’). We listened to lyrics of each song to identify similarities, contradictions and significance thereof.

Though the four songs are not the first Zimdancehall songs to be inspired by real life events, we reckon, that, the fact that in the period under study, from the 1st of December 2022 to the 23rd of December 2022, four songs about a single event (five including the one that we excluded), were produced, is unprecedented. Our interest in studying lyrics in songs referring to the Levels-Shashl sextape was motivated by the fact that there is no study known to us which is based on lyrics of songs about a sextape. Levels and Shashl’s entanglement defied class stereotypes if one considers that the former attended schools such as George Stark High School in Mbare whilst the latter, daughter of former health minister Obadiah Moyo went to Dominican Convent, one of the country’s most prestigious girl’s high schools.

5. Results

With an average length of just three minutes, the four songs are underlined by intensive repetition, sound devices, codeswitching mainly between English and Shona. Figurative language ensures that their messages are conveyed in a few words. The following aspects were noted in analyzing the songs under study: Defying stereotypes, Survival of the fittest’, Consensual transaction, and Levels’ sexual ‘prowess’.

5.1 Defying stereotypes

In African culture, it is taboo for a girl to ask a boy out as Lorna Real Love does in S3. As if that is not enough, she breaks another female stereotype, ordering Levels to “leave light skinned” (tumayellowbone). African society generally treats light-skinned women as more beautiful than dark-skinned ones and the term yellow-bone comes from the assumption that such women’s light complexion runs deep into their bones. Interestingly, Lorna Real Love does not seem fazed by Levels’ playboy antics and only wants to spend time with him, not to keep him as suggested by the prefix “chimbo” which loosely translates to ‘do for a moment’ as in “chimbomira zvetumayellowbone” which is juxtaposed with “chimbouya kuzvimadhafudhunda zvimablack bone”. Ordinarily, a dark-skinned person would feel insulted if they are referred to as a black, let alone black-bone, yet Lorna Real Love embraces it. She also fights stereotypes against stocky women, advising Levels to take a break from lean girls, tumaslender tumayellowbone and come to the chubby ones; the diminutive prefix ‘-tu’ is very fluid in terms of attitude towards something small and here it is contemptuously used. She also deconstructs society’s pejorative use of the prefix ‘zvi’ to use it in an affectionate way. Though she says it in a hilarious way, Lorna Real Love offers a vision of beauty that recognizes different forms of beauty. This contrasts with Lebrone who, in S4 admires Levels who by having a light-skinned girlfriend who Mbare residents mistake for a coloured, has earned a prestigious status.

In addition, Lorna Real Love debunks the myth that women are ‘soft’, “ini ndiri simbi hombe, une mota hombe”, literally, ‘I am a strong metal and you have a big car’. In this case, Lorna Real Love implies that she is as tenacious as Levels. In another demonstration of lyrical creativity, she employs alliteration to ask Levels to allow her to take charge because she can fix all his problems: “ndiri makanika usapanika ndipe ndimboirevha ndimboedriver” (I am a mechanic, don’t panic, just let me drive it a bit”. Such a feisty women is reminiscent to characters in the film *Waiting to Exhale* who go against the ‘norm’ by describing themselves as laying men and not vice versa.

5.2 'Survival of the fittest'

S3 acknowledges competition for Levels so she asks for an opportunity, "ndipoo mukana". In the survival-of-the-fittest world of relationships, if one does not have required specifications, they lose out, women only ask for photographs of the big manhoods, "hombe ndoinonzi isa picture timboiona" (S1). Apparently, one needs a big car, big house to achieve greatness. The reduplicated verb, 'hombe' in 'muhombehombe' demonstrates such greatness. In S3, Lorna Real Love laments the fact that she has been sleeping with men who have small manhoods which leaves her sexually deprived, "ndanzwa nekukwira tumahonda fit two minutes katofa tumishikashikashika... tunogumira munzira" (literally, 'I am tired of boarding small cars which do not last the distance). S1 adds that "hombe ndedzemunda murefu munda muhombe" (big ones are for large fields). The metaphor of a female body in songs as a field has been cited in the discussion on Jamaican dancehall. In a Zimbabwean context, Zimdancehall chanter, Qunofuzed's "9ine" has a verse in which he likens a woman to an unused field which he wants to till. Similarly, here, D-Flexx suggests that satisfying heavily built women sexually requires great stamina. He ends by advising people not to put themselves under pressure by comparing themselves with others, "usazviye pressure".

