Zimbabwean women online: an investigation of how gendered identities are negotiated in Zimbabwean women's online spaces

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the construction of Zimbabwean women's identities in this contemporary internet age. Two Facebook groups are of particular interest here due to the vibrant conversations that take place on a daily basis, that is, *Makhox Women's League* and *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries.* Conceiving these internet sites as discursive spaces, I unpack the contesting discourses and tensions in the different narratives offered by Zimbabwean women and identify and critique the competing sets of feminine subjectivities. I achieve this by drawing on poststructuralist and postcolonialist feminist theories in order to situate these groups as cultural sites that are particularly identity defining. I particularly draw on Foucauldian theories of discourse, power and the subject to conceptualise the formation of particular discursive gendered subjectivities. With an understanding that discourse is constitutive of power relations and contestations, and that discourse should be historically contextualised in order to take into account particular conditions of existence; I draw on Mamdani's (1996) conceptualisation of how power is organised in Africa within a historical and institutional context, and identify the bifurcated nature of the postcolonial Zimbabwean state as a colonial residue as necessitating a particular kind of subjectivity. To this end, one can understand the different femininities on *Makhox Women's League* and *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* as constituted within, and complexly negotiating, a traditional/customary discourse and a rights-based modern one. This qualitative inquiry is informed by an eclectic approach that combines methods of textual analysis that complements both critical linguistics and media studies and attends to lexical structure as well as narrative and rhetorical analysis respectively. Combined with an online ethnographic approach I employ these tools to analyse these particular Facebook groups with the understanding that as women converse daily on these platforms, they 'govern' each other's conduct and thought processes in interesting ways. I argue that these conversations discursively constitute the performances of different femininities on both sites that also take into account the diasporic condition of Zimbabwean women. I show how they negotiate and mediate feminine performance and in so doing propose and contest certain 'truths' that are frequently validated.

DEDICATIONS

For my husband Mbongeni and our treasures Sibusiso and Nobubele who give my life purpose

&

Mum and dad, who have always believed in me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> 'Translation.' This describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been *dispersed* forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several 'homes' (and to no one particular 'home') (Hall 1992b: 310, emphasis in original).

1. Introduction

"I will submit until I die"

Comment on *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* Facebook Page (March 2015).

This decidedly bold proclamation is a response to a post in which a man is captured in a photograph cooking in the kitchen with a baby tied firmly to his back and arguably provokes a culture shock. Amidst the mixed reactions that follow, this particular woman declares that she would never subject her own husband to such humiliation which leads her to declare that she would rather submit to him until she dies. I find this incident particularly interesting because it gives me an entry point into the issues that I probe in this thesis as I interrogate two Facebook groups (*Makhox Women's League* and *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries*) as particular online spaces in which culture, in the broadest sense of the term, is produced through discourse. The popularity of these online spaces can be attributed to their multi-cultural and multi-lingual nature as they allow interactions in Ndebele, Shona and English, the three main languages used in Zimbabwe.

The online presence of Zimbabweans is significant especially in a country that has experienced bulk migrations over a short period of time. This large diasporic population contributes to the vibrancy of Zimbabwean online communities. In giving attention to the seemingly mundane everyday talk on these platforms, I probe the underlying discourses and cultural practices that undergird such utterances which consequently constitute particular

corresponding subjectivities. If discourse speaks us, and consequently produces its objects and subjects (Hall 1997), then, by proudly proclaiming her submission, the woman in the opening quote constitutes herself as a willing patriarchal subject and her will to submission makes sense within those parameters. As I unpack the discourses on these two platforms, I am therefore interested in the construction of Zimbabwean women's femininities and with how they engage and negotiate their gendered identities. I therefore pay attention to the way that culture constitutes its subjects and consider the contested ways that knowledge is historically contingent, with its processes of inclusion and exclusion. In other words, I critique these two Facebook groups by interrogating the discourses that are validated or backgrounded on these online spaces with a particular concern to unravel underlying power relations and the consequent formation of gendered identities.

Without presenting a detailed historiography, this chapter addresses key events in Zimbabwe's precolonial and postcolonial condition that position the country as a nation defined primarily by its 'crisis'. These are dealt with in the first three sections of the chapter which discuss the research context, the Zimbabwean diaspora and the internet in Zimbabwe. The fourth section focuses on the gender order in Zimbabwe highlighting the existence of different sets of feminine identities in the country. Section five identifies the study as rooted in the broad theoretical framework of cultural studies and specifically informed by poststructuralist and postcolonialist approaches. The next two sections consist of the research objectives and a presentation of a summary of the case studies respectively then the chapter concludes by outlining the thesis structure.

1.1 A personal note

"To be or not to be": that is the question ... is the famous opening line to arguably one of the most popular soliloquies of all time. At the risk of being clichéd I will adopt Hamlet's monologue to probe some of the tensions that arise in identity formation processes. So I will begin again; "To be Zimbabwean or not to be Zimbabwean, that is the question." Having lived in South Africa for the past five years (and an additional two while I was doing my Masters degree), I have witnessed people I have come into contact with do their best to distance themselves from being 'Zimbabweans' for various reasons, whether social, economic or otherwise. Sometimes it is for concerns about one's safety that one denounces her/his 'Zimbabwean-ness' because of perceived or real threats to personal security. At other

times it seems to come from a sense of inferiority on account of the particularly difficult circumstances in Zimbabwe that leads to a perception that being South African is more prestigious to a certain extent. Whatever the reasons, there seems to be a certain stigma attached to proclaiming one's Zimbabwean-ness even to other Zimbabwean peers, and an almost palpable shame to openly speaking one's language in such circles. These are some of the issues that have made me think deeply about my own identity, issues that have directly or indirectly had a bearing in the pursuit of this particular research.

So who am I? To start with, I am a *black Ndebele woman*, which already places me in a disempowered position racially, ethnically and in terms of gender respectively. My subjectivities are constituted within this matrix. Further, I am a migrant (or so I think considering that I am in South Africa for studying purposes) thus I simultaneously belong and do not belong. I belong because I am a legal temporary resident in South Africa but I do not belong because my temporary residency status has an expiry date. So, in a sense I have a floating identity. I also do not belong because other people around me struggle to fit in. How does one freely claim or 'perform' Zimbabwean-ness in a society where other fellow Zimbabweans are not comfortable being in their own skins. How do I claim my identity? Surely as the old adage goes, when in Rome do as the Romans do, so how does one do as the Romans do without becoming 'Roman' too and losing one's initial identity. At the same time does being 'Roman' necessarily mean having to negate one's identity? What does one become in this complex mix of identities? Considering that refugees or immigrants are treated as "sub-human, not quite subject" (Schirato & Webb 2003: 153), what happens to my national identity since it has been argued that one's identity is tied to their national identity? This in turn raises pertinent issues pertaining to whether a national identity is even desirable and as to whether sovereignty ultimately resides in the nation-state or in the body as Ahluwalia (2008) critically questions.

It is these issues that frame so much of the questions I try to tease out in my research. Challenging the Western idea that we can produce knowledges that are neutral, Grosfuguel (2008) argues that as scholars we always speak from a certain location within the racial, class, gender and sexual hierarchies that order contemporary societies. As such, in conducting this research I realise that I am already 'situated' in this manner, but not as a producer of knowledge about Zimbabwean women's identity rather as someone who is implicated in the

subaltern experiences of Zimbabwean women from several vantage points. So, when I speak of the experiences of Ndebele women I see myself in their struggles; when I speak of Zimbabwean women in general, I identify myself in their struggles; and when I speak of Zimbabwean women's struggles in the diaspora, I personally relate to it, given my diasporic condition. I therefore speak in this thesis not as an authority but (broadly speaking) as part of the disenfranchised voices with floating identities that come out of the global South that seek not only to be seen and heard but also just to be. Thus, following Brah (1996), my use of the terms 'I' and 'we' signal my agency not just as a researcher but as an expression of how these various processes have shaped my sense of being.

1.2 The research context

Zimbabwe is a sub Saharan African country with an estimated population of 14, 5 million (CIA World Factbook 2018). Such estimates also reflect the effects of the HIV/AIDS population growth rates. Also considered are the high emigration rates largely in response to the economic meltdown in the country for over a decade, with more than 3 million Zimbabweans estimated to be living outside the country. The 'Zimbabwean crisis' as it has come to be popularly known among a host of other euphemisms that have been employed to describe the socio-economic and political situation in the country since the early 2000s should be understood within the historical context of colonialism. In discussing this history, I only place emphasis on important events that played a part in the making of postcolonial Zimbabwe and which then contextualises the formation of identities. Broadly speaking, the Zimbabwean crisis is usually portrayed within a nation-building narrative and this is the theme I take up in my discussion of the research context. This necessarily also takes into account the leadership of former president Robert Mugabe as the longest serving leader of the country before he was ousted by a coup in November 2017 by the current President Emmerson Mnangagwa (at the time of writing).

When Zimbabwe was granted independence in 1980, Robert Mugabe assumed leadership of the country to November 2017 (as Prime Minister first, then President in 1987-2017) under the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF)[1] party. Whilst President Mnangagwa took over the Presidency and was consequently elected into office in the highly

[1] ZANU emerged in 1963 as a splinter formation from Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo, who became the second Vice-President in 1987 when the two parties merged to form ZANU PF.

contested July 2018 elections, ZANU PF remains firmly the ruling party. Notably, President Mnangagwa served as Mugabe's deputy since 2014 and has been part of the ruling party since the liberation struggle and served in various portfolios in government. His presidency is therefore broadly considered as a continuation of the Mugabe government.

During the liberation struggle there had been two major political parties, ZANU and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo. It has been argued that there were ethnic[2] tensions which persist to this day even during the armed struggle between Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Nkomo's Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), with the former operating in Mashonaland and Manicaland regions and the latter in Matabeleland and Midlands regions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). It has also been argued that the failure of the government to bring different personalities, political parties, ethnicities, races and genders together points to its failure in the nation building project and the resultant national identity crisis the country finds itself couched in (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012a, 2012b; Mhlanga 2012, 2013; Mpofu 2016). I will hasten to note however that this is one side of the debate.

In a detailed literature review of the Zimbabwean crisis, Ndlovu-Gatsheni identifies scholarship that on one hand vilifies Mugabe as "this larger-than-life political figure who was the midwife to the birth of the nation before becoming its undertaker" (2012a: 316), who moved from liberator to dictator and took the country "from being bread basket… [to] a basket case" (Sachikonye 2002: 13). On the other hand, Ndlovu-Gatsheni also identifies more critical narratives which point to an amalgamation of factors including, among others, land redistribution, reconstruction of nation and citizenship as well as the effects of colonialism. These views are unpacked in greater detail in the next two sections. Following Ndlovu-Gatsheni's conclusion that the continued difference in the understanding of the crisis is a consequence of the multi-layered nature of the crisis and multi-rootedness of its causes, I am inclined to view the debates as particular discursive formations which are productive of different regimes of truth (Foucault 1981).

[2] Zimbabwe has two main ethnic groups, the Shona who constitute 80% of the population and the Ndebele who account for 16%. The rest are sub-ethnic groups.

1.2.1 Zimbabwe from 1980-2000: Growing pains

It is important to note that from the onset the ruling party took over a "bruised but not defeated settler state" (Herbst cited in Sachikonye 2011: 1). However, instead of healing the wounds of colonialism and uniting the nation, between 1982 and 1987, in response to unconfirmed reports that ZAPU had arms caches on its Matabeleland and Midlands farms, Robert Mugabe deployed the North-Korean trained Fifth Brigade army notably composed of Shona speaking men to these areas specifically targeting all Ndebele speaking people, including women and children. An estimated 20 000 civilian Ndebele-speaking people were murdered during a genocide[3] which is commonly known as *Gukurahundi* (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP) 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012b; Mhlanga 2009; Mpofu 2016). The CCJP report details the atrocities including rape and the ripping open of pregnant women's bellies among other grotesque deeds the Fifth Brigade committed. *Gukurahundi* is a Shona word that refers to the first rains that wash away the dirt before ploughing season. Mhlanga (2012) notes the symbolism of the army being dubbed as cleaners who were sent to wipe out the Ndebele people who were perceived to be chaff.

The *Gukurahundi* genocide is mostly interpreted at a political level as an attempt by the ZANU PF to establish its political hegemony and destroy the ZAPU's support base as the main opposition at that time (Eppel 2013; Sachikonye 2011). This laid the ground for inter-party violence and intra-party conflicts that still prevail in present day Zimbabwe. At a deeper level, the *Gukurahundi* is argued to be the seed that gave birth to an ethnocratic state rather than a unitary one (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012b). The *Gukurahundi* and the culture of silence that surrounds it[4], has been described as "a bad birthmark" (Mhlanga 2012: 207). The recent calls for a devolution of power and the creation of a separate Ndebele state by a radical political group known as the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF) which was established in 2010 is attributed to it[5].

[3] On 16 September 2010, the Genocide Watch based in Washington DC and headed by Gregory H. Stanton officially declared the Gukurahundi as a genocide and Robert Mugabe answerable to the crimes committed as then Prime Minister, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012b).

[4] There has been no public apology from Mugabe and ZANU PF. Mugabe has only ever referred to the Gukurahundi as "a moment of madness" Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015); Moore (2015). In a television interview with Dali Tambo in 2013 he said some things "we never talk about" when asked about Gukurahundi.

[5] See Mhlanga (2012); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012b) for a detailed discussion on the premises of the devolution; Mpofu (2016) for a discussion on the complicity of the media in official silences on genocide debates and memory approximately 30 years after it occurred; Vambe (2012) for a discussion of experiences of ordinary people who were affected by Gukurahundi 30 years on.

Despite internal conflicts, Zimbabwe soon established itself economically as the breadbasket of Africa. Within the first few years after independence, the country outperformed its neighbours with high growth in most sectors including agriculture, education and health (Mlambo 2013; Riddel 1984). It is argued that most of this growth can also be attributed to good rains in the first two years of independence and good relations with the western world, a willingness to borrow externally complemented by the eagerness to lend by bankers (Riddel 1984). Riddel, however, notes that as early as 1984 there were signs, although slight, that the economy was beginning to falter.

There are different accounts regarding Zimbabwe's varied economic policies and strategies. For instance, Brett (2005) argues that the country took over a corporatist policy regime characterised by strict exchange rate and price controls which it followed from 1980-1990. The government then added some redistributive elements to satisfy the previously disadvantaged black majority. However, by the late 1980s the closed nature of the corporatist programme inhibited foreign investment and was prohibitive to local investors. Coupled with a high tax regime, rising levels of unemployment and a budget deficit among other factors, Zimbabwe was facing a likelihood of an economic crisis and due to mounting pressure made a switch to a liberalisation programme in the decade from 1991 (Brett 2005). On the other hand, Masaka (2013) disputes the distinction made by Brett between the corporatist and liberation periods as a false dichotomy and argues instead that there has always been a mix of the two. He argues that the 1980s were state led, the 1990s market led while politics dominated the 2000 to 2008 period with market dominance returning from 2009 to the present. Similarly, Makina (2010: 102) provides a historical trajectory of what he calls four different periods within five decades namely i) the pre-independence period (1965-1989), ii) the control regime period (1980-1989), iii) the liberalisation era (1990-1996), iv) the deepening crisis period (1997-2008).

What the different accounts point to however, is the devastating effects of the widely publicised Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which was introduced as a solution to offset an economic crisis in the 1990s. The programme was meant to lead to a reduction of unemployment rates, budget deficit, and debt service ratio over 5 years by borrowing from International Funding Institutions such as the World Bank. Instead, it marked

the beginning of grave economic problems for Zimbabwe. This is not surprising considering the solution presumed a capitalist mode of economy beneficial to the World Bank in the long term. The programme was an epic failure due to a number of factors, chief among them being the punitive lending rate, late disbursement of funds by donors and a major drought in 1990-1991 necessitating food imports. The overall result was mass retrenchments and collapse of most indigenous business ventures linked to inadequate credit support. (For further details and wide ranging analyses see Bratton & Masungure 2006; Makina 2010; Masaka 2013; Mazarire 2013; Potts & Mutambirwa 1998; Simpson & Hawkins 2018).

The recourse to economic adjustment in the early 1990s was interpreted by some as an admission by the ZANU PF government that its developmental strategy and economic policy had not been successful (Sachikonye 2011). However, Sachikonye further argues, whatever growth had occurred in the 1980s had been fragile given the structural weaknesses that were built into the economy. These weaknesses are traced back to the pre-independence period when sanctions were imposed following Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965.

The amassed failure of the economic plans and programmes created a crisis in the second half of the 1990s. The crisis related to a decline in living standards, unemployment and dim prospects for economic growth (as measured by Gross Domestic Product - GDP) and transformation (Sachikonye 2011; Raftopoulos 2009). The eruption of strikes by labour unions and war veterans in 1996 and 1997 were symptoms of the gathering storm. The war veterans were a particularly aggrieved group as they felt they had been side-lined or forgotten since Independence. They demanded a pay-out from government for the part they had played in the liberation struggle which in turn triggered a crisis. The economy suffered a major blow when the Zimbabwean currency lost more than 50% of its value on 14 November 1997, what has become known as 'Black Friday' (see Bratton & Masunungure 2006; Makina 2010). This was exacerbated by Zimbabwe's participation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) war in 1998 which consumed about US$30m a month. Food riots broke out in 1998 as prices gradually spiralled out of control. In this period, ZANU PF faced its strongest opposition yet in the form of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)[6] led by the late Morgan

[6] Due to internal disputes the MDC split into different factions in 2005 to form MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) which remains the main opposition, and a smaller faction MDC- Mutambara (MDC-M) which was represented by Arthur Mutambara and now operates as MDC-Ncube (MDC-N) as represented by Welshman Ncube.

Tsvangirai. This opposition led to its constitutional referendum defeat in 2000 and a consequent substantial reduction of its majority in the 2000 election. The ZANU PF's stronghold on power has arguably been weakened ever since.

1.2.2 The Third Chimurenga and the land question

It is the period from 2000 onwards that has attracted much debate which has in turn generated extensive literature about what went wrong in Zimbabwe. Before delving into the different facets of these debates, a brief overview of a number of events believed to have played some part in exacerbating the crisis is necessary.

As stated earlier, former President Mugabe articulated the Zimbabwe crisis as primarily rooted in the land question and more broadly as an anti-imperialist struggle against which the Africans needed to unite (Raftopoulos 2009; 2013). No account of Zimbabwean politics, economics and social development would be complete without considering the significance of the land question (Sachikonye 2011). Accordingly, I give a brief overview of this primary unresolved issue in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

The centrality of the land question is frequently acknowledged. Discussions reference the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 wherein it was agreed that Britain and Zimbabwe would engage in the fair redistribution of land with the former agreeing to finance the enterprise (Chigora 2006; Mlambo 2015). However, Tendi (2010) perceives the fact that no figures had been agreed to from the onset as a mistake. As such in the few years after independence, funds made available fell far short of the generous funding the liberation movements had been led to expect at the Lancaster House Conference (Mlambo 2015). Basically, in 1982 the overall objective of the programme was to resettle 162 000 poor and landless households on 9 million hectares of land over 3 years. However, resource constraints and lack of political will saw only 71 000 households resettled by 1997. The slow pace of land reform is also attributed to the 'Sunset Clauses' in the agreement which provided that the government could acquire land from white farmers on a willing seller willing buyer principle and on payment of compensation in hard currency. This clause reduced room for manoeuvre for the government as many white farmers were either not willing to give up the fertile land or the government could often not afford the prices (Mlambo 2015). Furthermore, government repeatedly showed little political will beyond election rhetoric for once elections passed, the issue would not be pursued.

By the 1990s the Zimbabwean government had failed to honour the spirit of the plans for land redistribution. Corruption claims shrouded the process as land was made accessible to government elites (Sachikonye 2011). The British too were considered to have reneged on their promise to fund land reform through their insistence on the willing seller willing buyer principle[7]. Amidst mounting political pressure from an emerging opposition, Mugabe gave the British a July 1997 deadline to honour its historical obligation. The land question suddenly became urgent and gained visibility. The British response was to disclaim "special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe [with] a new government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests" cited in (Tendi 2010: 87; see also Willems 2010). The letter written by Clare Short, then Secretary for the newly created International Development Department, was interpreted as an attempt to erase the past and exacerbated poor diplomatic relations between Zimbabwe and Britain thereby giving ZANU PF a convenient excuse for the land invasions of 2000.

When the Mugabe regime realised that they were fast losing credibility after the 2000 elections, the government embarked on a Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) where white farmers were coerced into moving out of their farms by war veterans together with party youth militia, peasants and certain agencies such as the army and state intelligence agency[8]. Some of these were disenchanted after the exercise when they were forced to move off some farms which had been earmarked for the ruling elite. The FTLRP has come to be officially known as the Third *Chimurenga,* a discursive strategy employed by the ruling party that is cast as signalling the final stage of the liberation struggle after the first and second *Chimurengas* against colonial rule (Tendi 2010; Mlambo 2015). *Chimurenga* is a Shona word that means "revolutionary struggle". The first *Chimurenga* was the war of resistance in the 1890s when the British South Africa Company rule was first established. The second

[7] It is estimated that about 6 000 white commercial farmers owned 15,5 million hectares of land while 8 500 small scale African farmers had 1, 4 million hectares. The rest of the population, an estimated 700 000 communal farming households, subsisted on 16, 4 million hectares. These households consequently occupied less than 50% of all agricultural land and moreover 75% of this land was in the drier, less fertile agro-ecological regions, see Sachikonye (2011); Raftopoulos (2009).

[8] The allegiance of these groups to the ruling party varyingly dates back to the armed struggle for Independence in the case of war veterans while the other groupings also consist of those who were trained by the North Korean army which is renowned for its ruthlessness in times of war. Youth militia were trained in isolated camps where they were brainwashed with ZANU PF ideologies and propaganda, see Ranger (2004); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009). In as much as the war vets were honoured to be discharged on 'national duty', it is argued that they were unaware that once again they were being used as "stormtroopers" for a narrow vision of nationalism, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012a).

Chimurenga refers to the armed struggle of the 1960s and 1970s which led to the country's independence. The third *Chimurenga* was therefore hailed as the completion of the struggle now focusing on economic independence (Mlambo 2015).

It has been argued that ZANU PF went to great lengths to legitimate the land invasions and in turn, their authoritarian rule by employing a racial and 'nativist' discourse (Muzondidya 2011; Mlambo 2015). By playing on unresolved racial prejudices and inequalities in the economy and in spite of its questionable methods, the Mugabe regime managed to gain sympathy from within and from other African countries where the land question similarly is unresolved. It has been argued that he played the 'race card' as a way of deflecting political debate about Zimbabwe so as to conceal policy failures, authoritarianism and elite accumulation projects amidst mounting resistance (Chigora 2006; Sachikonye 2011; Mlambo 2015). The discourse of 'nativism' emphasises entitlement to resources (such as land) for authentic subjects of the nation by virtue of being *vana vevhu/abantwana benhlabathi* (children of the soil). In effect, as mentioned earlier, white people were discursively expurgated as belonging to Europe "just as Africa was for Africans and Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans" (Muzondidya 2004 cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009: 1152).

Furthermore, ZANU PF constructed a version of what Ranger (2004) has termed 'patriotic history' by positioning itself as the champion against Western imperialism as represented by the opposition party MDC and white farmers. 'Patriotic history' prioritises the continuity of the Zimbabwean revolutionary tradition as exemplified by the "*zvimurenga*" (the wars of liberation) trilogy mentioned above. This version of history elides other versions and in effect serves to silence other historical trajectories (Ranger 2004). It has been argued that 'patriotic history' has rendered Zimbabwe as a "war vet nation" (Munochiveyi 2010) which effectively silences other forms of nationalisms and versions of history in Zimbabwe (see also Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Muzondidya 2010). This particular version of patriotic history sought to achieve a sense of renewed patriotism among Zimbabweans by playing on deeply felt grievances such as the land question, indigenisation of the economy and black empowerment (Tendi 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015).

To this end, ZANU PF has deployed various discursive strategies through the public media, for example catchy jingles played every hour on radio and television, liberation war

documentaries and unity galas[9] to legitimate a version of history that constitutes engagement in the liberation struggle as a prerequisite for leadership of the Zimbabwean nation (Ranger 2004 and Tendi 2010 discuss these strategies in greater detail). In addition, through media articles and speeches key public figures and intellectuals such as Tafataona Mahoso (then chairperson of the Media Commission) and Jonathan Moyo (then Minister of Information) articulated a discourse that legitimated ZANU PF as "the ordained guardian of Zimbabwe's political past, present and future" (Tendi 2010: 5). Consequently, the MDC – whose leadership lacked war credentials – was therefore expurgated as the 'Other' while the white Zimbabweans were 'occidentalised' (as argued by Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Muzondidya 2010). This narrative painted the opposition as agents of imperialism (the fact that they were sponsored by the West lent credence to this narrative) out to demonise Mugabe as a gross human rights violator, while pretending to be human rights agents (Tendi 2010).

The legitimating narrative as told by the ruling party depicts Zimbabwe as a nation perpetually immersed in the struggle against colonialism (Christiansen 2005), in which the liberation war itself "has been turned into a foundation myth of the postcolonial nation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010: 36). Thus Zimbabwe became "a site for contestations between decolonisation values of social and economic justice vis-à-vis the post-Cold War universal claims of good governance, human rights and liberal democracy" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 150-151). It was therefore a struggle between prioritising the land question and national sovereignty by the ruling party versus democratisation and respect for human rights by the opposition and the international community.

The international response to the situation included sanctions as a way of eliminating Zimbabwe from the international community. In 2001, the USA imposed a number of targeted sanctions on the ZANU PF government followed by the European Union (EU) and several others by 2002 (a critique is offered in the next section). The idea was to force the ZANU PF to respect the rule of law, institute democratic practices and honour property rights (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Nyakudya 2013). Accordingly, The Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA) was signed into law in December 2001 and called on financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) not to support any loan, credit or guarantees with the Zimbabwe government (Nyakudya 2013; Tafira 2015). The

[9] See Tendi (2010) for detailed discussion on these various strategies.

effects of these sanctions impacted on ordinary Zimbabweans as the inflation rate spiralled out of control[10].

Some of the major indicators of the crisis were hyperinflation, unemployment, failure of state services, high prevalence of epidemics such as cholera, typhoid, tuberculosis and other HIV/AIDS related infections, unstable water and electricity supplies as well as massive human displacement (Raftopoulos 2009, 2013; Sachikonye 2011; Muzondidya 2013; Gaidzanwa 2015). The depth of the economic crisis was arguably felt in the period 1998-2008 (Sachikonye 2011; Raftopoulos 2009); even though at the time of writing developments indicate that Zimbabwe is in the throes of yet another economic meltdown[11] as will be addressed shortly.

After the 2008 presidential elections Zimbabwe was a highly polarised state firmly divided between opposition supporters and the ruling party supporters. This was reflected in a highly contested election where it is believed that the MDC-T had won as there was a five-week unexplained delay in releasing the election results (Nyakudya & Jakarasi 2015). In September 2008, ZANU PF and the two MDC formations signed the SADC mediated Global Political Agreement (GPA) as a way of moving forward from the stalemate of the March 2008 presidential elections. The SADC mediation had resolved that the two parties would work together on electoral, media and security sector reforms before the next elections. However, in complete disregard of the SADC mediation body, in 2013 Mugabe unilaterally declared the date for elections. Interventions from SADC to postpone the elections were fruitless. Inevitably, ZANU PF once again won the Presidential elections with a landslide victory under a new constitution. Again the election results were highly contested to no avail. The SADC observer mission declared the elections "free, peaceful and generally credible" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Generally speaking, the economic situation improved after the GPA as the country operated using a multiple currency system including the United States Dollar, the South African Rand and the Botswana Pula, with the US dollar trading as the main currency. This situation put pressure on the retaining of the dollar and government was unable to keep up with its wage

[10] Inflation reached 1 600% in January 2008 and was at 232 million % by mid-2008, Sachikonye (2011:103).
[11] https://mybroadband.co.za/news/trending/279765-zimbabwe-economic-crisis-photos-show-how-bad-it-really-is.html Accessed 12/12/18.

bill. As a result, there were massive retrenchments as Treasury tried to come up with measures to keep the wage bill to a minimum[12]. As an attempt to keep the US dollar circulating within the country, bond notes were introduced as legal tender and cash shortages escalated. By the beginning of October 2018, acute fuel and food shortages once again re-emerged thrusting Zimbabwe into another economic crisis. The scarce US dollar and the devaluation of the bond note triggered inflation.

1.2.3 Mugabeism? Making sense of the Zimbabwean crisis

A relatively new strand of research known as "Mugabeism" has emerged over the years that, broadly speaking, considers the figure of Mugabe and his role in the Zimbabwe's crisis[13]. Here I discuss Mugabeism as a multi-faceted discourse that picks up on many of the issues already introduced. As a point of departure, two positions from which to view Mugabeism must be recognised. The first employs a neoliberal lens and the second is through a nationalist lens. The two contrast with each other as counter narratives that seek to explain the current crisis Zimbabwe finds itself in. But, first, what exactly does Mugabeism entail?

Mugabeism is "a summation of a constellation of political controversies, political behaviour, political ideas, utterances, rhetoric and actions that have crystallised around Mugabe's political life" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009: 1139). Years later the same scholar refers to a:

> … highly contested political phenomenon albeit one that has no coherent ideological content…[that] is not reducible to a biography of Mugabe. Mugabeism has assumed a form of populist reason. It is a multifaceted phenomenon. It masquerades as a revolutionary phenomenon linked to a pan-African anticolonial and anti-imperialist decolonial project. Its rhetoric has a radical left-nationalist, pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist as well as nativist orientation (2015: 15-16).

As this lengthy quote suggests, Mugabeism cannot be pinned down to a single definition. It takes various forms to the extent that Mlambo retorts that it "seems to be everything and nothing in particular" (2015: 46). Furthermore, he proposes that the struggle to define Mugabeism may have to do with:

> …the result of scholars looking for a nonexistent ideological coherence in what may, in fact, be historically shaped and emotionally driven actions of a generation of

[12] http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/09/zimbabwe-workers-shock-mass-dismissals-150913072155817.html Accessed 12/12/18.

[13] It is hardly surprising given the fact that the 94 year old had been in power for 37 years when he was ousted by the military in November 2017; the country's history is bound to intersect with his life as a political figure and vice versa.

> nationalists that lived through a traumatic colonial period whose pain and scars they seek to assuage by hitting back at everything they regard as the source of their previous suffering.

In addition, Mugabeism's origins and progression can be traced back to the dominant intellectual and ideological climate that informed African policy debates in the early postcolonial period, including Kwame Nkrumah's neo-colonialism theory, pan-Africanism, and Third-World radicalism and dependency theories (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). These various intellectual strands helped mould the leadership of postcolonialism and partly explains the eclectic nature of Mugabeism (Mlambo 2015; see also Melber 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009 for ideas about Mugabe's intellectual influences).

From a nationalist perspective Mugabe is seen as a revolutionary, a liberation war hero and an outstanding statesman (Sithole 2015). In agreeing to reconciliation at independence in 1980, Mugabe was lauded as statesman by the West in the 1980s and has even been knighted for his international relations and awarded honorary degrees. Scharneccia (2015) attributes this to his strategic diplomacy which enabled him to get aid from the West to develop Zimbabwe. It is argued that because the West wanted Zimbabwe to be a shining example of how collaboration between the West and Africa could work, they turned a blind eye to Mugabe's domestic policies such as the *Gukurahundi*. This enabled Mugabe to maintain a "contradictory diplomatic personae" (Scharneccia 2015: 90) whereby he balanced a model of reconciliation on the international level while he was unleashing violence on ZAPU supporters on the domestic front. The reconciliation with ZAPU in 1987 that marked the end of *Gukurahundi* and the joining together of the two parties into one, further endeared Mugabe to the international community.

It was only in the 1990s with his increasing unpopularity (noted in the previous section) that Mugabe deployed the strategy of "patriotic history" to salvage support for his authoritarian regime. The land invasions (which symbolise Mugabe's radical left-nationalist stance), Operation *Murambatsvina* (Operation Restore Order) of 2005 and Operation *Mavhoterapapi* ("Where did you put your vote")[14] three years later reveal the violent side of Mugabeism

[14] These two operations are believed to have been targeted against those who had voted for the opposition. During Operation *Murambatsvina*, ZANU PF deployed police officers and youth militia to demolish all structures considered illegal (including informal housing, informal trade centres, backyard workshops, rental rooms etc.). They confiscated or destroyed goods, arrested traders and also assaulted anyone who resisted, (for details see Bracking (2005); Bratton & Masunungure (2006); Masunungure & Badza (2010).

which Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya (2010: 1) term "grotesque nationalism." Grotesque nationalism, they state, encapsulates a mixture of the ugly and bizarre aspects as well as the ambiguities and contradictions of Zimbabwean nationalism which have been responded to with both empathy and disgust from within and outside the country. From a human rights discourse Mugabe is viewed as a villain, despot, tyrant and ultimately the figure of evil. And yet, it is counter-argued, this violence was inherited from colonialism because by its very nature "colonialism was never a terrain of democracy, human rights and freedom; rather it was a terrain of conquest, violence, police rule, militarism and authoritarianism" and thus renders Mugabe "a creature of colonialism" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009: 1144).

Accordingly, Mugabe should be viewed not as an individual or 'sovereign' actor but as postcolonial subject constituted by colonial transgressions and whose effects can be observed in the postcolonial dispensation in which he now exists as a postcolonial subject (Sithole 2015; Tafira 2015). Sithole argues that "the politics of exclusion have been structurally cemented and the very colonial logic of subjection reproduced itself in ethnic terms" (2015:224) as exemplified by *Gukurahundi*'s expurgation of the Ndebele. The same argument may be applied to the occidentalisation of white Zimbabweans during the Third *Chimurenga*. It is further argued that, being a product of the very colonial structures he now endeavoured to destabilise, Mugabe (and other African leaders) is (are) constrained by the colonial matrices of power (Ndlovu 2015). It is therefore necessary to situate the domestic events in Zimbabwe within the global context of globalism, global capital, and global racism (to be further discussed in the next two chapters). Briefly though, those who sympathise with the Mugabe regime view the sanctions against Zimbabwe as part of the global North's 'big brother' tendencies to bully the global South. As such, Zimbabwe had to "be punished accordingly for prurient disobedience; such punitive measure(s) have to be of satisfactory levels and should act as a future deterrent to those that stray from the line imperialism draws" (Tafira 2015: 210). This is exemplified by the sanctions against Zimbabwe.

It is against this background that Ndlovu-Gatsheni as stated in the introduction to this section cautions against Mugabe-centric narratives of the Zimbabwe crisis. Contrasting views however situate the roots of the crisis as arising from poor governance, mismanagement of the economy, lack of democracy and a political struggle to retain power by a largely unpopular regime (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). He calls for a holistic approach to understanding

the Zimbabwe crisis that goes beyond mere criticisms of Mugabe but rather appreciates the historical contexts of the socio-political and economic situation in Zimbabwe. It important to emphasise again, that whether the Zimbabwe crisis is viewed as a governance issue that can be resolved by regime change or as a result of a genuine anti-imperialist struggle, the significations of the crisis (and Mugabe by implication) do not constitute an absolute truth, but rather the political ideas that inform particular discursive regimes in their struggle for hegemony.

On taking over the reins in November 2018, current president, Emmerson Mnangagwa embarked on a populist narrative to relexicalise Zimbabwe as a 'Second Republic' which, by implication, stands binarily opposed to Mugabe's 'First Republic'. In order to distance himself from the Mugabe regime he constructed Zimbabwe as heralding a new economic order, widely popularised by the mantra 'Zimbabwe is open for Business', in a bid to attract foreign investors to the country and to show that he could lead Zimbabwe into viable international partnerships in contrast to Mugabe. When the initial euphoria had subsided after Mnangagwa assumed office and people's livelihoods did not improve, the populace began to be disgruntled once more. They began to consider Mnangagwa as old wine in a new skin and to "view the November 2017 coup as a domestic spat, with septuagenarians replacing a nonagenarian, all being hewn from the same wood" (Simpson & Hawkins 2018: xi). Mnangagwa saw the election as the only way to legitimate his rule. In a highly contested election on July 30 he was declared the victor with 50,67 percent of the vote. His rival Nelson Chamisa of the MDC Alliance[15] garnered 44,3%. Mnangagwa was inaugurated as President on 26 August 2018 but faces a legitimacy crisis following the post-election violence in which the army opened live fire and killed six civilian protestors. The USA has renewed ZIDERA and consequently the sanctions remain firmly in place, effectively locking international aid. Barely two months after his inauguration Zimbabwe finds itself in the same socio-economic problems that bedevilled the country 10 years ago and the government finds itself once again in a crisis of legitimacy. Against this background, it is my argument that Mugabeism is not necessarily centred on the figure of Mugabe but rather it is a deeply entrenched system that

[15] In 2017 about seven opposition parties came together to form the MDC Alliance (although this was resisted by some opposition parties) to represent their voices in the 2018 Presidential elections; they were represented by Nelson Chamisa the leader of MDC-T.

has outlived Mugabe and remains firmly in place even when his figure has been discredited and removed from active politics.

1.3 The Zimbabwean diaspora

The study is concerned to interrogate the negotiation of identities by Zimbabwean women in various online spaces. These spaces comprise of women both within and outside Zimbabwe. This is significant as contemporary migrations are creating new diasporas with shifting sets of social relations in the new locations and has consequent relevance for identity formation. The regimes of power that give rise to the formation of a specific diaspora in turn have an effect on how the diaspora relates to the homeland (Brah 2003; McGregor 2010). In the case of Zimbabwe, the diaspora is a consequence of its colonial and postcolonial history, in which the political and economic crisis in the 2000s as discussed thus far has played a significant role.

It is a combination of factors (including poverty, unemployment, economic hardship, political unrest, authoritarian governance) that led to the massive exodus of Zimbabweans in the 2000s in more significant numbers than in the 1990s (Crush & Tevera 2010; McGregor 2010). Initially, those Zimbabweans who were able to emigrate tended to be from Zimbabwe's elite and middle classes who were able to afford long distance flights (abroad), possessed professional qualifications which made them more readily employable in their host countries, or had contacts to help facilitate the move (McGregor 2010). Nowadays (post 2000), the Zimbabwe diaspora community is made up of asylum seekers, political refugees, students, semi-skilled and unskilled labour migrants, and undocumented migrants. Most of these are found working menial jobs even if they have qualifications as employment is becoming scarce (Muzondidya 2011). The extreme changes in the political, economic and social life of Zimbabwe in its protracted crisis have inevitably produced complex shifts in the sphere of culture and in the values and ideas not only among the migrant population but in the lives of those who remain behind. Perhaps to put the discussion into context, a definition of exactly what diaspora means will suffice.

The term diaspora has its origins in Greek translations of the Bible as the verb "to sow" and the proposition "over'' (Cohen 1997:2). It has come to denote in common usage the dispersal of people from their homelands into other communities around the world. Safran (1991:83-

84) usefully identifies six distinguishing characteristics of diaspora. First, the term diaspora refers to people who have been dispersed from an original "centre" to two or more foreign regions; second, these dispersed communities "retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history and achievements" ; third, they remain partly separate because they believe they cannot be fully accepted by their host society; fourth, diasporic communities "regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return when conditions are appropriate; fifth, they believe all members of the diaspora should be committed to the maintenance and restoration of their original homestead and finally; they "relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship").

This definition has been critiqued as perhaps outdated and as overemphasising the relationship to the homeland (Cohen 1997). Cohen builds on Safran's definition by offering four additional features that characterise diaspora. First he argues that because dispersal from an original centre is often "accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great injustice that binds the group together" diasporic communities consist of "groups that scatter for aggressive or voluntarist reasons" (Cohen 1997: 23). Second, "a strong tie to the past or block assimilation in the present and future must exist in order to permit a diasporic consciousness to emerge or be retained" and, third, there must be an appreciation of "the positive virtues of retaining a diasporic identity." Fourth, Cohen suggests members of the diaspora "characteristically sense not only a collective identity in a place of settlement, nor again only a relationship with an imagined, putative or real homeland, but also a common identity with co-ethnic members in other countries" (1997: 24-25).

Three distinct features recur in these descriptions that characterise the diaspora phenomenon: dispersal, connections to the homeland and collective identity. More related to contemporary diasporas, Braziel (2008) reminds us that it is important to "relocate diasporas within the contemporary critical moments of postcolonialism, postmodernity and late capital precisely in order to articulate the possibility that *diaspora* (as a term) and that diasporas (as migratory formations) are produced and thus circulate with "new currencies" in global discourses"

(Braziel 2008: 25, emphasis in original). Allowing that diasporic communities are constituted within discourse (if discourse according to Foucault (1984) produces both the objects and subjects of a discourse), then diasporic identities are produced within a tension between 'global' and local discourses. Although they are constituted by dominant global capital flows or ethnic nationalisms among other power structures, diasporas are not only receptive or passive structures. They are also productive, that is, they "write counter-globalisation narratives to the "master" narratives of nationalisms, imperialisms, and global capitalism" (Braziel 2008:6)[16].

This is the context within which the Zimbabwean diaspora can be conceptualised. The heterogeneous Zimbabwean diaspora community in negotiating spaces for themselves in their new locations, also continue to be engaged in political and economic processes at home. A strong sense of connection to their homeland is seen in the way they continue with their cultural practices, various forms of interaction and the sending of remittances (Muzondidya 2011). Remittances sent by diaspora communities help alleviate poverty and Zimbabweans abroad are donating clothes, food, basic drugs, books, computers, and other research material to their former schools or rural communities either through their personal capacity or alumni associations (Muzondidya 2011). Besides material assistance, Zimbabwean professionals in positions of influence are facilitating skills training by helping place young scholars and researchers in institutions abroad.

However, Zimbabwe has not been able to maximise the economic gains from their diaspora due to a number of reasons (Muzondidya 2011). First, there are no supportive policies at home and diasporas are discouraged from investing as they were also labelled as 'sell outs' along with the opposition and other foreigners during intense political turmoil. Second, the government has offered little opportunities for diasporas to contribute to development in the country. In 2004, however government introduced Homelink, a scheme that offered to build homes for Zimbabweans in the diaspora if they sent their remittances through the Reserve Bank so that the country could earn some much-needed foreign currency. However, this failed because of lack of political trust and moreover the government failed to build the houses on time due to shortages of building material. Another contributing factor was that a large number of Zimbabweans in menial jobs could hardly afford to remit to their own

[16] These issues are unpacked further in the following chapters.

families. Furthermore, there is no cohesion or organisation between this group and the more professional and middle classes, which in turn also might warrant their involvement with political processes at home. In the 2005 elections many advocacy groups lobbied for the right for Zimbabweans in the diaspora to vote, but the government declined, only allowing those in the army to vote. The government continues to drag its feet regarding the diaspora vote (see Simpson & Hawkins 2018), although it has become a critical issue which attracts debate in the international community.