Women are portrayed as preferring big things in S1, S3 and S4. D-Flexx boldly claims that women always think of big things, "mupfungwa dzemadzimai munongofunga hombe". To make matters worse, he insinuates that they do not work to get what they want but depend on someone, apparently a man: "(mu)buritsire mari anatora figure hombe" (give her cash and she will take a huge sum). This appears to be corroborated by a lady's request to drive Levels' big car in S3. D-Flexx implies that tall men have big manhoods which women call "good size". S4 modifies the chorus of Baba Harare's song "Haubvire" in, "Ane hombe, mukoma Levels vane hombe" (she loved him because he has a huge manhood). The woman in S3 complains that she is sleeping with a man whose manhood is tiny "kana kumba uku tiri kurarira madora", madora are mopani worms. This is juxtaposed with her disclosure that she heard that Levels carries a 'big fish' which she wants to taste, "chimbondipa ndimboraira muramba".

5.3 Consensual transaction

Unlike the three other tracks, S4 is the only one which explicitly refers to the Shashl-Levels sextape though, like them, it does not spell her name. From the onset, Levels is absolved of any wrongdoing because he had consensual sex with his lover, "mukoma Levels havana mhaka guys... pavaiita wani zvainaka chii chaita kuti vagoumba daka" (my elder brother Levels is innocent, they had consensual sex so what's the problem?) What Librone seems to overlook is that Shashl's allegations involved previous incidents, not necessarily the incident projected in the leaked sextape.

5.4 Levels' sexual 'prowess'

Levels' sexual prowess is highlighted in A4 where several ideophones are used to graphically re-enact action on the leaked recording to suggest that Shashl initiated the sexual activity, "paati shadabu, mukoma Levels kwadabu" (when she opened, my brother levels hit her) leaving her lying on her back, "nemanhede kupedza masports ese kuti rundubvu"; "shadabu" literally means 'opened widely', "pidigu" is 'fall', "kwadabu" denotes forcible removal of a layer and "rundubvu" means 'completed' which suggests that Shashl was left vanquished. The most brutal imagery is found in the words, "kudhanda kwacho kutori too bad", he hit her badly. The phrase "kupedza masports" (literally, to end the match) is used when one party defeats another. Probably to demonstrate that Shashl's charges were

insincere, A4 modifies the chorus of Baba Harare's track "Haubvire... mota yacho ihombe" ('you are such a character and your car is big') to "hakubvike kuMbare kwacho hakubvike" ('she no longer wants to leave Mbare', where Levels resides'). Ndunge Yut uses a technique found in African orature to praise Levels' sexual exploits, calling him with his clan-name, Mazvimbakupa whose totem is zebra. As stated earlier, it appears as though Levels' praises come at Shashl's expense. A1 says Levels' popularity has skyrocketed, "Aenda mbiri Levels" whilst A2 and A4 concur that he deserves an award for his sexual performances. In A2 Ndunge insinuates that Levels aroused Shashl's orgasms, something which he says, can only be achieved by a man who has a big manhood, "ukanzwa mabby oscreamer paita hombe apa (Ladies only scream when they have encountered a big one). Ndunge modifies the chorus "Paita Rudo", a yesteryear song by Enoch Munhenga, who is popularly known as X-Q and Oliver Mtukudzi, which means 'there is love' which he modifies into "ane hombe inotapira", 'he has big, a sweet one'.

6. Discussion

The four songs under scrutiny were found to be disempowering to women because three of them insinuate, and S4 clearly states, that Levels is innocent merely based on the viral sextape. The four songs also celebrate the producer's exploits whilst suppressing Shashl who S3 and S4 apparently insult through body shaming and colourism. All this, whilst the matter has been referred to the courts and the jury is still out, literally. This places them at risk of getting contracts in exchange for sex so we believe that this study will help in probing chances of him and other producers exploiting female singers especially teenagers. To its credit S3 provides images of an archetypical woman who refuses to be confined, she is strong-willed but dedicated to her man and all the four songs demonstrate that sex should be consensual. Levels' influence as a revered producer clearly influenced the bias in the four songs. Ndunge Yut has a contract with Chillsport Recordz and he and Lorna Real Love recorded their songs with the stable. Musicians are in this study urged to strive to provide fair social commentary because they have a huge influence on social behaviour. More discussions between managers, promoters, artistes, corporates and government representatives should be held.

7. Conclusions

The utilization of Africana Womanism has demonstrated its worth in analyzing the dynamics between black males and black females. The theory offered valuable insights into the dehumanization of African professional women within the music industry. Through the lyrics of the singers, the analysis of the four songs revealed a pattern of gender bashing, with the insinuation that the victim was at fault for the public release of the sextape. The songs prominently incorporate offensive language, with a significant focus on women, thereby contradicting the ideals of gender equality and African cultural values.

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