While there is a plethora of diasporic organisations which lobby for democracy and development in the country[17], the lack of coordination, ethnic conflicts and a small support base are among the factors that arguably contribute to their efforts failing to make a lasting impact. For instance, in Johannesburg, South Africa, at least 20 diaspora organisations exist, but their progress is marred because of duplicity of leadership, divisions among ethnic and racial lines within these organisations (Muzondidya 2011).

1.3.1 Diasporic Identities

This study recognises that it is through culture that identities are given meaning, shared, constructed and even contested. As Arthur (2010) argues, migration is particularly identity defining. This insight informs this study which seeks to understand better how Zimbabwean women negotiate their identities online. As alluded to in the introduction, the concern of the study is to unravel the particular gendered identities of a postcolonial Zimbabwean woman in a globalised world. This requires contextualisation of the formations of these online communities in relation to the socio-economic, political and at times specifically gendered reasons for migration.

Historically in Zimbabwe migration in the 1980s consisted largely of rural-urban migration (Schmidt 1992) with the exception of men who worked mostly in the mines in South Africa (Pasura 2010). Instances of cross border trading became more common among women because soon after independence in 1980 there was a lack of formal work for them. However, the 1990s saw an increase both in migration and in cross border trading (more detail in section 1.5 below).

[17] For example: Zimbabwe Action Support Group; Zimbabwe Advocacy Campaign; Zimbabwe Exiles Forum; Zimbabwe Diaspora Forum; Mthwakazi Forum; Mthwakazi Arts and Culture; Zimbabwe Human Rights Lobby Group, Zimbabwe Liaison Office, Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum among others, see Muzondidya (2011:136) for more.

The important point to mention here is that the feminisation of migration particularly in Zimbabwe, besides the commonly cited economic and political factors, is attributed in part by women's increased responsibility as primary providers for children and extended family members, or what has been described as transnational mothering (McDuff 2015). In this new scenario, women are forced to migrate and they often stay away for longer periods consistent with the perceived 'sacrifice' that they make in order to take care of their families, a role that has been normalised in many circles (Hofmann & Buckley 2011 cited in McDuff 2015: 4). The accelerating migration patterns are described as having destabilised the family with most parents staying apart and this has in turn led to the "instability of marriages in Zimbabwe" (McDuff 2015: 4). In addition, Pasura (2008) notes how marriages in the diaspora have also been threatened by the shifting balance of power especially in cases where women have financial autonomy and their husbands become dependent on them, thus rendering the diaspora a site of cultural conflicts (see also Makoni 2013; Batisai 2016).

In some cases, non-normative family structures become prevalent. "Small house" is a pejorative term used to describe a woman having an affair with a married man, a married man dating young girls is known as "sugar daddy" and a young man dating an older woman is known as "Ben10" after the well-known TV cartoon character. Cohabitation is also a prevalent phenomenon and while these practices can also be found in Zimbabwe, they are considered less deviant and therefore more 'acceptable' in the diaspora because of its egalitarian context (Tinarwo & Pasura 2014). To this end they argue that "the diaspora has seen the emergence of a 'move-in' marriage, a kind of cohabitation where the main purpose is not to have children but rather to improve the economic and social wellbeing of the individuals concerned" (2014: 528).

One consequence of migration is what Hall (1992b: 307) calls the "ethnic mix" whereby populations in destination countries are now mixed with migrant populations. He concludes that:

> … globalisation *does* have the effect of contesting and dislocating the centred and 'closed' identities of a national culture. It does have a pluralising impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical (1992b: 309, emphasis in original).

This strengthening of national local identities can be seen as a consequence of the proliferation of xenophobia, which frequently has its moments of eruption in South Africa, when locals torch foreign-owned businesses and sometimes even kill foreigners who they hold responsible for some social ills in that country. In turn, the production of new identities can be understood under the rubric of cultural hybridity (Appadurai 1996; Rushdie 1991). This refers to the products of new diasporas brought into being by postcolonial migrations. Most often, these cultural hybrids find themselves having to "learn to inhabit at least two identities, speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them" (Hall 1992b: 310).

When different cultures are in communication with each other, as suggested by Hall above, there is a mutual adoption of norms, values, ideas and identities that exist in hybrid form or comfortably alongside each other. In today's world, Appadurai (2013: 2) argues, we are faced with the task of linking not only our markets in the neo-liberal world order, but also "our moralities and our many modernities" which introduces particular tensions and challenges. These are some of the tensions that Zimbabwean diasporas face in their homelands and host lands. In a bid to assert themselves and their new-found identities, Zimbabweans in the diaspora turn to social spaces which can be physical or online, either to keep in contact with their kith and kin back home or to join groups of other like-minded people to help them navigate their new locations. Against this background, the next section offers a contextual overview of the internet in Zimbabwe.

1.4 The internet in Zimbabwe

This section begins with a brief detour to discuss the internet as a 'new' media form before situating it in an African context and more specifically, a Zimbabwean context.

The term 'new media' has been imbued with many definitions and interpretations, but here I recognise the broad description of "a wide range of changes in media production, distribution and use … [which] are changes that are technological, textual, conventional and cultural" (Lister et al. 2009: 13). These changes, Lister et al. (2009) add, have been referred to by various terms that signify the characteristics of new media, for example digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked and simulated media among a host of other terms. In sum, new media are seen as extending the interactive possibilities of old media with correlative

cultural changes (Banda et al. 2009). For such reasons the internet is identified as a significant aspect of 'new media', the focus of this study.

On a technical level, the internet can be described as the collection of networks that link computers and servers together (Lister et al. 2009). Beyond the technical, it is argued to be a pervasive cultural phenomenon that has enabled the intertwining of lives beyond space and time by enabling instantaneous communications through social networks, blogs and websites among others, which allow the freedom of expression (Castells 2009; Creeber 2009; Chen 2012). It is also hailed as enabling a form of anonymity which makes possible fluid internet identities (Lister et al. 2009, Bell 2000). However, the extent of anonymity is disputable considering the surveillance scandals of Wikileaks, and the privacy concerns of Facebook. For example, Facebook gives users the impression that information shared is completely in their control, yet when they share this information with friends, it is collected and sold to third party applications and as a consequence they have no control over how this information is used (van Dijck 2013).

What has been of concern in studies of new media in African circles is the neglect of a specific contextualisation of the impact and uses of new media on the continent – in relation to, for example, the digital divide, lack of access to technologies resulting in low penetration and thus low usage of the internet (Banda et al. 2009). Briefly, as these issues are discussed in more detail in chapter 3, the term digital divide refers to the different levels of access to the internet globally in different geographical areas with the global South at a disadvantage. The disparities are related directly to the economic conditions within the countries which impacts on the affordability of internet services (Internet Society Global Internet Report 2014). Be that as it may, there has been a reasonable penetration of internet usage in Africa as a whole especially through mobile telephony. In Zimbabwe, mobile penetration was last recorded at 95, 4 % in December 2015 and this growth also takes into account the 84% figure of rural households with mobile phones[18]. According to a report by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ 2016), the increase is attributed mostly to investments in technologies like 2G and 3G and LTE. Mobile technologies still account for the majority of Zimbabwe's internet access. Other technologies

[18] http://www.techzim.co.zw/2016/03/84-rural-zimbabwe-households-rely-mobile-phones/ Accessed 24/11/16.

include Fibre (13, 849 active links), VSAT (1, 425 active links) and TelOne's ADSL with 64, 961 active users.

Zimbabwe has seen a steady technological growth since the computer mediated communication facility was first introduced in 1994. According to the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), the Zimbabwe government commissioned Global One in 1997 to erect a national and international internet telecommunications network link to the USA and Points of Presence (POPs) in four major cities of Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru and Mutare. The network link was further upgraded a year later when it was linked to Canadian TeleGlobe in order to further boost its capacity (Moyo 2009). Internet subscription had risen from 30 000 in 1999 to a recorded 7, 197, 279 active internet subscribers as of April 2018, bringing national penetration to 51, 9% (Techzim 2018)[19]. Facebook users have been estimated at 880 000 as of December 2017[20]. Perhaps the slow penetration could be attributed to a faster growing WhatsApp which claimed 34% of internet data usage against Facebook's 3% by December 2015. Part of the growth of Facebook and WhatsApp usage in Zimbabwe has been attributed to the sporadic political protests that are mobilised through social media (TechZim 2015).

Part of this growth is also due to political tensions in the early 2000s alluded to earlier which saw the ruling party effecting changes to the communications regulatory framework. Briefly, since the ZANU PF faced formidable opposition to its rule for the first time since 1980, it swiftly and expediently passed laws that grossly curtail basic civil and political liberties such as freedom of expression, access and information (Moyo 2009). Examples include the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA 2001), Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA 2002), Public Order and Security Act (POSA 2002) and the Interceptions of Electronic Communications Act (2007) to enable secretive surveillance of the flow of Information on the internet in Zimbabwe. This attitude to new media is perhaps most obviously captured in former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's sentiments who is on record as openly criticising the internet as an imperialist tool causing political tension in the country at the World Summit of Information Society (WSIS) 2003 in Switzerland.

[19] https://t3n9sm.c2.acecdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Abridged-Sector-Performance-report-Second-Quarter-2018-final.pdf. Accessed 12/10/18.
[20] https://internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm. Accessed 12/10/18.

The BSA effectively made it difficult for new players to penetrate the broadcasting industry, thus ensuring a monopoly for the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). It is notable that the government is the majority shareholder of the single broadcasting authority in the country. The BSA introduced a 75% local content policy on both radio and television and granted the Minister of Information the power to amend, suspend, terminate as well as set licensing conditions for broadcasters (Chuma 2010). The AIPPA also gave extraordinary powers to the Minister of Information who oversees the accreditation of journalists and media organisations through a Media and Information Commission. It is criticised as designed to silence critical media particularly as it underwrote/enabled the closure of three privately (non-government) owned newspapers within a short space of time (Chuma 2010). In the same vein, POSA with its ambiguous wording criminalises the publication of "false statements *prejudicial* to the State" (Section 15, my emphasis). This imprecise wording has made it hard for privately owned newspapers to criticise the government. It also made public gatherings without obtaining a pass from the police illegal. Journalistic practice has thus been described as reduced to being either for or against the state (Moyo 2010; Chuma 2010). Within this political context with these established binary oppositions, both public and private media owners exploit this situation to their ends, by "creat[ing] 'regimes' that undermine professional and ethical roles of journalists [so that journalists are] resigned to these developments, seeing them as 'normal'" (Mano 2005 cited in Chuma 2010: 99). This situation led to a prevalence of propaganda journalism and self-censorship as journalistic agency became stifled by and large by structural constraints (Chuma 2010). In turn this also led to the growth of the Zimbabwean online public sphere.

Against this censorious background, the use of digital media has seen an exponential growth of websites and this increase has been attributed to its ability to offer interactive spaces for Zimbabweans (Moyo 2009), particularly for the number of Zimbabweans living abroad and/or those in the country who need an alternative source of news. The Zimbabwean online public sphere is enabling in this context as most people did not emigrate willingly, but rather in response to the volatile political and economic situation during the crisis years. They continue to want to participate in the country's politics and to keep in touch with their relatives at low cost. As a significant number of Zimbabwean emigrants are professionals such as doctors, nurses or teachers, they tend to be in the position to access the internet as an information tool (see also Moyo, D 2009; Mabweazara 2013a). The internet today,

considering that most people with smartphones can easily access the internet, is no longer only used for news, but to share people's experiences and to build a sense of community as is evident in the heavy presence of Zimbabwean groups in social networking sites and other websites.

Research into possibilities presented by the internet in Zimbabwe has tended to be confined to journalistic concerns (e.g. Paterson 2013; Mano 2010; Moyo 2010; Mabweazara 2013a). While a small body of research into women's use of the internet exists (Pillsbury & Mayer 2005; Huyer & Carr 2002), there is a growing body of research that focuses on Zimbabwean women's uses of the internet and which also tend to focus on women living in Britain (Pasura 2008; Makoni 2013; Tinarwo & Pasura 2014; Batisai 2016; Rutherford 2011; Mano & Willems 2008; Peel 2009). My study therefore contributes to the literature with regards to the visibility of Zimbabwean women in online social spaces not only living in the diaspora, but in their home country as well.

1.5 The gender order in Zimbabwe

As highlighted earlier, livelihoods in Zimbabwe have been seriously compromised since the late 1990s and the consequences have a gendered dimension. Understanding that the nature of the gender order in postcolonial societies draws attention to the radical ways that gender relations change in crisis situations such as war, epidemic or economic restructuring (Connell 2011:8), the study thus adopts a critical feminist view of gender relations driven by an emancipatory agenda. Feminist critical discourse analysis' central concern is with "critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group" (Lazar 2005: 5). It is on this underlying concern that the study is predicated.

While patriarchal practices in Zimbabwe can be traced to the pre-colonial era (Wells 2003; Gaidzanwa 1985), the contemporary gender order continues to presume women's inferiority to men. It is however important to recognise that the gender order is not merely static but fluid and variously contested, in other words the "structures of women's subordination in domestic and social spheres are negotiated, disputed, and transformed over time" (Schmidt 1992: 1). The household is an important focal point because it is a terrain of struggle

compounded by disputes over distribution of resources, reproduction, allocation of labour and the like. Therefore, there is a need to focus on the changing nature of patriarchy and the responses to it.

Patriarchy is understood as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 1990: 20). These social practices and social structures are reinforced in various ways and institutions, but worth mentioning at this point is its reinforcement through state power because it is in this logic that patriarchy is embedded in modern state structures (Campbell 2003). Zimbabwe has been described as a "patriarchal, patrilocal and polygynous" society with power resting with older men within the family unit (Cawthorne 1999: 57). Although there are more monogamous marriages in contemporary Zimbabwe, Cawthorne's description aptly captures the nature of Zimbabwean society regardless that this observation was made more than a decade ago.

More recently however, it has been argued that Zimbabwe is a 'man-nation', a term that has been employed to emphasise the centrality of former President Mugabe as the primary definer of a single version of masculinity that he advanced as the ideal of the nation during the years he was in power (Muponde 2015). Muponde particularly notes how Mugabe would equate the leadership of the nation with physical qualities through often privileging a particular type of hegemonic masculinity juxtaposed against subordinate masculinities. For instance, the late Joshua Nkomo, his political rival in the liberation struggle, was defined as heavy built, pot-bellied and slow moving and hence unfit for presidency as compared to Mugabe's fit-to-box medium height and weight. Similarly, the late opposition MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai's "unlovable, fat, pockmarked cheeks; short, porcine nose; and dwarfish and stout figure" was often foregrounded instead of his ideas (Muponde 2015: 141). Furthermore, Muponde argues,

> [Mugabe] is *jongwe* the cockerel; the man of steel, war-hardened, unwavering, unblinking…the warrior masculinity hardened by the smoke of the gun…Morgan Tsvangirai, who exists outside the slay-or-be-slain Boy Code of Zimbabwean politics, is represented by Mugabe as puppet or front man of the British; as *baas* boy mostly because of his having worked as a foreman at a white-owned nickel mine; and tea boy as he is much supported by the West who demonise Mugabe. Therefore [Tsvangirai is] presented as brainless…a trade unionist and war deserter who has only ever negotiated wage increases (not serious matters such as sovereignty, land, history, bloodshed, and war).

By belittling the physical and intellectual capacity of his enemies as aptly captured in the quote above, Mugabe advanced a type of hegemonic masculinity as embodied by economically or politically powerful males. This hyper or hegemonic masculinity is a legacy of the violent colonial and patriarchal past and the contestations of femininities and masculinities that characterised the war of liberation and the violent politics of postcolonial Zimbabwe (Campbell 2003; Manganga 2010). The adoption of the Zimbabwe bird (known as *jongwe*, 'the cock' and which became Mugabe's nickname) as the national emblem in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe arguably signifies the promise of a new dawn but during the struggle it served as a symbol of manhood and masculinity (Campbell 2003). The men appropriated victory in Zimbabwe and thus articulated the virility of men as a precondition for manhood (Muchemwa & Muponde 2007; Parpart 2007). It is important to note however, that this heroic figure of Mugabe was often contrasted by his critics as an ailing figure who had lost his memory and fertility, hence no longer fit to rule the rule country (Muponde 2015; Gaidzanwa 2015).

The concept of masculinity thus had two central concerns, first the association of men to knowledge and its production and second, the recognition that the conduct of war is a man's affair (Campbell 2003; Christiansen 2007). In post-colonial Zimbabwe, this discourse of military based liberation has excluded poor African males who are unschooled and/or were not war veterans. Consequently, millions of ordinary men and women who fought for Independence in numerous ways are unrecognised (Staunton 1990; Barnes 1999; Jacobs 1995; Lyons 2002). Women's roles were repeatedly represented within the domestic realm even though they had many other significant roles in the war front (see Gaidzanwa 2015). Thus Tsvangirai, having no war credentials and cast as 'tea boy', is simultaneously emasculated and feminised which points to not only the existence of subordinate masculinities but also the crisis of subordinate masculinities.

This discursive construction of the alpha male has also been theorised as '*dodaism*.' The term is a derivative of the Zulu/Ndebele word (*ama)doda* (men) and *amadoda sibili* (real or courageous men). It is used to capture the combination of "patriarchal anxiety and deformed masculinity"[21] and also "seeks to communicate the contestation of gender ideologies"

[21] Patriarchal anxiety is represented by the unease shown by Mugabe when his position is challenged whilst deformed masculinities are invoked in the way he lashes out at those he considers sell outs or rebels. A most

(Campbell 2003: 131). This insight serves to buttress the fact that patriarchal relations are often complex and unstable, a factor that the study foregrounds throughout. For instance, *amadoda sibili* are represented as men who are not cowards and are able to defend the 'sovereignty' of the nation at whatever cost (Manganga 2010). Zimbabwe's coming of age was characterised by this masculinist and misogynist discourse through which the leadership sought to recreate the new nation. They thus validated traditions based on patriarchy and the nuclear family (Campbell 2003).

As a consequence, homosexuality is not tolerated in Zimbabwe. Mugabe is renowned for his infamous rants against homosexuals whom he has described as exhibiting animal-like behaviour[22]. Interestingly, in his rhetoric Mugabe and his supporters cast homosexuality as un-African and representative of the influence of Western imperialist powers, even though it is argued that homosexual practices can be traced back to pre-colonial times (Melber 2015). Melber further argues that by positioning homosexuality within the broader anti-imperialist discourse, Mugabe managed to give his arguments currency and therefore resonated even outside Zimbabwe with other African leaders (e.g. Uganda and Namibia) following his lead. In a tirade during Zimbabwe's 2014 Independence celebrations, Mugabe dared homosexuals to produce children like normal heterosexual couples do, thereby re-affirming the idealised patriarchal culture and 'national values' that buttress Zimbabwe's gender order.

Notably, in pre-colonial Zimbabwe men did the bulk of agricultural work but during the colonial era when most men went into wage labour, women formed the backbone of an unremunerated labour force by farming, taking care of the family, cooking, child rearing and caring for the sick among other duties. Women played a crucial role in the overall economy but were considered minors. Thus, most African women were unable to enter contracts, represent themselves in court or marry without the legal consent of a male guardian (Jacobs 1995)[23]. They were basically socially invisible unless they were old and bestowed authority

compelling example is how liberation war fighters who fall out with Mugabe are not buried at the National Heroes Acre in Harare –the highest form of honour - as is the norm.

[22] It is argued that the Canaan Banana saga remained a thorn in his flesh during his presidency and partly explained his extremism. Canaan Banana was the ceremonial president appointed in 1980 and was disqualified for being a homosexual after one of the men he had sexually assaulted shot a colleague who had referred to him as "Banana's wife", see Gaidzanwa (2015) for details. Following a court case, Banana was imprisoned and Mugabe endured several rumours about homosexuals in his cabinet thereafter.

[23] Whilst this study is concerned with black women in particular, it is important to note that white women in colonial Zimbabwe were also predominantly valued for their biological contribution as wives and mothers in so far as increasing the settler population was concerned, Jacobs (1995).

through midwifery, spirit mediums or as healers (Schmidt 1992; Jacobs 1995; Gaidzanwa 1985). It is noteworthy that indigenous and European structures of male domination reinforced one another to result in the double yoke of oppression of women during the colonial era. Men therefore had the bulk of the power in society whilst women tended to manipulate their situations to gain as much power as acquiesced to them by men (Cawthorne 1999; Gaidzanwa 1985; Ouzgane & Morrell 2005). This partly accounts for why women's value is constructed in relation to their fertility and they are required to be obedient and passive in the presence of males (Campbell 2003; Gaidzanwa 1985). It was however in resistance to this construction that a vibrant women's movement has developed in Zimbabwe.

The resistance to the masculinist concept was manifested by women's struggle for rights and dignity through establishing women's organisations. Some of these include Musasa Project which focused on domestic violence, the Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) which dealt with women's legal rights, *Padare*[24] which focuses on questions of masculinity and violence, and Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) which has been fighting for gay and lesbian rights in a homophobic country[25]. Generally, the sustained and active engagement in gender struggles has resulted in more women being visible in the political arena. One of the notable moments was the appointment of a female Vice President in 2004 (renowned for having shot down an enemy aeroplane when she was 17). The appointment of Joice Mujuru, former Minister of Women's Affairs, was met with criticism. Although billed by Mugabe as a victory for women's rights, most women saw her appointment as a means of silencing them: they viewed her as one of the men (see Christiansen 2007 for a detailed discussion). Briefly, a department of Women's Affairs had been established during the liberation struggle to cater for women's needs. However, this initiative was tainted by the appointment of the wives of ZANU leadership as top office bearers[26]. The Women's Affairs department under the leadership of Joice Mujuru was consequently considered a farce.

This appointment was also considered controversial because Mugabe used it to quash the increasing popularity of Emmerson Mnangangwa within a faction of his party who was

[24] *Padare* is derived from the Shona word '*dare*' which means an open courtyard. In the olden days important matters were discussed in the open courtyard in the presence of village elders.
[25]There is a plethora of women's organisations in Zimbabwe, these were randomly picked for illustrative purposes. See Essof (2013); http://www.sokwanele.com/gender/gender-organisations.
[26] Head of Women's Affairs - Teurai Ropa (Joice Mujuru): wife of ZANLA operations commander Rex Nhongo
Deputy - Sally Mugabe: wife of Robert Mugabe, president of ZANU and commander in chief of ZANLA
Secretary for Administration - Julia Zvobgo: wife of ZANLA publicity secretary Eddison Zvobgo.

earmarked for the vice presidency and to eventually replace Mugabe as President (Gaidzanwa 2015). As factionalism grew in the party and Mugabe's health and age began taking a toll, the election of his wife Grace Mugabe in 2014 as leader of the ZANU PF Women's League was seen as an attempt to protect their hold on power. Grace Mugabe was awarded a controversial PhD notably on the same day as Joice Mujuru (perhaps signifying the power struggle that was to ensue) in a move that was largely criticised in the press as Grace Mugabe had completed her PhD within 3 months (Moore 2015; Gaidzanwa 2015). Shortly thereafter she went on the warpath against Joice Mujuru accusing her of being a traitor and plotting to overthrow Mugabe, Mujuru was eventually elbowed out of the vice presidency along with other "traitors" at the ZANU PF congress in December 2014 (for details on all these events see Gaidzanwa 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Of importance to note in this brief narrative is the manifestation of frustrated masculinities jostling for recognition through the various factions of ZANU PF, and the emergence of Grace Mugabe to defend the ailing masculinity of Mugabe and what it all meant for the Zimbabwean nation. It therefore remained to be seen if Zimbabwe would bow down to the "status of an overpowering mother-nation" (Muponde 2015: 154) in light of Mugabe's public acknowledgement that Grace was his 'leader' and Grace's declaration that all the ministers consulted her for advice, to carry forward a Mugabe dynasty (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Muponde 2015; Gaidzanwa 2015). However, due to factional disputes that led to the infamous 'coup not coup', the Mugabe dynasty never came to be.

Less controversial but also notable, is the appointment of Thokozani Khuphe as the first deputy Prime Minister under the Government of National Unity as a member of the opposition party and also as a Ndebele woman (therefore ethnically disempowered). As the first Vice President of the MDC-T she was earmarked to take over the MDC Tsvangirai led faction and represent the party in the July 2018 elections following Tsvangirai's death in February 2018. However, following a succession dispute the MDC-T further split into different factions so she represented a less popular faction in the Presidential elections while Nelson Chamisa emerged as a more popular and a formidable opponent to Emmerson Mnangagwa. These examples are presented to make the point that Zimbabwean women are positioned differently within Zimbabwean society. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that women have never been a monolithic category; they were affected differently by

colonialism and patriarchy varying according to region, socio-economic strata, age, marital status, household composition, stage in life cycle and historical period.

In postcolonial Zimbabwe practices such as formal polygamy, arranged marriages, child pledging and wife inheritance (of widowed women) have become less common. Legislation since the country's independence in 1980 enables women better opportunities to leave unwanted marriages, claim child custody, secure inheritance and insist on equality in the workplace (Jacobs 1995; Wells 2003). In spite of this, women's status in contemporary Zimbabwean society is hegemonically defined in relation to patriarchal interests; basically what is considered a "respectable" status is validated (Hungwe 2006; Gaidzanwa 1985) and this presumes elements of the traditional gender order which confines women to the domestic sphere with marriage providing the ultimate social standing. The increasing number of women considered deviant within this discourse as a consequence of co-habiting, single parenting and early parenthood can be attributed partially to the persistent disruption of the social order (through colonialism, the liberation war, the political and economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s and massive diasporic movements of post 2000 alluded to earlier which separated families and family members), (Hungwe 2006). In contemporary Zimbabwe there is a constant struggle to redefine femininity by the 'deviant' group and therefore different sets of feminine identities coexist.

The existence of the diaspora population has triggered the reconfiguration of social and gendered positions thus making the diaspora a site of cultural conflicts. In his study of Zimbabwean women living in Britain, Pasura (2010) finds that there has been a renegotiation of gender roles as some women have become breadwinners and are accustomed to longer working hours; consequently, men have to do some of the housework as well. With over 40% of Zimbabwean migrants being women, this feminisation of migration has led to a shift in gender relations which challenges men's assumed powerful role as head of the family. Men's power derived from having access to economic resources has been seriously weakened. Migration has also seen the breakdown of many marriages as both men and women struggle to adapt to living in new societies with different cultural values (Pasura 2010). Although it is often represented as if women's migration is a recent phenomenon, Barnes (2002) notes how women's migrant history is often ignored or erased from history by providing evidence which shows that women have been on the move from as early as the 1900s. Patriarchal values and

norms can lose their strength in shaping men and women's understanding of their own position within the family unit and in society as a whole. Furthermore, migration affects family cohesion if spouses and children live, work and study in different countries. The social fabric of the extended family system which the Zimbabwean society has traditionally been so dependent upon is also being gradually eroded in the diasporic population (Sachikonye 2011). The extended family and proximate kinship are central to the production and reproduction of gendered ideologies in Zimbabwe (Pasura 2010).

Also notable is the critical role of Christianity[27] as a predominant religion in Zimbabwean society with 90% of the population practicing Christianity to the extent that it has become assimilated as a 'traditional' Zimbabwean cultural value (Christiansen 2007). In Zimbabwe, like in other African countries, many abandoned industrial sites and buildings in town (due to the deteriorating socio-economic situation) have been converted into worship houses/ churches. Arguably, religion serves as a rationalising force, as the only thing that makes sense in a society plagued by many social ills and an uncertain political future. The act of praising God, the argument goes, whilst wallowing in a state of poverty and pain is not a sign of escapism but rather a reaffirmation that God stands with the oppressed and those facing difficulties and hence the forces of evil will not have the last say (see Nyomi 2017 in her discussion of Protestantism). It is however important to mention that Christianity is not the only belief system in Zimbabwe as evident in the discussions on *Makhox Women's League.* Some question its legitimacy or rather its effectiveness in addressing deep spiritual matters. Various religious literatures identify Africans as deeply spiritual and religious beings even before the arrival of Christian missionaries[28]. Christianity in Zimbabwe therefore features in various forms and some people follow a syncretic religion that is, merging a diversity of religious beliefs and practices.

[27] Notwithstanding the fact that Christianity manifests in various forms. The major Christian communities and movements in Zimbabwe are as follows; African Indigenous Churches, Anglican Church, Baptist Churches, Evangelical Churches, Lutheran Church, Methodist churches, Orthodox Church, Pentecostal and African Initiated Churches, Reformed Churches, Roman Catholic Church https://relzim.org/major-religions-zimbabwe/ Accessed 21/06/18.

[28] See Mbiti, J.S (1990), *African Religious Philosophy,* Oxford: Heinemann; Bhebhe, N. (1979), *Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe*, London: Longman; and various scholars in the edited volume by Ross et al. (2017), *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

1.6 Theoretical concerns

The study is rooted within the broad theoretical framework of cultural studies and is informed by internet studies and gender studies. Cultural studies as a poststructuralist approach is concerned with issues of representation, production and audience in the meaning making process. These are known as the 'moments' in the circuit of culture, a model that emphasises the interconnection of all three in probing lived reality (Johnson 1986/7). Cultural studies insist on the importance of understanding the socio-cultural context of any meaning making process (Curran & Gurevitch 1996; Du Gay et al. 1997).

Broadly speaking, internet studies signify the nexus between the internet and society. The field of cyberculture studies as informed by cultural studies speaks to people's everyday experience of the media and the internet thus becomes an object of inquiry by virtue of it being used extensively on a daily basis (Nakamura 2006). A cultural studies approach to internet studies emphasises the centrality of representation in the quest to understand its symbolic forms and meaning (Bell 2000), and informs audience work which might probe "the nature of subjectivities, identities and the body in connection with technology and nature" (Kennedy 2000:14).

Foucault's conceptualisation of the constitution of the modern subject is critical in this study. The subject is understood as constituted through discursive practices that regulate ways of talking and behaving in any discursive formation. Discourse, as a "system of representation" (Hall 1997:44), is organised according to the rules and practices that govern it at a particular historical moment. In any discursive field a plurality of discourses co-exist, frequently in contestation. They consequently produce different subject positions according to what counts as 'truth' and under what circumstances the knowledge is applied (Foucault 1981). The study accepts that the internet serves as a location where different discourses are articulated and where various internet identities are discursively constituted in historically contingent ways (Hall 1992b). In other words, internet identities are multiple and therefore discursively responsive. Accordingly, identity in the internet age is understood as fluid, even when people feel connected in their space/time framework in the World Wide Web (Castells 2010; Borgmann 2012; Hall 1992b).

Foucault's concept of governmentality considers how practices of power and knowledge normalise the conduct of individuals through subtle coercion and surveillance (Foucault

2008; Inda 2005; Vintges 2012), and hence ‘disciplines’ subjects to behave in certain ways (Foucault 1977a; McNay 1992). In relation to this study, these online Zimbabwean women’s spaces are sites where discourses constitute either willing or resisting subjects of the discourses in relation to the diverse gendered identities validated or ‘othered’. The study is concerned with how the range of discourses variously ‘govern’ or ‘discipline’ Zimbabwean women online in terms of gender and gendered identities, and how they are negotiated and resisted.

In line with the concern with Zimbabwean women’s online interaction, the study is additionally informed by poststructuralist and postcolonial feminist theory. This theoretical basis is anti-essentialist in nature and attends to language, power and subjectivity in its social critique (Weedon 1997). It understands gender relations within a set of structures that determine its patterning in society, referred to by Connell (1987) as the gender order where certain masculinities and femininities are both constructed and contested. Postcolonial feminist theory emphasises the different concerns that non-western forms of feminism take in contrast to western feminism by emphasising the different historical and social contexts that inform their concerns (Dube 1999; Gadzepko 2009; Connell 2011). Importantly, it also addresses the growing segment of women in migrations and how the international division of labour depends quite significantly on women labourers (Brah 2003).

This study draws on public sphere theory, initially conceptualised by Habermas (1989) and reformulated by various scholars, including Habermas himself (Fraser 1989; Crossley & Roberts 2004). If initially theorised as a space where the public would meet and engage in reasoned debate to reach consensus on political affairs (Habermas 1989), recent formulations recognise that the public sphere need not be geographically specific or committed to a singular conception (Lunt & Livingstone 2013). Rather, the public sphere in contemporary media studies emphasises the plurality of public spheres (Castells 2008; Downey & Fenton 2003; Lunt & Livingstone 2013). Of particular use in this study is the conception of the public sphere as agonistic as it focuses on the way the internet functions as a site of discursive struggle and conflict (Dahlberg 2007; Mouffe 1999). The agonistic public sphere recognises that dominant discourses will be articulated online, while marginalised groups too can access the internet as “a means for the formation of counter-publics, the articulation of identities and oppositional discourses, and the contestation of the discursive boundaries of the

mainstream public sphere" (Dahlberg 2007: 60). The significance of this approach for this research is the recognition of the different sites as potential counter-publics where various non-hegemonic gendered identities might also be articulated, imagined and contested. This provides a productive way to tease out discourses which are either conservative of patriarchy or contest it within Zimbabwean women's online spaces.

1.7 Research objectives

The overarching research question that underpins this study is as follows: What is the nature of the engagement of Zimbabwean women in the selected online spaces? This generates several sub-questions that relate to gendered identities and power relations on the two internet sites, for example, what is discussed online; what form do the gendered identities take on these sites; what discourses are validated or 'othered' and what are the implications for gender equality/justice; and how do they understand the significance of the sites in relation to their identities. In addition, the study also examines the extent to which these sites act as public spheres or counter publics where different gendered identities co-exist.

1.8 The case studies

Makhox Women's League

This Facebook group was founded in May 2011 and currently has 97,733 followers[29]. It is framed as a social help forum and the mission of the group is stated simply as "women empowerment." Its purpose is stated as *"Siyakhana. Siyahlekisana. Sakhubungane. Njalo sakhuthando siphinde silukhande"* loosely translated "We build each other. We make each other laugh. We build friendships. We also build love and fix it as well." People post their problems or various experiences on the page through the group administrators and the group members respond with comments and/or help. The postings range from relationship problems, marital problems, family problems and health problems among others, but the group also celebrates triumphs and successes of their members. This Facebook group caters primarily for Ndebele speaking women although at times there are some posts and responses in English as well.

[29] This figure is correct as of 13 October 2018. It changes constantly as more people join the group.

I found this group to be a potentially interesting site for scholarly investigation when I first heard about it from colleagues in 2012 and realised that it was a relatively popular group, possibly because in many ways it was breaking convention and bringing private issues for discussion explicitly in the public domain. These issues relate to marriage (including in-law relationships), adultery, sex, children and, most critically, how women naviagate these various relationships.

In addition, I also found it interesting that the name "Makhox" derives from Makokoba, the oldest township and first 'native' settlement in Bulawayo during the colonial era. It came into existence in June 1894 after King Lobengula's old Bulawayo was burnt down the previous year by colonial settlers (Ranger 2010; Kaarshlom 1999). The native location, later known as Makokoba, consisted of more women than men as many of the men were away trekking in its formative years. It was the women who constructed the African town (Ranger 2010). The women raised money from beer brewing and sex-work, practices that continue in the present (Thornton 1999), arguably through force of necessity for survival. It was a place of families committed to the development of an urban culture and its vast associations, women's clubs and burial societies are an attribute of the close-knit nature of the township (Ranger 2010; Msindo 2007).

Although it has gone through various social transformation phases, Ranger argues that Makokoba has always experienced bug prevalence, poor sanitation and living conditions, high levels of unemployment and even in the 2000s "Makokoba remained as it has always been; overcrowded, impoverished, full of women [*sic*]" (Ranger 2010: 9). Despite all this, it is described as having a vibrant cultural life, "full of sport, music and drama" (Ranger 2010: 249). The naming of this Facebook group is arguably a nostalgic attempt to capture the spirit of togetherness through good and bad times. The contemporary township arguably remains formidable refusing to bow down to pressure to demolish it or to be turned into a tourist resort (Ranger 2010).

Baking and Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries

At the time of this research the second Facebook page has 96,796 members[30]. It is a multi-lingual group with posts in Shona, English and Ndebele although Shona seems to be more

[30] This number is correct as of 13 October 2018. It changes constantly as more members join the group.

dominant than the other two languages. Shona people form the majority of the Zimbabwean population (Shona 82%, Ndebele 14%, other 2%)[31]. As the name suggests, this Facebook page foregrounds the domestic role of women as presumed in traditional patriarchal societies. These are identified on the page profile as "sharing of kitchen experiences, triumphs and disasters while managing families in the process." While recipe sharing is one aspect of its focus, it goes beyond this to incorporate the social experiences and diasporic household dynamics through probing family relationships and cultures. Cultural identities are also expressed through food, language, music and foster a sense of belonging (Pasura 2010).

This group was founded by Sikulile Nkhoma, a Zimbabwean born entrepreneur based in Malawi to foster a sense of togetherness among Zimbabwean women based in different parts of the world. As with the previous group, *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* offered a singular opportunity to investigate the creation of identities because of the vibrant conversations that take place on a daily basis as evidenced by the numerous posts in a day (on average 25-30) and the high response rate in terms of likes and comments. Notably, both groups focus on the private sphere of the home and the personal, as these types of groups have become popular over the years in Zimbabwe.

1.9 Thesis structure

The thesis is organised into eight chapters. Having highlighted the research context in this introductory chapter, chapters 2 and 3 develop the theoretical framework and concepts that inform this study. Chapter 2 specifically focuses on Cultural Studies by tracing its development and relevance for my study particularly. As the study adopts a poststructuralist and postcolonialist framework to understanding the constitution of identities in Zimbabwean women's online spaces, this chapter also details the poststructuralist theories as represented by the work of Foucault on discourse, power, the subject and governmentality, poststructuralist feminism and postcolonial feminist thought.

Chapter 3 consists of a discussion of the Internet and social media, showing how discourses of empire and globalisation serve to buttress the neoliberal profit logic of global capital. The chapter shows how we should thus be wary of being too celebratory of the perceived democratising potential of the internet in a discussion of the public sphere.

[31] See http://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/demographics_profile.html Accessed 4/12/14.

Given that internet data is textual, I employ qualitative procedures of textual analysis that are concerned with signifying practices and with unravelling the polysemic nature of texts (Lindloff 1995: 22) as discussed in chapter 4. Critical discourse analysis as a qualitative approach is considered appropriate in that it sets out to make evident the unequal relations of power in society and is underpinned by concerns with social transformation (Fairclough 1995a; 1995b). The study uses an eclectic approach to textual analysis that draws on critical linguistics and media studies, and attends to lexical structure, transitivity choices and thematic structure of the text (Janks 1997) as well as narrative and rhetorical analysis (Silverstone 1999; Richardson 2007).

The socially oriented pages *Makhox Women's League* and *Baking and Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* have numerous Facebook posts in a day. Purposive sampling is employed to select the samples of articles most appropriate for analysis. The data analysed in this research span over a period of 1 year (2015), acquired through consistent monitoring of the Facebook pages. It is important to note that this data collection in 2015 relies on almost 5 years of research, observation and informal conversations in relation to these sites.

The rest of the chapters constitute data presentation and analysis. Accordingly, chapters 5 and 6 constitute discussions on findings from *Makhox Women's League,* those from *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* constitute chapter 7. The thesis concludes with chapter 8 consisting of a synthesis of and critical reflection on, the analysis.

CHAPTER 2: CULTURAL STUDIES AND POST STRUCTURALIST APPROACHES

> I'd like to underline the fact that the state's power (and that's one of the reasons for its strength) is both an individualising and a totalising form of power. Never, I think, in the history of human societies - even in the old Chinese society - has there been such a tricky combination in the same political structure of individualisation techniques and of totalisation procedures (Foucault 1982: 213).

> Feminism does not exist. But feminisms do (Gillis & Munford 2003: 5).

2. Introduction

This chapter serves to introduce the body of theory within which the study is rooted. As the study is located within the broad area of cultural studies, I therefore begin with a brief discussion on the central tenets of cultural studies particularly picking on strands that are relevant to my study. In so doing, I show how the study of culture has been conceived through various phases in its history and as constituting everyday social interactions.

In the sections that follow I discuss structuralism as a vital preceding discussion to poststructuralism so as to effectively distinguish the two approaches. I specifically locate my discussion of poststructuralism within the strand of cultural studies that informs my considerations of Foucault's work on discourse, the power/knowledge nexus and governmentality, feminist poststructuralism and finally postcolonial feminism.

2.1 Cultural Studies: an overview

Cultural studies constitutes a broad field of study which enables shifts in focus in response to various contemporary contexts. Inquiries within the field therefore consider the form of specific struggles within different national and cultural contexts, that is, it insists that we situate issues and questions in the socio-cultural context in which they are produced and negotiated (Kellner 1995; Gray 2003). In this respect it is hard to define due to its malleability, but attempts to define cultural studies have delineated it as a critical interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary field of inquiry (Nelson et al. 1992; Gray 2003); a "key set of key sites of investigation, key methodologies and theoretical orientations" (Turner 2003: 1). It has also been described as a discursive formation in the Foucauldian sense (Hall 1992a). To this end, the field therefore takes on different forms with different emphases and permutations, but nevertheless the varied

approaches share the same conception of culture as a political, historical process constructing everyday life (Turner 2003; Hall [1983] 2016).

Indeed, cultural inquiry has been through a number of phases (Casey et al. 2008). Early conceptions of culture conceived of culture as constituting the best that could be achieved in a society, a definition that excluded popular forms of culture. The first phase of cultural inquiry in the Anglo world reaches back to the mid-19th century and includes the works of theorists concerned with mass society such as Matthew Arnold, T.S Eliot, F. R Leavis and Q. D Leavis among other contemporaries and political theorists such as John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville (Bennett 1982; Casey et al. 2008). Whilst their work cannot be reduced to a homogenous body of theory, as a body of mass society theory it includes a number of intersecting themes such as the erosion of the organic community, the emergence of mass culture and associated atomisation of individuals. When taken collectively, Bennett (1982) argues, these themes articulate a set of pessimistic reactions to the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation, the beginnings of political democracy and the rise of popular education as well as the emergence of contemporary forms of mass communication which led to the formation of mass culture. Within the broad mass society outlook, the 'new' mass culture was weighed against pre-industrial forms such as folk culture (including traditional dancing and other rural based leisure activities and sports) and high culture (including classical painting and orchestral music). Mass culture was found to be a threat to the organic folk culture and the integrity of elite cultural values (see Casey et al. 2008).

In the second phase of cultural critique (from the 1930s to the late 1950s), the Frankfurt School theorists (notably Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Adorno, Marx Hokheimer) took up much of the themes of the mass society theories and framed them within a Marxist critique of ideology. The mass media were critiqued as culture industries and an apparatus of ideology (Adorno & Horkheimer 1972; Baran & Davis 2012). The culture industry, the argument goes, carries all the hallmarks of capitalist production. Its products are not only standardised and emptied of aesthetic merit but they also produce the audience itself, a homogenised and passive audience that lacks a critical edge (Baran & Davis 2012; Bennet 1982). Inevitably, the work of the Frankfurt school critical theorists was critiqued for its pessimism which was reminiscent of mass society critics (Casey et al. 2008). Nevertheless, they highlighted important questions about power which is theorised variously as ideology (Althusser 1971;

Thompson 1990), hegemony (Gramsci 1971) and discourse (Foucault 1978). Cultural studies in this context shifted and became self-reflective of its political function (During 2007). As a political project, cultural studies made a radical break from the earlier understandings of culture and took on a more anthropological definition that situated it as a way of life or shared values of a society (Hall 1997). This marked the next phase of its development that is characterised by radical ruptures and conjunctures, both theoretically and methodologically (Hall 1992a).

Although it dispersed into different branches, there remained a shared commitment to "examining cultural practices from the point of view of their [interweaving] with, and within, relations of power" (Bennett 1992:23), and in the process showing how culture could simultaneously be used as a tool of domination and also be summoned as a resource for resistance (Kellner 1995). These concerns are reflected in the inaugural body of work recognised as British cultural studies. The origin of cultural studies as it were is often traced to its germination in institutionalised form at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and the works of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall are often cited as the founding theorists that were pivotal in developing the field. The Centre became influential in heralding a new form of cultural studies in post war Britain in the 1960s and attention was paid to culture as "constitutive and constituted by the 'lived', that is material, social and symbolic practices of everyday life" (Gray 2003: 1). Particular attention to 'meaning' marked what is understood as the 'cultural turn' within cultural studies.

Consistent with the concern of the materiality of culture, I approach the two sites in my study as representative of different forms of culture and take an interest in the ways that Zimbabwean women respond to everyday situations and, in the process, shape cultural processes. Inevitably there are relations of power implicated as some discourses are validated while others contest them. Thus, as active agents in making everyday culture, the women give meaning to their lives in daily narratives that can be understood as particular 'webs of significance', a conception I find useful in making sense of the narratives in my study. To quote Geertz:

> The concept of culture I espouse, […] is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an

> experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 1973: 5).

In search of the meaning of these online discourses in my study, it is necessary to unravel these metaphorical 'webs' that may be threaded or superimposed on one another in an effort to understand how culture and the cultural shape social relations (Gray 2003). To this end, the strand of cultural studies I am interested in necessarily takes account of culture and the discursive (the 'linguistic turn') and has its roots in Europe. I expand on these in the sections that follow. Suffice to say, cultural studies has extended beyond the British and European borders to include American cultural studies, Australian cultural studies and African cultural studies and even Global cultural studies among a host of others.

It should be noted that African cultural studies within which I locate myself is a relatively new focus that takes organic African culture as its object of inquiry. Challenging the dominance of British, American and Australian cultural studies as the dominant voices in Global cultural studies, it advocates for a recognition of a number of 'origins' of cultural studies and visibility of the various cultures that emanate from Africa (Wright 2016; Arseneault et al. 2016). There is a tension presented between considering African Cultural Studies as "an organic discursive formation derived from local African cultures and ways of knowing" (Wright 2016: 481-482) as advocated by some African scholars, and advocating for an African cultural studies that is in dialogue with its global counterpart. I position myself along with Wright's suggestion of dialogue between the two. This effectively dissolves the seeming contradiction in my taking an African cultural standpoint while relying on Foucauldian theories. I believe that adapting these (European) theories creatively into African contexts is more productive than completely eschewing them.

Whilst South Africa arguably has a long history of established cultural studies and informs programmes at several universities, cultural studies in Southern Africa continues to grow across the continent and notably, the student body in South African universities normally consists of non-nationals who continue to contribute to the vibrancy of the field (Wright 2016; Tomaselli et al. 2013).

2.2 Structuralism: an overview

Structuralism, as a distinctive body of thought, originates from the structuralist theories expounded in the field of linguistics whose primary aim was to analyse language as a system of signs (Robey 1973). Considered in this sense, structuralism becomes coterminous with semiotics, the science of signs. Young (1981) notes, however, that semiology is a science of signs whereas structuralism is a method of analysis.

Structuralism is therefore primarily based on the acknowledgement that if human actions have a meaning, then there is an underlying system of conventions which makes this meaning possible (Culler 1973). Employing linguistics in the study of cultural phenomena suggests that social and cultural phenomena are signs and, importantly, they are anti-essentialist. Rather, they are defined by a network of internal and external references or structures; in other words, they are defined by their relations with one another (Culler 1976). It makes sense therefore, that any entity (in the study of culture) is considered as a semiotic phenomenon since "the laws of communication are the laws of culture [hence] culture can be studied completely under a semiotic sign" (Eco 1973: 71). In a similar vein, Barthes defined structuralism as a "method for the study of cultural artefacts which originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics" (cited in Culler 1973: 21).

In discussing the linguistic basis of structuralism, Culler (1973) argues that a linguistically based structuralism is not simply the study of structures revealed by the analysis of sign systems but it goes deeper to make visible that meanings are usually a historical product of cultural systems. In order to make these arguments clearer, the next section discusses the work of Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist who is generally regarded as the founder of modern linguistics. He postulated the existence of a general science of signs or semiology, of which linguistics is a part of.

2.2.1 Saussure's model of language

Structuralism bases its methodology on Saussaurean linguistics; its object, particularly in cultural studies, can be any signifying practice in whatever form which constitutes the content of ritual, conventional or public entertainment (Barthes 1967). Saussure's model of language and reflections on sign systems in particular was hailed as opening the way for a general study of the varied ways in which human experience is organised (Culler 1976).

Saussure perceived the sign as composed of two elements, the signifier and the signified which work together to construct meaning (Barthes 1972; Hall 1997). His model demonstrates that the signifier represents the form of something, whilst the signified represents the corresponding mental representation of that form. Thus the definition of the signifier cannot be separated from that of the signified as they exist only as components of the sign (Barthes 1967; Culler 1976; Hall 1997). Notably, Saussure insisted that the signifier has an arbitrary relationship with the signified; in other words, meaning does not inhere in the sign itself but is intricately linked with social conventions. Because it is arbitrary, the sign is subject to history so the bonding of a particular signifier and signified at any given moment is dependent on historical processes (Culler 1976). Signification is therefore conceived as a process because "it is the act which binds the signifier and the signified, an act whose product is the sign" (Barthes 1967).

Saussure's linguistic approach to signification recognises that cultural practices are acts of signification; they make use of signs and therefore work within the limitations of language (Weedon 1997). Saussure's model of language helps us understand the constructed nature of language and how this has a bearing on how things are represented. In relation to this study, Saussure's model provides a framework from which to understand how there is a continuous struggle to fix the signifier "man" or "woman" as particular naturalised versions of the particular masculinities or femininities in patriarchal culture, which have an impact on subjectivities and consequently identity formation. This can be considered as a "battle for the signified – a struggle to fix meaning temporarily on behalf of particular power relations and social relations" (Weedon 1987: 94). This insight is invaluable in this study as it offers a critical tool to unearth the different kinds of feminine identities that are privileged in Zimbabwean women's online spaces among other contesting discourses that also struggle for visibility. However, the critique of his theoretical contribution identifies it as ahistorical, with an exclusive focus on the formal and structural parts of language to the neglect of how it is used within society. Human activity is argued to be treated scientifically since people are not accorded the agency to interpret meaning according to their specific socio-historical context in this model (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982; Sarup 1988; Turner 1992; Hall 1997).

2.3 Representation, meaning and language

Saussure's model represents a semiotic approach to representation which, as noted above, considers language as a system of signs. A study of these signs aids the understanding of the representation process since the production of meaning depends on language. Representation is understood as the process of meaning making through language (Hall 1997). The concerns of cultural studies have been discussed as a circuit that incorporates issues of representation, production and audience. These comprise the 'moments' in the circuit of culture, a model that insists on the interconnectedness of all three in relation to the lived reality or context in which they are embedded (Johnson 1986/87). Representation thus connects meaning and language to culture. Each of these processes depends on each other and is indispensable to the whole.

This research, with its particular textual focus, addresses primarily the representation moment with an understanding that the engagement of Zimbabwean women in a range of contrasting online forums, including websites and Facebook pages, is indicative of diverse identities in an arguably patriarchal society (see previous chapter for this discussion) where there are inevitably unequal relations of power. A poststructuralist approach to the analysis of the internet as a significant site for investigating the nature of the discourses that circulate in these spaces, has the potential to illuminate the feminine subjects they validate, particularly in relation to how they are conserving or transformative of gender relations. To this end, this study is informed by poststructuralist understandings of language and discourse.

2.4 From Structuralism to Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is informed by semiotic and discursive understandings of the role of language in the meaning making process. A combination of these two approaches represents the constructionist approach to representation which recognises language as a social practice and argues that meaning is constructed within society (Hall 1997). This approach contrasts with other approaches such as the reflective and intentional approaches which argue that language simply functions like a mirror to reflect meaning as it is in the world, or that words and other signs mean what the communicator intends them to mean respectively. For Hall (1997), language cannot solely be reflective or be conceived of as carrying the communicator's intended meanings. Rather, he argues, meaning should be seen as socially constructed, thus subscribing to a poststructuralist understanding of language and meaning making. While this study is located in the discursive approach, there are important elements

of the semiotic approach that are also helpful in critiquing Zimbabwean women's online discourses and which have been briefly highlighted above. As discussed earlier, language is considered as a system of signs and a study of these signs helps in understanding the process of representation.

The term poststructuralist often makes reference to a number of French theorists whose bodies of work were influenced by and reacted against the formalism of structuralist linguistics. It therefore affords both an extension and critique of structuralism, especially as used in critical textual analysis (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982). These thinkers include Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard among others. Although there are substantial differences among their postulations, crucially they share a critique of the epistemological subject and the placing of importance exclusively on language. One of the most important features of poststructuralist theory for my work is that it is valuable in the investigation of the present social order that is increasingly pronounced by electronically mediated language systems, such as is the focus of this study. It is important to note at this point that this study focuses on the work of French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault as his ideas on discourse, power and the subject are most useful for a sustained critique of Zimbabwean women's online discourses as a particular cultural space and influence on identity formation thereof.

While there are similarities between structuralism and poststructuralism in rudimentary terms, the two are fundamentally different when it comes to socio-cultural critique. Broadly speaking, in poststructuralism, "the signified is demoted and the signifier made dominant [meaning that] there is no one-to-one correspondence between propositions and reality" (Sarup 1988:3). In other words, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is understood as a result of social conventions specific to different social groupings and to specific historical moments. To this end, all meanings are produced within history and culture and are therefore not fixed in language. The Saussaurean approach falls short in that while it attempts to locate meaning in the language system, it however sees meaning as fixed, it does not acknowledge the plurality of potential meanings (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982; Weedon 1997).

Poststructuralism is useful in that it helps us to perceive human reality as constructed. It critiques previous conceptions of the human subject as "autonomous and implicitly male, as a

neutral, contextless 'transcendental ego' capable of determining truth in a way that associates truth with ontological specifications" (Poster 1989: 5). Poststructuralists like Foucault argue that the subject is conceived within discourse and does not have predetermined characteristics but rather is a product of signifying activities which are culturally and historically specific and generally unconscious, at least in the first instance (Foucault 1978). While structuralism considers meaning as lying within the text, poststructuralist thinking postulates that there is no absolute truth and rather exalts the text's polysemic nature and the range of forms of mediation.

Poststructuralism emphasises the interface of the reader and the text as a productive act. This means that reading is no longer a passive act of consumption, but rather it has become performance in the sense that the reader is an active participant as indicated by Barthes in his acclaimed 1968 essay entitled "The Death of the Author" (Barthes 1977). This essay arguably marked a poststructuralist turn and subsequent poststructuralist developments became "more concerned with representation as a source for the production of knowledge – a more open system, connected in more intimate ways with social relations and questions of power" which signified a shift of focus from language to discourse (Hall 1997: 42-23). Poststructuralist arguments are developed further in the following sections through discussions of Foucault's work and feminist poststructuralism and postcolonial feminism.

2.5 Discourse, power and knowledge

Foucault believed that the end of the 18th century marked a critical turn in the study of human beings as it was the point when they began to be recognised simultaneously as knowing subjects and objects of their own knowledge (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982; Springer 2012). His interest in the human sciences (medicine, psychiatry, psychology, criminology and sociology) led him to undertake a genealogical analysis of modern institutions by tracing their emergence historically and tracing their differences and transformations and how these are connected to the present (Kunz 2011). Genealogy is a form of critique that attempts to establish and preserve the singularity of events. It focuses on "local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge" (Sarup 1993: 64; see also Foucault 1977b). In this way it attempts to uncover the multiplicity of factors behind an event and to show how fragile historical forms can be. This view of history

discards essences and constants and this can be observed throughout Foucault's work in which he is constantly critical of systemicity and carefully avoids totalising forms of analysis.

In his early work (*Madness and Civilisation 1961, The Birth of the Clinic 1963*), Foucault focused on the analysis of historically situated systems of institutions and discursive practices. In simple terms, Foucault considered discourse as a group of statements which provide a language for talking about different topics at different historical moments. He was interested in the rules and practices that govern discourse in particular historical moments and thus referred to discourse as a system of representation (Hall 1997). Discourse is thus understood to construct the topic and regulate the way it is talked about and in the process effectively defines the objects of our knowledge. This means that in different fields or discursive formations, be it medicine, education or psychiatry, what we know is defined by those with the authority to speak, such as doctors, teachers and psychologists who are frequently men. Foucault is therefore not as interested in speech acts of everyday life as in the 'serious' speech acts, that is, what the experts say when they are speaking as experts in their different fields[32] (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982). While in each discursive formation a dominant discourse appears more powerful than other contesting discourses (such as the discourse of gender equality contesting the dominance of patriarchy for instance), Foucault argues that in any discursive field there can exist different or contradictory discourses that can operate without changing their form or strategy. In analysing discourse, we should not therefore look for the dominant or dominated discourse. Rather, "we must question them on the two levels of their *tactical productivity* (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure) and their strategical integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilisation necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur)" (Foucault 1979: 102, emphasis added). This means that we should not be more concerned with why dominant discourses are dominant but rather with how they achieve that status and what 'common sense' strategies they utilise.

In his later work, Foucault (*Discipline and Punish 1975; The History of Sexuality 1977*) came to be concerned with the nexus between power and knowledge. He advances what he calls an "analytics" of power as an alternative to a "theory" of power as a means of defining the

[32] Foucault changes his focus in his later work where he systematically interrogates power relations involved in the formation or establishment of 'truths' as discussed in detail further in this chapter.

specific domain formed by relations of power (1987: 82). Traditionally, power had often been conceived of in negative terms and associated with judicial mechanisms, essentially as that which restricts, hinders, rejects, outlaws and expurgates. Foucault, recognising that the conception of power as repressive is inadequate, reformulates the issue of power with a positive conception which is both technical and strategic. He describes it as follows:

> [P]ower must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallisation is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (Foucault 1979: 92-93).

Power for Foucault, therefore, as this lengthy quote indicates, is omnipresent. It is everywhere because it comes from everywhere. It operates in a net-like organisation and is exercised from multiple points. Power should be analysed as something that circulates or functions in the form of a net. It is therefore not a possession or something that can be seized or acquired (Foucault 1979; 1980). An analysis of power, he proposes, should therefore concentrate not on the level of conscious intention but rather on the point of application of power, that is, "at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its objects, its target, its application, there – that is to say – where it installs itself and produces its real effects" (Foucault 1980: 97). How a woman comes to identify herself as a particular subject within patriarchy can serve as an example. The conscious or unconscious choices she makes about her identity can therefore be investigated as the particular effects of the application or source of power.

Foucault argues that power is a productive force. It produces knowledge, truth and the subject which are connected in a complex way that is significant in understanding the ordering of different societies. He contends that in any society there are innumerable relations of power which infiltrate and constitute the social body and the set of power relations cannot be established without the production, accrual, and circulation and functioning of a discourse. This means that "there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are

subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault 1980: 93). Each society has its own discourses which it makes function as true and so individuals are usually in a perpetual struggle to discover the truth or to conform to the 'truth' of their society – or resist it. People are judged, condemned or classified according to how they live in accordance with these discourses which carry within them the specific effects of power. In analysing the mechanisms of power:

> [One] should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions…the point where power surmounts the rules of right which organise and delimit it and extends itself beyond them, invests itself in institutions, becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention (Foucault 1980: 96).

This means that power is normalised to the extent that it is barely recognised, it becomes common sense. It is at the point of 'normalisation' that power relations are at its most potent form. At this juncture subjects are constituted within regimes of truth often across various discursive fields and through a range of strategies. Foucault emphasises that truth is a thing of this world and discourses are historically contingent. Here, he destabilises the notion of deep meaning as natural, given and intrinsic while exposing meaning and knowledge as culturally produced. Therefore:

> the mechanisms and occasions which enable us to identify true and false statements, how they are sanctioned or made visible, the techniques accorded value in the acquisition of truth and the status of those who are accorded the status of saying what counts as true or as knowledge come together to induce the regular effects of power (Foucault 1980: 131).

The exercise of power creates new objects of knowledge. Conversely, knowledge induces effects of power. In the same instance, there is no truth without power or lacking in power. This means that it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge and at the same time, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power (Foucault 1980). It is in discourse, that power and knowledge are joined together and effectively produce the subject (Foucault 1976).

2.6 Subjectivity

In an enlightening piece on the subject and power, Foucault summarises his work as follows:

> …what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years…has not been to analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects (Foucault 1982: 208).

He provides a schema of three modes of objectification that subjectify humans. The first mode is the objectivising of the speaking subject through linguistic modes. In this mode, considered as the scientific classification, Foucault shows how the discourses of labour, life and language were structured into disciplines and thus came to be considered as natural sciences (see Rabinow 1984). The second mode Foucault refers to as the "dividing practices" in which the subject is objectivised either by being divided inside himself [*sic*] or by others. His examples include the definitions of the mad and the sane, the sick and healthy, or criminals and lawbreakers. The point is that these identities are achieved through these dividing practices and their various mechanisms of power and knowledge (Rabinow 1984).

The third mode, which is most relevant for this study, is subjectification. It deals with "the way a human being turns him - or herself into a subject" (Foucault 1982: 208). Unlike in the other two modes which, broadly speaking, deal with the interplay between domination of vagabond, working class or marginal populations and various social scientific forms of classification, this third mode pays close attention to the conscious processes of self-formation (Rabinow 1984). The point here is that the subject is active in this process of self-formation and Foucault is concerned with isolating those techniques through which the individual recognises themselves as a subject. He is interested in radically historicising (as elaborated in the *History of Sexuality 1976*) the strands of discourse and practices dealing with the subject, knowledge and power and calls this 'the genealogy of the modern subject.'

Two meanings of the word subject are suggested by Foucault: a woman can be subject to someone or something else by control and independence (such as broadly speaking, women as subjects of patriarchy), or tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (for example, distinguishing oneself as a good woman as opposed to a bad woman). Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes one subject to something (Foucault 1982). It is integral therefore to probe "how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, [and] dictate our behaviours" (Foucault 1980: 97). It is one of the main objectives of this study to find out how Zimbabwean women identify themselves as

'Zimbabwean women' on internet forums, to probe the strategies that determine 'woman-ness' within the Zimbabwean context and, therefore, constitute them as subjects (patriarchal or otherwise) gradually and progressively through the discourses that are privileged and othered in these online forums. The process of self-reflexiveness or self-appropriation as a particular subject takes place through discourse and points to the techniques or the effects of power. Discourses are thus best understood as "practices that systematically form the subjects of which they speak" (Sarup 1993: 70). Foucault suggests a close reading of this by examining what he calls "technologies of the self", which he describes as those strategies which allow individuals to effect a certain number operations on their own bodies, thoughts, behaviour and way of being in order to reach a certain state of happiness, purity or freedom (Foucault 1982: 225). The following section therefore discusses key concepts in the development of the subject and specific workings of power on the bodies of individuals.

2.7 Governmentality and Disciplinary Power

In his meticulous study of the human sciences, Foucault provides a critique of how different forms of social control have made people into subjects through an important concept that he calls governmentality. By combining the workings of power at the local (individual) level and at the level of the state, Foucault provides a unique insight into the effects of power that constitutes individuals' consciousness in our culture and permeates through the whole social fabric. He traces how, from the sixteenth century, European society was subjected to increased attention to the population, family and economy through the "art of government." Foucault advances the art of government as:

> … essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy - that is to say, the correct way of managing individuals, goods, and wealth within the family (which a good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children, and servants) and of making the family fortunes prosper - how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father toward his family into the management of the state…To govern a state will mean, therefore, to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising toward its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, *a form of surveillance and control* as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods (Foucault 1978: 207, emphasis added).

In his analyses of the process of modernisation, Foucault notes that it is this form of surveillance and control that is at the core of governmentality and which also forms part of the central concern of this study as it speaks to the ultimate form of subjectification of

modern individuals in modern capitalist society. Foucault argues that the economic changes of the eighteenth century made it necessary to ensure the "circulation of effects of power through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions". By such means power, "even when faced with ruling a multiplicity of men [*sic*], could be as efficacious as if it were being exercised over one" (Foucault 1980: 151-152). This is best understood as "technologies of power" which regulate the conduct of others and submit them to certain ends or domination and it is the confrontation between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self Foucault aptly terms "governmentality" (Foucault 1982: 225). Governmentality in its nature is concerned with control of the welfare of the population, the increase of its wealth, longevity and health as well as the stimulation or control of birth rates to certain ends. It signifies a new set of tactics and techniques of the control of the consciousness of individuals without the full awareness of the people (Foucault 1978). The activity of government, Rose argues, is "inextricably bound up with the activity of thought … made possible by and constrained by what can be thought and what cannot be thought at any particular moment of our history" (2004: 8).

A new regime of power emerged as the growth of the population increasingly became a focal concern for the state. Foucault calls this regime "bio-power" which defines the techniques and procedures that consists in governing human behaviour via state institutions (Foucault 1992). This encompasses the government of a household, a state or of oneself. Bio-power refers to the increased ordering of society in all realms, and places a "unique emphasis on the body as the place in which the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large-scale organisation of power" (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982: xxii). The body in this context is seen as an object to be controlled and manipulated. Thus, a new set of procedures, a nexus of power and knowledge that Foucault calls disciplinary technologies is developed. At this point, knowledge assumes power and most importantly it acts as a mode of surveillance, regulation and discipline (Sarup 1993).

Foucault demonstrates, particularly in *Discipline and Punish* (*1975*), how processes of training and regulation of human bodies emerged in a wide range of institutions such as factories, prisons and schools. These signalled a shift when it was considered more efficient and profitable to place people under surveillance than to inflict physical pain and violent

spectacles to exert control (Fraser 1989; Sarup 1993). This has the effect of surveillance which is internalised to the point that each person is his or her own overseer such that power is continuously exercised at a minimal cost and it culminates as disciplinary power. The aim of disciplinary power is to produce bodies that are useful and docile, productive and subjected (Rabinow 1984; Sarup 1993).

By looking at confession within western Christian culture, Foucault tries to show how human beings have become subjects through acts of obedience and submission through confession which demands that the subject tell the 'truth' about himself. This was a type of government in which one is required beyond obedience to reveal what one 'is' by stating it (that is the truth about oneself) and reaffirming the subject's obedience to that 'truth' (Foucault 1994). This mode of confession becomes an indispensable component of government. Consequently, confession is identified as an important technology of power in which bodily performance was formed (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982). This conceptualisation is most relevant for this study: the online forums potentially offer a platform that functions as a 'confessional' by means of which Zimbabwean women police each other's behaviour by what Foucault calls "subjection by illumination" (1980: 153). Furthermore, Foucault discusses the rise of sexual confession in *The History of Sexuality* and relates it to the practices of social domination. He argues that sexuality is not an essential reality but rather produced through a "system of discourses and practices which form part of the intensifying surveillance and control of the individual" (Sarup 1993: 80).

A valuable explanation of disciplinary power is provided through the metaphor of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, an architectural device whose general principle is of an omnipresent eye of the overseer (Foucault 1977a). This device was invented as a technology of power to solve the problems of surveillance. The panopticon comprises of a large courtyard which has a tower in the centre that is surrounded by a series of buildings divided into levels and cells. The cells each have two windows with one facing the tower to allow for constant surveillance. The panopticon is designed in such a way that even if there is no guard present, the power apparatus still operates effectively. It is not possible for the inmate to see whether the guard is in the tower so he is forced to conform to acceptable behaviour as if surveillance were perpetual and total, thus becoming his own guard through applying self-discipline (Rabinow 1984). Importantly, Foucault notes, the very people who occupy the central

position in the panopticon are themselves entangled in the ordering of their behaviour such that power ceases to be identified with an individual who possesses and exercises it to become machinery that no one owns (Foucault 1980; Rabinow 1984).

Having shown how the interconnections between Foucault's concepts of discourse, power/knowledge and truth culminate into a totalising effect of power on an individual level through the training of the body and soul of an individual on one hand, and on the wellbeing of the social body on the other hand; Gordon (1980: 254) identifies these as the 'microscopic' and 'macroscopic' techniques of power), the next section offers a discussion of feminist theory in which once again these concepts serve to make connections on a critical study of feminist discourse.

2.8 Feminism: Past and Present

Feminism is a politically loaded term and is variously defined. The term 'feminist' is sometimes responded to with considerable antagonism as a result of connotations of separatism and extremism, a stigmatism it has acquired over its laborious history (Walby 2011; Mills & Mullany 2011). Defining feminism is therefore an arduous task; there are different concerns and different types of feminisms which defy rigid definition (Beasley 1999; Walby 2011). While there are profound differences within these formulations, the general project for feminism is to illuminate unequal power relations through the critique of sexual hierarchy (Weedon 1987; van Zoonen 1994; Beasley 1999). More precisely, feminism is understood as a movement to end sexist oppression as argued by bell hooks. She states:

> Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into (1984: 54).

This definition importantly draws our attention to the centrality of systems of domination in women's oppression and also signals the inter-relatedness of sex, race, ethnicity and class oppression in feminist analyses. Intersectional approaches to gender emphasise the fact that the world is not only shaped by gender relations but also by interlinked power relations which relate to other social categories mentioned above. An intersectional understanding of one's identity should thus strive to show how facets of one's identity intersect rather than accumulate to construct their social positionings (De Mul 2009; Cook & Hasmath 2014).

It has been argued that positions within feminism range from those with explicit and specific political commitment standpoints to those that acknowledge flexibility and diversity. The latter generally prioritise historical, local and contextual specificity (Beasley 1999: 38). For purposes of clarifying the feminist project, a brief overview of feminist theories is outlined with an understanding that in order to progress or locate feminist discourse one needs to 'return' to a certain point by invoking history to explain the nuances and tensions in contemporary theory (Burton 1992; Thornham & Weissmann 2013). My emphasis is on poststructuralist feminism and postcolonial feminism with which the study is concerned.

2.8.1 Liberal, Radical and Socialist Feminism

The diversity and progression within feminist theory is often described as 'waves' although the wave metaphor is often criticised for setting up false contradictions between generations of feminists (Gillis & Munford 2003). It is however also argued that it can to provide reference points for exploring the feminist movements (Mills & Mullany 2011) and thus, it is usually employed to provide a broad roadmap in the development of feminist thought[33]. While I recognise the relevance of the wave metaphor to indicate the shifts, I briefly refer to the various forms of feminism more commonly referred to.

Liberal feminism can be understood as an extended project extending from around 1850 to 1920 when universal suffrage was won in several countries in the global North. During this period a number of issues were addressed in addition to suffrage, such as employment, education, prostitution and married women's rights (Walby 2011). Liberal feminism is therefore concerned with countering unequal rights especially in education and employment. As the attainment of equality with men in the public arena is of central concern, those who work within this framework champion reform in the form of redistribution of benefits and opportunities (Beasley 1999), such as removal of the glass ceiling, access to governmental power, violence against women and sexual exploitation of women. Liberal feminism succeeded in establishing units that promoted feminist goals inside government in northern countries particularly (Walby 2011). Liberal feminists advocate for freedom from prejudice or the bonds of custom and believe that opportunities should be based on a merit-based hierarchy. Government intervention to the plight of women is prioritised in this framework.

[33] Recognising the tensions in this either/or approach regarding the wave narrative, Evans & Chamberlain (2014) suggest a more critical and fluid use of the term to reflect continuity, inclusivity and multiplicity.

This approach is often criticised for failing to engage with the deep-rootedness of gender inequality (Walby 1997).

Radical feminism attributes the oppression of women to their sex within patriarchy, focusing on the private sphere and issues such as sexuality and motherhood. Sexuality is perceived as a major site of male domination over women and the body is thus crucial to social analysis (Walby 1997; Beasley 1999). This approach is often censured for its biological determinism.

Socialist feminism in contrast, stresses hierarchical class relations as the source of coercive power and oppression and ultimately of all inequalities. In this view the overthrow of capitalism is seen as the necessary precondition to doing away with male privilege. This view too is often criticised, in this case for economic reductionism.

These forms of feminism are understood to have grown in response to "the upsurge of radical and socialist politics in the 1960s" (Segal 1999: 9). Most importantly, the concern was with finding the cause for women's oppression and so feminists differed substantially on what the cause might be (Barrett & Phillips 1992), hence the different emphases regarding oppression, the dimension that is common to all.

Important questions about what constituted the fundamental issues were raised in debates within these different strands, as succinctly summed by Barrett & Phillips (1992: 4):

> Was women's oppression primarily located in the sphere of work or the sphere of the family? in the realm of production or the realm of reproduction? in economic structures or cultural representation? in sexuality or mothering or what? Such disagreements operated within the broader context of debates over the relative weight to be attached to structures of patriarchy (or sometimes the sex/gender system) versus capitalism; and either of these structural accounts versus social roles, or psychologies of power. The diversity of the answers helped conceal the consensus in the questions; yet behind all the sharp disagreements over what was primary or secondary, feminists united in the importance they attached to establishing the fundamentals of social causation.

Any possible sense of 'consensus' however was short-lived as some of the assumptions of these movements were challenged on several accounts. Chief among them was the pervasive political impact of black women's criticism of white feminists claiming to speak for them (Brooks 1997; Segal 1999). They stood against the universalisation of women's experience and emphasised that oppression of women affects them differentially according to race, class and geographical locations. The consensus was also destabilised by an increased interest in

sexual difference and identity which was believed to have not received enough attention in the first and second waves. Another reason for the breakdown in consensus is attributed to the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism (Brooks 1997). Recognising the "falsely universalising, over-generalising and over-ambitious models of liberalism, humanism and Marxism", from the late 1980s many feminists became sympathetic to post-structuralist critical projects and focused on the local, the specific and the particular (Barrett & Phillips 1992). Influenced by Foucauldian insights, feminist interest in centralised power blocks shifted to a concern with more dispersed sites and with an increased interest in the body and the concept of subjectivity in the 1990s (McRobbie 2004), marking a turning point in feminist theory, into poststructuralist strands and also postfeminism (Burton 1992; McRobbie 2004).

2.8.2 Feminist poststructuralist theory

Feminist poststructuralist theory signifies the intersection between feminism and poststructuralism. This intersection is important as it has provided feminism with an array of critical frameworks (such as the constructivist or discursive approach employed in this study) which have been used to critique traditional assumptions of identity and subjectivity (Brooks 1997). Informed by poststructuralist principles, feminist poststructuralism has been described as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (Weedon 1997: 40).

In formulating a feminist poststructuralist perspective, Weedon (1997) insists that feminism must investigate the discursive sites of (male) power and forms of knowledge. In order for feminism to effectively establish an alternative knowledge-base, feminists must become aware of how subjective identities are constituted through different discourses (Brooks 1997; Talbot 2010). This alternative knowledge-base should be empowering to women and challenge common sense notions of gender. Feminist poststructuralism therefore challenges essentialism. It emphasises the historicity of discourses: "discourses are historically constituted social constructions in the organisation and distribution of knowledge… [K]nowledge does not arise out of things and reflect their essence of truth: it is not the essence of things in the world" (Talbot 2010: 119). The 'truth' about gender in society accordingly is not fixed, but historically contingent and dependent upon the relations of

power that perpetuate its hierarchical forms (Brooks 1997; Talbot 2010). What is defined as 'truth' and who has access to that truth are all factors which combine to constitute our subjectivity.

Feminist poststructuralism prioritises historical and cultural specificity in the experience of women. As Weedon argues:

> For a theoretical perspective to be politically useful to feminists, it should be able to recognise the importance of the subjective in constituting the meaning of women's lived reality. It should not deny subjective experience, since the ways in which people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society (Weedon 1997: 8).

Feminist poststructuralism is also concerned with the centrality of language in constituting subjectivity. Because language is considered as a site of struggle, critical attention to language has the potential to denaturalise a social reality offered by a historically specific range of discursive positions through which femininities and masculinities are constituted (Weedon 1997; Talbot 2010). Language is therefore the central "site of the cultural production of gender identity…we take up positions in our enactments of discourse practices…our sense of self is therefore not fixed and static. It is a process; an "effect of discourse" which is therefore changeable" (Talbot 2010: 110-11; see also Pringle & Watson 1992). The forms that femininities and masculinities take are never inevitable as they change over time. Thus, the project for many feminist poststructuralists (and here I include myself) is to explore the variety of forms of femininity and masculinity (Walby 1992). Gendered identities are constituted in various ways either by conforming or challenging the status quo. While feminist discourses might not have achieved dominance, they continue to struggle for visibility (Walby 1997).

One of the aims of feminist poststructuralist criticism is to challenge existing power relations. The appeal of a Foucauldian approach for feminism lies in how it conceives of knowledge and identity as social constructs and not as essential truths; more importantly these relations of power operate through discourse (Talbot 2010). In other words, Foucault challenges the traditional feminist understanding of the nature of men's power over women by subverting their concepts of truth (Brooks 1997; Sawicki 1998). Discourses, as already stated before, are understood as historically constituted bodies of knowledge and practices that systematically allocate power to some and not others (Foucault 1980; Talbot 2007, 2010). They position

people as social subjects in particular and/or different contexts such that "any individual is a constellation of subject positions bestowed by different discourses" (Talbot 2010: 124; see also Pringle & Watson 1992). Consequently, women may be positioned differently within various patriarchal discourses.

Foucault's conception of micro-power and his emphasis on the body as a site of power is invaluable for feminist critique (Gatens 1992), as it coincides with a growing interest in feminist insights about the politics of personal life and sexual empowerment (Sawicki 1998). This enables feminist explorations into the operations of patriarchal power at the most intimate levels of experience, such as in the institutions of marriage and motherhood (as represented in the groups under study) and also in the everyday practices that determine women's relationship to themselves and their bodies (Sawicki 1998). These practices incorporate the self-policing by and of women in relation to patriarchy (Bartky 1990). In addition, Foucault's approach to the body enables us to conceptualise gender "not as the effect of ideology or cultural values but as the way in which power takes hold of and constructs bodies in particular ways… [and therefore] the cluster of the terms 'the female body', 'femininity', and 'woman' need to be analysed in terms of their historical and discursive associations" (Gatens 1992: 132-133). Although Foucault's approach has been discredited in certain feminist circles for not having been specifically concerned with women per se, his value lies in providing an empirical and conceptual basis for treating sexuality, the family, schools and social sciences as political problems that enable us to discover new ways of understanding ourselves and our place in the world (Fraser 1989; Sawicki 1991).

In feminist poststructuralism therefore, the subject is understood to have no essence reflected by gender, it becomes 'natural' through repetition and discursively constructed performances (Butler 2004). This is what Connell (2009) refers to as gender competence, whereby young people learn how to live according to a certain identity and produce a particular gender performance. Since there is no prediscursive subject, gender is considered as a process, thus destabilising the understanding of sex as biological and gender as socially assigned. For Butler, gender and sex are both produced within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). The heterosexual matrix is considered as those "regulatory practices of gender formation and division [that] constitute identity... [and which] are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but rather socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (1990: 23,

emphasis in original). People are considered to be a certain type of gender in terms of their conforming to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility determined through expressive attributes of men and women. In other words, the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity is what constitutes one as a male or a female most often within the heterosexual bond (see also Connell 2009). Butler therefore argues that gender is performative and is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalised.

Furthermore, Butler (1990: 188-189) identifies gender parody as a type of subversive repetition that subjects achieve through the denaturalisation of the norms that solidify the heterosexual matrix and exposes their nature as performative constructions. Gender is thus neither a psychic, hidden or internal 'truth', nor can it be reduced to surface appearance; rather performativity points to an enactment of those "norms which precede, constrain and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's "will" or "choice" (Butler 1993: 224). There is no inside 'truth' to femininity in the same way as there is no outside 'truth' to it. The aim of Butler's subversive politics is to create a space for non-normative genders, sexualities and sexes to achieve legitimacy (Cook & Hasmath 2014).

Many of these concerns were raised in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This triggered academic interrogation of popular cultural forms, prioritising diversity in the investigation of gender identities (encompassing women and men), including queer and ethnic identities that were given little recognition in earlier forms of feminism (Gillis & Munford 2003; Mills & Mullany 2011).

2.8.3 Postfeminism

Postfeminism is understood as referring to an active process in which the feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s came to be undermined (McRobbie 2004; 2009), as a consequence of various factors, notably consumer capitalism. Young women's positions, it is argued, changed rapidly during the twentieth century (Aune 2013), resulting in young women being "unfixed" or "unhinged" from traditional femininity (McRobbie 1994: 157-158). Consequently, in contemporary society young women have been individualised as workers and consumers rather than as mothers, daughters, or wives like before (Aune 2013). For this reason, postfeminism arguably thrives in a neo-liberal context in which subjects are

constituted to become more self-reliant and self-governing without the regulation of formal structures. Neoliberalism is understood here as a discursive formation that fundamentally operates on the logic of market forces.

Postfeminism and neoliberalism are thus linked by their mutual endeavour to emphasise the expression of personal responsibility and individual choice within a consumerist environment (Cook & Hasmath 2014). As such, the "enterprising, autonomous, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism" is juxtaposed with "the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism" and finally women, more than men are "called to work on and transform their selves – and particularly to remodel their interiority, their subjectivity" (Gill et al. 2017: 231; see also Gill & Scharff 2011). Postfeminism, therefore, is conceived as a discursive sensibility that is contained within and through the prevalence of neoliberal principles. I find postfeminism particularly relevant to my study of the construction of identities on Zimbabwean women's spaces because of its recognition of the effects of consumer capitalism on contemporary gendered identities.

A postfeminist framework provides the catchwords of emancipation, freedom and equality. Powerful images are seen in the media depicting a sense of satisfaction with this new order that holds no apparent patriarchal threat as women are seemingly independent and privileged subjects whose welfare features prominently in governmental discourse. The young woman who is a beneficiary of previous forms of feminism is interpellated as a subject of capacity and is thus championed as a subject of popular feminism by the commercial media and consumer culture (McRobbie 2009:110). She is expected to take advantage of all the new opportunities afforded to women and in the process becomes her own harsh critic. She then becomes "an intensively managed subject of post-feminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality" (McRobbie 2009:60). A case in point is presented by the paradox of Zimbabwean women who try to express their freedom – sexual or otherwise – through the way they dress. By wearing mini-skirts in public spaces Zimbabwean women show that they have a new awareness of their rights to perform the identities they choose publicly – in a society where they are expected to remain on the periphery and not in public spaces on their own terms.

Yet women who wear mini-skirts in public are often harassed by touts for 'indecent dressing.' This harassment has become commonplace over the years. In response, in October

2014, a Women Rights lobby group known as *Katswe Sistahood* held a "Mini-Skirt March" as a demonstration against public harassment suffered by women. There were mixed reactions to this; the most noteworthy came from the then First Lady Grace Mugabe condemning women who wear mini-skirts and conflating the wearing of miniskirts as a deliberate invitation to men to rape them[34]. So while a postfeminist identity promises women a form of freedom of choice, at the same time her behaviour is heavily policed consistent with traditional patriarchal expectations of dressing decently, covering one's thighs and hands at all times, practices which, ironically, McFadden identifies as an "artefact of colonial (Victorian) invention" (2005: 6). This newfound political reconstitution of sexuality as a domain of rights is not a guarantee that women's entry into public spaces (whether education, property rights, political office and even the streets) which signify claims to citizenship, will not suffer a backlash of patriarchal resistance, frequently violent. One can draw parallels to neighbouring South Africa where Posel notes, in a study analysing how sex has come to be discursively constituted in public discourse, that "[d]iscursively, the imagery of sex as freedom, as the symbol of a virile new lease on life, jostles with that of sex as menace, sex as death" (Posel 2004: 62). She seeks to show how, with the rise of a new black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa and their global cultural and consumerist taste, sex has become a sphere where these newfound freedoms are asserted. Similarly, in other African spaces, the rise of middle-class women driving the women's movement presumes a modern culture and identity in their societies where they increasingly reject debilitating traditional myths of a 'true' identity of an African woman (McFadden 2005), in the process offering new ways of being feminine.

This new form of being feminine brings back to visibility particular conventional forms of femininity that presume heavy make-up and grooming and rules about bags, hair and shoes, once considered as a form of submission, which are now celebrated as a matter of personal choice. McRobbie (2009: 64) terms this the "post-feminist masquerade", a style adopted by women to deal with the threat of hegemonic masculinity without compromising their sexual identity. Yet paradoxically this masquerade works in many ways to conceal that patriarchy is still in place, thereby making it difficult to recoup the language of discrimination, exclusion

[34] See "Mixed reactions to mini-skirt march" Accessed 5/10/14. http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2014/10/05/mixed-reactions-mini-skirt-march/ and "First Lady condemns mini-skirts" at https://www.newsday.co.zw/2015/11/21/first-lady-condemns-mini-skirts/ Accessed 21/11/15.

and injustice. This can then be linked to what has become a common pronouncement, namely that feminism is 'dead'; in the sense that it has lost its critical edge (Chesler 2005). Some arguments posit that either feminism's successes have rendered the movement obsolete because women now have equality or, alternatively, feminism's failures have rendered the movement obsolete in demonstrating the "absurdity of feminist demands" (Boyle 2005: 35). It is also suggested that feminism has been defeated by a backlash against feminism. Then, it is presumed that feminism has been integrated into mainstream agendas and been weakened as a lobbying weapon in policy discourses (McRobbie 2009). On the other hand, some believe that this common-sense assumption and insertion into the mainstream owes to the success of feminism and indicates that it is alive and well (Walby 2011; Mills & Mullany 2011).

Accordingly, postfeminism is considered synonymous with the backlash, which is described as:

> a powerful counter-assault on women's rights, … an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the women's movement did win for women. This counterassault is largely insidious… [it] proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall (Faludi 1992: 12).

Feminism in this instance, is thereby interpreted as the major source of women's discontent rather than sexism and oppression. This inevitably brings in new anxieties which McRobbie terms 'postfeminist disorders' associated with the unstable relationships women have to contend with in a neo-liberal context as discussed earlier. McRobbie's critique has been recognised as particularly useful in understanding how particular discourses construct subjects' identities (Cook & Hasmath 2014).

It is important to emphasise that contemporary feminism manifests in these different forms discussed above that tend to be woven together depending on different contexts and concerns. It can also be seen in a number of new forms, such as local groups in various towns and cities in the form of civil society projects, for example, through the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), internet activism (for example #MeToo movement) and governmental programmes (Walby 2011; Aune 2013). It is argued that these institutionalised new forms are less recognisable as feminist because they often exist in alliance with other social forces, but are as effective as the traditional social movements with new goals and feminist interests although, not explicitly labelled as such (Walby 2011). It is for this reason, in contrast to the

postfeminist critique, that it is argued that feminism should not be considered as dead because "its activities and projects address all major areas of social life; feminism is exploring its new position in relation to mainstream power, and is producing new tensions and solutions" (Walby 2011: 12). The next section discusses feminist postcolonial theory as another framework for the study with particular relevance for the subaltern location of African women.

2.9 Feminist postcolonial theory

Feminist postcolonial theory signifies the intersection between feminism and postcolonial theory. That it has brought feminist concerns to the fore in conceptualisations of the postcolonial is a crucial intervention. Importantly, it has also racialised feminist theory by illuminating black women's experiences as socio-historically contingent rather than treating women as a homogenous group (Mohanty 1988; Lewis & Mills 2003). Broadly speaking, postcolonial theory provides a critique of discourses on empire and race, and feminist postcolonial theories argue for black and Third World[35] women's voices within these discourses. Global relations have been comprehended by binary distinctions such as coloniser/colonised, First World/Third World, developed/underdeveloped or developing and, more recently, the Global North/Global South (Dirlik 1994; Todd- Peters 2012). In order to locate the origin of these discourses a brief detour is necessary to explain the legacy of colonialism.

Colonialism refers to the conquest and direct acquisition of other people's land. While colonisation has occurred in various forms globally and across history, it is currently taken to refer to a particular phase in the history of Empire. The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the rapid partitioning of Africa by European empires. Several reasons are offered for why the partition suddenly became a "scramble" at the time it did considering that European powers had long taken an interest in Africa. It has been argued that factors that contributed to the partition related to strategy, prestige and economic gain, but more important was the threat to Britain's perceived control of Africa (Sanderson 1975). Britain

[35] 'Third World' is used loosely here in recognition of the fact that it is a politically loaded term. I employ it following Dirlik's suggestion that it "usefully evokes structural commonalities of struggles" (1994:20) and implies that the shared history of neo-colonialism and internal racism offers sufficient common ground for alliances among diverse peoples. It is often used to signal underdevelopment, poverty, religiosity, and non-Westernness, see Dirlik (1994) for a detailed problematisation of the term 'Third World'.

had hegemony in Africa from 1815 to about 1880. During that time France also had interests in Africa, but they did not challenge British hegemony. From around 1875 Britain began to express interest in making her informal empire formal, and France also expressed interest in expanding her empire. Moreover, Bismarck's Germany joined France in the attack against Britain's unofficial empire. The Berlin conference (1884) organised by Bismarck is usually seen as the formalisation of the Scramble for Africa and as ushering in a new imperialism period which saw the heightened colonial activity by European powers and the erosion of existing forms of self-governance in African states.

From around 1947, the dismantling of the European colonial empires and attainment of independence by formerly colonised countries saw variations of anti-colonial resistance, mainly with a nationalist agenda. At this point, there was hope that the end of colonial rule would herald a transformation that included freedom and self-determination. The nationalist assumption of decolonisation after independence was soon exposed as unfounded; it is argued that in reality the imperial Western countries only relinquished control to an extent but the economic hegemony of these industrialised countries was not shaken (Williams & Chrisman 1993; Young 2001; Grosfuguel 2008). Some scholars have tried to capture this new dispensation under the concepts of empire, imperiality and coloniality. I will discuss each in turn (although they tend to overlap) in the following few paragraphs.

The term empire is often used in two ways: first, it refers to an empire that was established for financial and ideological reasons and bureaucratically controlled from the centre by a government (signifying imperialism); and, second, it refers to an empire that was developed for settlement by communities or for commercial reasons by a trading company (signifying colonialism). It is for this reason that empire does not always signify imperialism (Young 2001). Most importantly the term has been invoked to signal a particular dispensation that manifests after imperialism. In a most influential description, Hardt and Negri (2000: xii-xiii) describe empire thus:

> Empire establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentred and deterritorialising apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command.

Within this centreless space, sits the United States of America in a privileged position (a 'big brother' position arguably), that positions it as the embodiment of sovereignty. This can be observed in how sovereign power – much like in Foucauldian operation of power – operates in multiple locations and registers, in the process deflecting attention from the big brother as wielder of power (Krishnaswamy 2008). When the hegemonic role is minimised, that is when the power of the USA as a global power is at its most potent. These registers are contained within the discourses of freedom, human rights, democracy and 'just' wars which are primarily defined by the global North in an effort to keep their positions of power over a 'powerless' global South.

Tensions therefore arise between leaders of postcolonial nation-states and the global North as they try to ascertain their own sense of sovereignty by articulating an anti-imperialist and pan-African stance as advocated for by former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and former South African President Thabo Mbeki[36]. Pan-Africanism is recognition of the subaltern position of Africa and commitment to the realisation of Africa being moved from the margins and being treated as equal partners in the global arena (Phimister & Raftopoulos 2004). Unfortunately, due to a crisis of governance in many African countries, nationalist leaders conflate their calls for anti-imperialism with authoritarian domestic policies which serve as elite embourgeosiement. In other words, those with power (and accumulating wealth) in the so-called weak states employ the legitimate anti-imperialist discourse to conceal and/or justify their own forms of dominance, as argued in the case of Mugabe in the previous chapter (see also Ajulu 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ndhlovu 2013). The challenge therefore remains for the postcolony as how to eradicate external dependence while doing away with internal authoritarianism at the same time. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ndhlovu argue strongly:

> … the challenge facing African people today is not only that of how to convert nationalism into pan-Africanism, but is also that of working towards avoiding the multifaceted tentacles of what Nkrumah termed the 'Wall Street Octopus' (empire and its coloniality). It is also a challenge of how to avoid the negative consequences of nationalism while mobilising its progressive and redemptive aspects to challenge

[36] I will not be discussing the pan Africanist ideals in detail here but I refer the reader to some helpful literature such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J & Ndhlovu, F (2013) (eds.) *Nationalism & National Projects in Southern Africa*; Mbeki, T (1992) *Africa Define Yourself*, Ajulu, R. 2001. *Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance in a Globalising World Economy* amongst a host of others.

> asymmetrical global power structures that continue to keep Africa in a subaltern position (2013: 26).

Empire produces what Krishnaswamy (2008) terms imperiality, a term that arguably goes beyond empire to signal not only continuity with older forms of imperialism, but also invoking the notion of coloniality (explained shortly). Imperiality is argued to be seen in the continued hierarchisation of nation states and in the dependency discourse that defines centre/periphery relations[37]. It is also characterised by being anti-postcolonial and finds currency in the idea of "permanent intervention" in countries where their (read US) hegemony is threatened (see Krishnaswamy 2008: 13). In much the same way, coloniality refers to the continued forms of colonial domination produced by colonial structures. Peripheral nation-states therefore live under the conditions of "global coloniality" which means that they remain in colonial situations even long after colonial administrations fall off (Grosfuguel 2008: 95). Colonial situations refer to the cultural, political and economic oppression of subordinate groups by dominant others in terms of race, class, ethnicity and also gender. Grosfuguel identifies the IMF, World Bank, the Pentagon and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as institutions imposed by the USA to advance a capitalist world system (see also Schirato & Webb 2003).

Needless to say, this capitalist world system came about as a consequence of colonialism in which the pervasion of a single economic system (neoliberal capitalism), primarily developed and controlled by the West, has been firmly established globally (Williams & Chrisman 1993; Young 2001). Neoliberal discourse became articulated increasingly in the 1980s as a set of new economic policies which united business and political leaders' policies in the endeavour to develop a more integrated global economy. These policies were premised on deregulation, privatisation and increased international trade (Todd-Peters 2012). Neoliberal ideas were promoted by dominant financial institutions (as mentioned above) and they managed to pressure 'developing' countries to conform to the Western economic assumptions about growth and trade. The continued dominance of the West in terms of political, economic and cultural, and also ideological power has been designated as neo-colonialism and so the history of colonialism remains critical to the understanding of postcolonial societies. Thus:

[37] Krishnaswamy (2008:12) notes that the centre/periphery dichotomy is now losing credence as First Worlds appear in Third Worlds and vice versa as the Second World disappears and Fourth Worlds rise.

> Postcolonial cultural critique involves the reconsideration of this history, together with the defining of its contemporary social and cultural impact…The postcolonial does not privilege the colonial. It is concerned with colonial history only to the extent that that history has determined the configurations and power structures of the present, to the extent that much of the world still lives in the violent disruptions of its wake, and to the extent that the anti-colonial liberation movements remain the source and inspiration of its politics (Young 2001: 4).

In fact, as Ajulu (2001) argues, since the incorporation of Africa into the world economy (towards the end of the 19th century) unfair trade practices have been in place. Formal colonialisation served to augment this asymmetrical trade relationship. Ajulu discusses how African economies were never structured to compete in the global market. As indicated in the quote above, postcolonial theory operates with an understanding of how present circumstances are informed by situations which preceded them and which yet still differ significantly from them. An analysis of imperial texts or discourses has the potential to illuminate and challenge continuing systems of domination and exploitation (Williams & Chrisman 1993).

Zimbabwe has had a particular relationship with China since sanctions were imposed in early 2000 as discussed in detail in the previous chapter. The government subsequently introduced a "Look East" policy in 2005 in order to alleviate the effects of the sanctions[38]. The rise of China poses a significant potential challenge to the dominance of the USA and the associated shifting centre of gravity to Asia (Power 2012). China's strategic relationship with Africa has benefitted from it having no previous history of exploitation on the continent. The environment is therefore conducive for China to establish trade with resource rich Africa and at the same time establish export markets for its own manufactured goods. China is argued to be well placed to becoming the world's next economic hegemon. As a result, "it should therefore come as no surprise…that it is the Chinese (now visibly being followed by the Indians and even occasionally Brasilians) who are today leading the scramble for Africa's natural resources in the 21st century" (Power 2012: 29). The rise of China (and Asia at large) is arguably giving Africa the chance to be economically relevant once again as China continues to inject aid into Africa (US$60 billion for Africa) of which US$4 billion is foreign direct investment for Zimbabwe. Be that as it may, argues Krishnaswamy (2008), that China and Asia are formidable competitors on the economic front, the US retains its political rivalry

[38] http://www.herald.co.zw/unpacking-chinas-4bn-zim-investment/ Accessed 29/06/16; http://www.herald.co.zw/understanding-zims-look-east-policy/ Accessed 8/01/16.

since its military prowess is superior and dominates global politics. With this succinct appraisal of colonialism and its effects, I return to the postcolonial.

Broadly speaking, postcolonial critique is the product of resistance to colonialism and imperialism[39]. The term 'postcolonial' itself has been widely debated and is used in varied ways across a number of disciplines such as literature, history, politics and communication among others (Diaz 2003; Young 2006; Ashcroft et al. 2006). While the term can be understood as the period following colonialism, imperialism remains a critical concept, particularly in terms of a global system of hegemonic economic power as detailed above (Young 2001). The postcolonial, in this sense entails the establishment of a new postcolonial culture in a transformed historical situation in response to changed political circumstances. The general assumption across different invocations of the term is that "the attention paid to the discourse and ideology of colonialism is as significant as a study of the material effects of subjugation under colonialism and after" (Quayson 2000 cited in Diaz 2003: 10).

The project for postcolonial theory therefore is to analyse colonialism at a discursive level as a system of oppression that is productive of particular forms of knowledge, ideologies, power relations, institutions and practices that continue to privilege the discourse of empire even after colonialism (Williams & Chrisman 1993; Young 2001; Grosfuguel 2008). Although postcolonial theory is not a unified field, it is generally informed by theorists such as Frantz Fanon who critiqued colonialism as a single formation and Edward Said whose seminal work on Orientalism (1978) opened up a field of analysis on colonial discourse (see Mudimbe 1988,1994; Mbembe 2001; 2015). His work importantly entailed an analysis of the textual forms produced by the West which produced forms of knowledge about the non-metropolitan areas and cultures (Said 1993; Williams & Chrisman 1993; Young 2001). Said's analysis of Orientalism as a discourse enables the understanding of "the systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said 1978: 25). While Said's response to Foucault varied over his lifetime (see for instance Racevskis 2005), he follows Foucault in his consideration of how

[39] It is important to note that these terms are problematic; they are often conflated and yet each are respectively different in meaning and varied in their specific national characteristics. See Young (2001) for a careful consideration of the nuances of each.

discourses can privilege or marginalise certain cultures and how these discourses are often manifest through language (Goodwin-Smith 2010).

One is able to discern from Said's critique of Western dominance, how the image of the 'Other' was produced within imperial discourse in order to ensure relationships of power, domination and hegemony over the colonised and/or Third World countries. The discursive formations that underlay imperial rule assumed that certain territories required domination and there were forms of knowledge that would sustain these ideas seen through the use of words such as "inferior", "subject races", "subordinate peoples", "authority" among others (Said 1994: 8). To this end, white supremacy can be conceptualised as "a set of discourses and practices that subjected non-European people and cast them in the position of subjected Others, while it advanced the interest of European nations" (Mama 1995: 18). This discursive representation of other societies persists to this day and can be seen in the binary structure of opposition between the First World and the Third World (Bhabha 1994; Mohanty 1988; Diaz 2003). It is through foregrounding the political that postcolonial critique destabilises the ideological and hegemonic discourses that naturalise Western discursive representations.

Also important is the work of Mamdani (1996) on the conceptualisation of power in colonial Africa whose traces still persist in contemporary society. Mamdani shows how the colonial legacy of the distinction between citizens and subjects lingers in the present and impacts on the constitution of subjectivities. The domain of citizens, he argues, was a privileged space whereby the 'white' colonisers were accorded "civil rights, free association, access to information and political representation and such privilege was legitimated paternalistically by reference to both scientific and biblical rationalisations" (Prinsloo 2009a: 86). In contrast, indigenous peoples were not subjects of civil rights, but governed by customary law through local heads such as chiefs.

As Mamdani explains;

> Organised differently in rural areas from urban ones, the state was Janus-faced, bifurcated. It contained a duality; two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority. Urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to enforce tradition (1996: 18).

This bifurcated nature of the state, while deracialised as many countries attained independence, was, importantly, not democratised and hence continues to frame the formation of subjectivities in postcolonial Africa. These urban black people, sandwiched between rights-bearing colons and the subject peasantry, found themselves in "a juridical limbo" as they were "exempt from the lash of the customary law but not from modern, racially discriminatory civil legislation" (Mamdani 1996: 19). It is against this background that the constitution of Zimbabwean women's femininities should be understood. It is notable that even today, for urban black people 'home' is considered as a rural one.

Feminist postcolonial theory in many ways takes up more of the same themes by challenging the homogenous image of the Third World woman as always already disempowered. It takes as its point of departure a discursive criticism of 'knowledge' and 'scholarship' on Third World women whose point of reference is feminism as articulated in the West (Mohanty 1988). One can discern here the mutual implication of power and knowledge as articulated by Foucault (1976), especially the power to speak on behalf of all women presumed by feminists in the West, to produce knowledge about other cultures, hence proposing and legitimising a uniform way of being 'woman.' To this end, Third World women are often represented as victims, passive, tradition-bound (Hegde 1998). It is this assumption of a homogenous notion of oppression that Mohanty, in her well quoted work "Under Western Eyes" (1988), argues against as producing an idea of an average 'Third World woman', supposedly essentially "sexually constrained", "ignorant", "poor", "uneducated" and "domesticated", in contrast to the implicit construct of western women as "educated", "modern", autonomous and having control of their sexualities and bodies (1988: 53). These distinctions effectively privilege a particular group as the norm or referent. To address this powerful and elite construction, it is necessary to take into account the socio-historical context of women in trying to explain their situations, something this study endeavours to do.

These are some of the tensions that the study seeks to unpack in relation to the specific context of Zimbabwean women. The postcolonial condition of the Zimbabwean woman has to be understood within the tensions that face the country[40], as discussed extensively in the previous chapter. It is important to mention the unique role played by prominent Zimbabwean

[40] These include, the land question, Gukurahundi, the economic crisis and related effects, massive population exodus, HIV/AIDS and other deadly illnesses, state authoritarianism as linked to the history of colonialism and the external influence of global power and capitalism.

literary writers in articulating the ambiguities of negotiating womanhood in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe while grappling with the double yolk of oppression in the form of patriarchy and colonialism (see Muponde & Primorac 2005). The widely cited works of Yvonne Vera[41] and Tsitsi Dangarembga[42] deal with gender inequality by questioning the stifling authority of patriarchal discourses in varying degrees and they also try to unshackle the hold of empire in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe (see Dube 1999; Ogbazi 2011). These authors are renowned for rejecting the oppressive practices of these institutions of power by articulating strategies for resistance and liberation. It is important to consider who Zimbabwean women are becoming in this current period of economic difficulties and continued migrations and to consider what discourses Zimbabwean women are circulating about themselves as they reconfigure their identities in everyday life.

Postcolonial feminism helpfully interrogates the differential effects of migration on women. The concern is how women deal with the crisis of identity in cases of postcolonial socio-cultural displacement; how they balance between integration into their new 'homes' and staying true to their cultural identity as a strategy of self-preservation at the same time. In problematising the subjectivity of migrants, Brah (1996) suggests that historical trajectories of diaspora have to be taken into account and one must always be concerned with analysing the regimes of power that inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora. To show how identities and subjectivities are neither fixed nor pre-given, Brah muses about when a location becomes 'home.'

Accordingly, feminist postcolonial theory is also concerned (just like postcolonialism and poststructuralism) with repudiating the post-Enlightenment human subject as a unitary and fixed entity, arguing that the construction of the African woman, the black and the 'Negro' are a product of wider social conditions and white supremacist ideology (Mama 1995). The consciousness raising of black identity in the 1980s, Mama argues, signified a desire to change one's consciousness, construct new subjectivities and reject the disempowering imperialist legacies in order to emphasise the centrality of historical and individual experience in the construction of subjectivity (see also Weedon 1997). With these concerns there arose specifically a kind of feminist critique for black Africans which emerged partly

[41] Nehanda (1993), Without a Name (1994), Under the Tongue (1997), Butterfly Burning (2000), The Stone Virgins (2002).
[42] Nervous Conditions (1988), The Book of Not (2006), On Stage-She no Longer Weeps (1987).

due to protest against white dominance in feminism and also due to acknowledging the material conditions and histories of African societies (Arndt 2002; Mikell 1997). In other words, African feminism gets to the bottom of African gender relations and the varied problems of African women according to their socio-cultural context.

2.9.1 African feminism

It is argued that an African approach to feminism is unique in that it acknowledges the different circumstances of women and levels criticism of gender relations within these paradigms. Usefully, Arndt (2002) offers an overview of these paradigms. First, women in some African societies are comfortable with the idea of complementarity with men and this is realised in the affirmation of motherhood and the family. Second, patriarchal relations are appraised in a differential way by weighing traditional institutions that are positive or negative for women. Third, African feminism contextualises the criticism of gender roles within other oppressive mechanisms such as racism, neocolonialism and imperialism among other mechanisms, and in this approach African feminist theories arguably exceed the race-gender-class approach of African-American feminism. Finally, African feminists usually go beyond the simple criticism of patriarchy to identify "both traditionally-established and entirely new scopes and alternatives for women which would be tantamount to overcoming their oppression" (Arndt 2002; see also de Hernandez et al. 2011).

It is for this reason that some feminists have called for the use of the term feminisms in the plural and not feminism in the singular to capture this diversity of cultural imperatives, historical forces and localised realities when referring to feminism in Africa (Mangena 2003; Nnaemeka 2003). While some have argued that feminism has no relevance in Africa as it is a term that developed in the West and therefore does not capture African concerns, others have for this same reason called for different terms to replace feminism such as 'womanism,' 'Islamic feminism' and 'nego-feminism' to mention a few as highlighted by Essoff (2001). The sprouting of so many theoretical paradigms is necessitated by the concerted effort to respond to the anomalies that Western feminism is fraught with, particularly its failure to address the cultural specificities which then gives birth to new context specific conceptualisations of feminism which represent varied discourses that seek to define gender relations and, in the process, produce particular discursive subjects. Womanism, as coined by Alice Walker in *In search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (2005), captures the special role women

play in community cohesiveness and valorises womanhood as a cultural resource. It is offered as a distinct alternative to definitions of femininity by mainstream feminism and patriarchal systems and stands against white domination and power to define (Mama in interview with Salo 2001). Nego-feminism describes a feminism of negotiation to signify the diversity of feminisms in Africa as mentioned above (Nnaemeka 2003).

The challenge now becomes the tension between postfeminism and postcolonial black feminisms. In particular, how does one reconcile the postfeminist position of women being "unfixed" from traditional patriarchy; that emphasises freedom of choice in a consumerist environment on one hand with a postcolonial black feminist stance on the other hand which proceeds from a critique of neoliberal capitalist influences and places emphasis on community? I argue that this tension allows me to critically analyse the spaces that the online posts inhabit in terms of these varying positions and what they tell us about the formation of identities of Zimbabwean women online. Because critical perspectives on gender identity (such as critical discourse analysis) have an emancipatory aim, it is employed in this study to unpack the various ways in which Zimbabwean women's identities are constituted in everyday language and practice. Critical discourse analysis (with a feminist agenda) is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

2.10 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to address some of the key poststructuralist approaches that underpin this study. As such representation, meaning and language were identified as key in examining the online discourses of Zimbabwean women. In particular, the study employs Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse with an understanding that representations and inequalities are manifested in language and culture. These prejudices culminate in discourses of knowledge and power in relation to subordinated groups, such as women, blacks and geographic spaces such as the global South. These discursive representations are passed down from generation to generation and so the critical thought and intervention of poststructuralist feminist theory and postcolonial feminist perspectives are key in producing alternative knowledge about the 'Other.' Against this background, the next chapter moves on to locate these key discussions within internet studies and the associated globalising influences.

CHAPTER 3: THE INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

> Globalisation addresses the complex lines of cultural and capitalist exchange that move simultaneously from centre to periphery, from periphery to centre, and from myriad peripheral points to others (Braziel 2008: 27).

3. Introduction

The study thus far has contextually situated Zimbabwe as a patriarchal postcolonial nation in a neoliberal world economic order and shown how discourses of knowledge and power within such contexts subordinate women and blacks and more so for those who live in the global South in general. Because this study is concerned with how Zimbabwean women inhabit online spaces in meaningful ways and the consequent identity formation on these platforms, this chapter moves to addressing the technological dimension and the social aspects inherent in technology use. It addresses the internet, social media and their potential as a public sphere. The first section addresses the technological dimension by giving a brief historical overview of the internet and social media and also presents a discussion of Facebook as the main site where these exchanges take place. Both celebratory and critical approaches are discussed. The second section is concerned with the social dimension in relation to these technologies, particularly the formation of identities on the internet and the unevenness of exchange on these platforms. This leads to a discussion of the public sphere theory as initially formulated by Habermas and its applicability for interrogating online spaces particularly in relation to the global South. The chapter concludes by locating the study within Laclau & Mouffe's agonistic frame of the public sphere which usefully positions online spaces as sites of discursive conflict and contestations.

3.1 The Internet and Social Media: an overview and critique

Contemporary cultural studies has responded to the advent of the internet in various ways. Media studies has of necessity always engaged with "the shock of the new" (Tomaselli et al. 2013: 42); from the advent of radio in the 1930s, to television, radio and film in the 1970s (Punathambeka & Scannell 2013). More recently, and globally, there has been an accelerating interest in 'new' social media signalised by the growth of the Internet. The scope of what media refers to has extended to include, but is not limited to, mobile phones, computers (desktop and laptop), e-readers, tablets, CDs and DVDs, digital games and the

internet among many others (Punathambeka & Scannell 2013), all now referred to as 'new media'.

In fact, the internet, succinctly described as "the ultimate network of networks" (Creeber 2009:2; see also Lister et.al 2009) can be traced back to the 1960s. Hence while it is not necessarily new in this regard, what is new or different about it is the rapid interconnectedness of people around the world and people's relationship to new media technologies. It is argued that the speed and capacity offered by broadband and other systems that allow users to download large files and share them with equal speed using smartphones and other mobile devices, have in turn allowed the growth of social media via social network sites (SNSs) (Spracklen 2015). Due to the user practices enabled by SNSs, social media has become a key term for characterising social network platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, WordPress, BlogSpot, Weibo, Pinterest, Foursquare and Tumblr among others (see Fuchs 2012). These can be further categorised as social network sites (Facebook, LinkedIn), video-sharing sites (YouTube), blogs (BlogSpot, WordPress), wikis (Wikipedia) and microblogs (Twitter, Weibo)[43].

Social network sites (SNSs) basically consist of web-based services that allow users to build a public or semi-public profile, make a list of others they share a connection with, view their list of connections and other participants within the system (boyd & Ellison 2008:211). While SNSs have a wide variety of technical features, a common feature is that of profiles which show a list of friends and friends of friends who are also users of the system. An interesting definition of profiles describes them as unique pages where one can "type oneself into being" (Sunden (2003) cited in boyd & Ellison 2013:211). Some users of social networks are not particularly using the sites for networking purposes, that is, to meet new people but rather to keep in contact with people who are already in their social network (Kadushin 2012). Most SNSs include a mutual confirmation of friendship, public display of connections, messaging, comments, video-sharing, photo sharing, instant messaging and blogging.

Facebook is described as the most popular social network site boasting 2, 23 billion monthly active users around the world as of the end of June 2018[44]. Because this study interrogates the

[43] See Albarran (2013:4) for a detailed list of sub-markets of activity to classify social media industries.

[44] https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/ Accessed 24/10/18.

usage on two Facebook groups, the social network site requires discussion. Facebook was launched by founder Mark Zuckerberg (then Harvard University undergraduate) in 2004 initially as a Harvard only social network. It expanded during the same year to include several other universities. From September 2005, it expanded to include high school students, professionals inside corporate networks and eventually anyone (with access to the Internet and related know how) over the age of 13 in September 2006 (boyd & Ellison 2008; Miller 2011). As indicated by the statistics in chapter 1, Facebook penetration rates in Zimbabwe show that there is a steady year on year increase. However, it should be noted that numbers hardly tell the whole story since a South African study has indicated that it takes about 5 years for an average Internet user in such contexts to be fully engaged in online activities such as online shopping, blogging etc. (Goldstuck 2010).

The invention of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1992 is considered as having marked the formalisation of the Internet (Spracklen 2015). Spracklen argues that it was from this period that the Internet increasingly became a place of leisure such that by the late 1990s it was becoming a part of everyday life, at least in the global North. As it became promoted in the mass media, utopian ideals about the perceived emancipatory potential of the Internet manifested. This inevitably led to much robust theorising about the nature of society we live in and this in part explains the myriad of labels that exist in trying to describe the era we are in. Debates frequently oscillate around whether we live in an information society or a network society whereby information flows are heightened by technological changes (Castells 1996), or whether we live in an age of informational capitalism, a more critical term than 'information society'. This approach interrogates how neoliberalism policies impact on knowledge production (Fuchs 2014b). Some debates even question whether the information society has in fact arrived, as captured in this statement, "we must not confuse the indispensability of a phenomenon with a capacity for it to define a new [social] order" (Webster 2006: 23). While there are disagreements about whether we actually live in an information society or not and about the associated significance of this, a concern about 'information' is a common theme through all these debates. Participants in the debates evaluate the role played by the media and information technologies in contemporary societies, especially considering the fact that more work is becoming increasingly knowledge based and thus eliminating the need for labour power (Fuchs & Sandoval 2014). These debates signal the different positions that have been taken in evaluating the internet and social

media. Accordingly, the ensuing discussion considers how there are both celebratory and more critical approaches to the Internet and social media.

As the commercialisation of the internet intensified in the 2000s as further software developments evolved, cyber enthusiasts argued that consequent higher speed ensured more universal access. Accordingly, the argument goes, the Internet has not only changed the way we consume popular culture but the technological changes associated with it have completely re-ordered traditional social structures, politics and economics (Castells 1996, 2007; Creeber 2009). Castells argues that we live in a "network society" which he describes as a society:

> … whose social structure is made around networks activated by micro-electronics based, digitally processed information and communication technologies… social structures [are] the organisational arrangements of humans in the relationships of production, consumption, reproduction and power expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture (2009: 24).

While Castells has no doubt offered one of the most compelling and comprehensive analyses on how information has re-ordered contemporary societies, his network society conception and his totalising claims have invited critics who recognise his ideas as technologically determinist. It has also been argued that he does not problematise the history nor meanings of concepts like power (Fuchs 2014a); undermines the salience of class inequalities; and generally takes a technocratic view of development (see Webster 2003 for a detailed critique). Thus, the network society conception, while useful to some extent, does not account for people or geopolitical regions which fall outside of the network. In other words, "the poor, the indigent, the merely 'difficult' or noncompliant are *technologised off the face of the earth*" (Schirato & Webb 2003: 147, emphasis added).

Recognising that some people are 'technologised off the earth' as suggested above, is an acknowledgement that there exists a digital divide between the information rich and information poor although cyber enthusiasts - also referred to as cyber utopians - uphold the common view that since international events can be watched by the whole world at practically the same time with a high speed, frequency and quality never before imagined, the Internet has greatly altered our perceptions of time, space and identity so that we are ever closer to living in a 'global village' (McLuhan 1964; also Creeber 2009; Chen 2012). It is presumed that in a global village territorial borders do not matter (since one does not need a passport to access the Internet as required in crossing a physical border) because, the

argument goes, the hypertextual nature of new media necessitates global information flows and the formation of cyberspace where people are forging new identities (Chen 2012). However, cyber realists - also known as cyber sceptics - challenge this position by pointing to the fact that it does not acknowledge the digital divide and that there are inequalities of exchange across geographical territories along social, economic and cultural lines among other categories. It is argued that global information flows (including news and entertainment) are asymmetrical; transnational corporations are in control of the big media industries and therefore determine significantly what gets communicated to who and when (Thompson 1995). Information arguably flows from the core to the periphery, thereby creating a tension between the global North and the global South. (I develop these critiques further in the next section).

Another aspect that cyber enthusiasts note is the digitalisation feature of new media which allows it to be easily transferred, manipulated and networked across different media platforms without being corrupted during storage or transmission. It can also be reproduced many times without losing its original quality and therefore surpasses analogue systems in terms of speed, quality and performance (Creeber 2009). Digital/new media is also characterised by convergence of the forms and functions of information, media and electronic communication to enhance the end product (Lister et al. 2009). All these features have enabled it to be used in different ways towards a variety of ends.

The interactivity of new media has therefore been lauded by internet enthusiasts for providing users with the freedom to produce and reproduce the form and content of information which arguably enhances human communication. The fact that they are communication-led rather than information-driven means that users largely control the information flow as the content in most social networks is enabled by the users. In this context the 'audience' is described as 'prod-users' (Bruns 2008) or 'pro-sumers' (Tapscott & Williams 2008), to account for the creative and interactive nature of online activity (both cited in Fenton 2012: 123). This role of the consumers as producers is discussed further below in relation to the public sphere potential of the Internet. However, the important point to mention here is that this perceived freedom and the sheer volume of information available on the Internet are argued to promote democracy. On the contrary, it has been argued that the abundance of information on the internet does not automatically translate to democracy (Morozov 2011; Habermas 2013). In

addition, the web by its nature is dominated by entertainment and popular culture so much that its accessibility positions us more as consumers rather than political actors (Dahlgren 2014). It therefore follows that the Internet does not necessarily enhance human communication or promote democracy because the abundance of infotainment on the web may hinder people from taking part in democratic processes as they retreat into their own fragmented private worlds (Webster 2006; Dahlgren 2014). Furthermore, it is also argued, the fact that information can be stored without being corrupted has no bearing on the quality of information being stored. In other words, quantity does not guarantee quality of information as the information may already have been manipulated towards particular ends and packaged accordingly for transmission (Morozov 2011).

In recent years, social media has been increasingly used for political activism. Possibly, this partly owes to the fact that a big share of communication on Facebook consists of communities of personal friends, political activists and fan groups among various others (Fuchs 2014b). Fuchs argues that although access to social media in itself does not usually turn people into engaged citizens, social media can play a central role in fostering participation in instances where political events arise and go viral. It is therefore easy to mobilise support for a political cause or otherwise on Facebook because it is easy to 'like' a cause that one identifies with. However, a large following on social media does not automatically translate to action on the ground through the act of 'liking' as followers do not sacrifice anything else to join a cause (such as money or time). This is what Morozov (2011) calls slacktivism. Morozov argues that while social media may be a valuable resource for participatory action, there are myriad other activities that are risk free that people can engage in (see also Dahlgren 2014). Another factor that affects social media political activism, these scholars argue, is the tendency towards self-promotion, whereby people are concerned more about their personal visibility and performance online which detracts from the political. In this case "a networked yet privatised sociality emerges" (Dahlgren 2014: 199) in which one's subjectivity is shaped by particular discourses which enable participation in political matters.

The internet and social media, cyber utopians argued, would boost democratic participation, collaboration and participation; revive communal associations; revolutionise people's thinking and behaviour; and enhance global cooperation and connectivity. While this may be true to a certain extent, cyber realists caution against a positive all-encompassing evaluation

of the internet. They argue that cyber utopianism leads to a condition of internet-centrism whereby all concerns about democratic change become reframed in terms of the internet, instead of being framed within the socio-cultural context where change ought to occur (Morozov 2011 offers a detailed discussion on cyber utopianism and internet-centrism). The problem, Morozov argues, is that most governments conflate democratisation of access with the democratisation of society. They do not take cognisance of the fact that more and cheaper access to tools in the wrong hands is counterproductive to democracy. He cites the operations of child pornographers, criminal gangs and terrorists among other undesirables that use the internet for nefarious practices. Furthermore, while anti-government information may be passed freely on the internet, the same governments (authoritarian or otherwise) may use the same platform for surveillance purposes in order to maintain hegemonic control over their citizens (Webster 2006; Fuchs & Sandoval 2014; Schirato & Webb 2003).

It is therefore argued that the logic of the internet is contradictory or in other words the web has a "split-personality" (Andrejevic 2014: 179). Whilst it seemingly offers democratic freedom on the one hand, corporate internet and corporate social media stand in the service of dominant capitalist interests and discourses on the other (Fuchs 2014a, 2014b; Schirato & Webb 2003). Thus it empowers the empowered and disempowers the weak (Morozov 2011). A critical political economy approach to the internet and social media recognises these as corporate businesses which operate according to the logic of capital accumulation. Critics note how the growth of the Internet was accompanied by a rise in the commodification and commercialisation of the Internet with people's personal data being turned into commodities and private browsing being aggregated for targeted advertising (Spracklen 2015; see also Albaran 2013; van Zoonen 2013). They argue that because the social character of the web makes us more inclined to reveal more about ourselves, we seldom consider the risks associated with such revelations (Morozov 2011). Corporate Internet and corporate social media sites like Google and Facebook mine our data to turn it into a commodity which is sold, in turn, to advertising companies for huge profits. This has been enabled by the fact that technology by its very nature is political and has come to be dominated by commercial interests which seek to profit out of people's leisure needs.

As such, the success of Facebook and other social network sites is believed to be based, not so much in the vision of its CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg's vision (and other social

network owners), as in its real or perceived capacity to reconstruct relationships with friends and family given increased mobility in the contemporary era (Miller 2011). Social media is therefore understood to facilitate the developments of strong relations with family members and friends. It is perceived to potentially reconstruct our orientation to kinship through technology and, in the process, compensates for increased distance and absence (Fenton 2012; Miller 2011). When communication takes place repeatedly, cyber enthusiasts argue, feelings of belonging together as a community are cultivated. The notion of community has currency in framing the understanding of social networks such as Facebook. Because social network sites operate through networks whereby a user sends an invitation to be friends with someone or to join a particular group, the networks presumably expand quickly and, within a short space of time, people are connected. A community is thus established when members share a common cause and can engage in collective action while communicating regularly (Parks 2011).

However, while people are seemingly, 'freely' connecting they are in actual fact doing labour time for Facebook which means that their digital labour is exploited (Andrejevic 2011). In producing content assumedly for their own amusement, Facebook collates data in terms of their likes, the pages they like visiting or what their friends like in order to bring targeted advertising to them. This appears in "what you may like" suggestions which might make one wonder how particular sites know they like something, which coincidentally they actually do like. Furthermore, being an integrated platform, Facebook combines a number of media and information and communication technologies like webpages, webmail, digital image and video, discussion groups, guest book or search engine thereby making it a distinct social networking site (Fuchs 2014a). Consequently, because one can customise their experience on Facebook, do everything on one convenient site, it is hard to recognise being on Facebook as exploitative (see van Dijck 2013; Webster 2003; Morozov 2011). Since there is no external force on anyone to use Facebook the decision to engage on the site is framed as free will and a source of personal pleasure. As Andrejevic puts it:

> Individuals are offered a modicum of control over the product of their creative activity in exchange for the work they do in building up online community and sociality upon privately controlled network infrastructures. Their free participation is redoubled as a form of productive labour captured by capital. In a self-generating cycle, the offer to overcome estrangement or alienation produces a second order form of separation: that of users from the data they generate (2011: 94).

The contention is that once users share their data on sites like Facebook, they have no control over their output or how their data is being is used. Thus, rather than publicising community, social networks privatise it instead. In this way,

> [the] information economy…foreshadows an era of unprecedented monitoring and sorting in which our every action and communication is captured, stored and mined with an eye to anticipating and influencing our future behaviour (Andrejevic 2014: 179).

One is reminded in this instance of Foucault's conceptualisation of biopower (discussed in chapter 2). In broad terms, Foucault argues that through biopower the populace were perceived as resources or commodities and so through surveillance techniques they could be delivered as a commodity to the state, particularly as "a healthy, active and disciplined population that was a commodity for the state and organised capital" (Schirato & Webb 2003: 136). It is further argued that just because we cannot see the immediate costs of these technologies, be it financial, moral or environmental, it does not mean that they come free (Morozov 2011). In an insightful article on the big technological giants such as Apple, Google, Microsoft, News Corp and Hewlett Packard, Sandoval cites unfair labour practices, exploitation of workers, environmental degradation caused by computer waste and ambiguous privacy policies among others as part of the invisible costs of using these capitalist technologies; they are described as "unsocial" (2014: 145). Against this background, it is therefore important to understand the possibilities offered by new media with the correlative changes – cultural, economic or otherwise – necessitated by the globalisation phenomenon to which the discussion now turns to.

3.2 New media and globalising influences

The remarkable expansion of new media has been accounted for and linked to the rapid acceleration of the trend to globalisation. Globalisation is a highly contested term and different fields tend to emphasise certain aspects over others. This "varied disciplinary, conceptual, epistemological and historical interpretation of globalisation from across the social sciences" (Held & McGrew 2007), gives globalisation inquiry various entry points and any attempt to theorise globalisation must take into account those different variables. For the purposes of my study the discussion about globalisation is brief and introduces those aspects that provide context to the discussion of the Internet and its associated globalising influences such as migration and the public sphere to be discussed in the following sections.

Conflicting views exist about what exactly the markers of globalisation are or should be. Some debates range from emphasis on the economic and cultural aspects of global capitalism, focusing on how these impact the daily life of citizens across the world. These are often framed in the cultural homogenisation versus the cultural hybridisation debates. Other debates focus on the technological developments and how they impact on the other changes, while still others focus on how these changes pose a threat to the autonomy of the nation state. My discussion is centred on these and incorporates both the celebratory and critical accounts of globalisation.

While globalisation is often explained in economic terms, primarily signalled by the neo-liberal economy that prioritises the market as the organising principle of the global economy, most scholars also identify the other dimensions of globalisation as equally important in achieving a holistic understanding of this phenomenon (Creeber & Martin 2009; Webster 2003; During 2005). It is argued that globalisation manifests itself in the economic, political, ideological, technological, socio-cultural and environmental spheres among a host of other spheres. Of importance to note however, is that there are varied underlying class configurations within which these spheres operate which are important in an intersectional assessment of the effects of globalisation in different societies (Berberoglu 2003). Globalisation then is described as "the highest and most accelerated stage of capitalist imperialism, that is, it is a global extension of transnational capital and the entire capitalist system that has penetrated every corner of the world and has done so with exceptional speed and intensity" (Berberoglu 2003: viii). Speed and intensity speak to the accompanying technological revolutions. Similarly, Webster (2003) identifies transnational companies as operationalising globalisation and points to the globalisation of the market, production, finance and communications as distinct features of this phenomenon. While globalisation cannot be reduced to the economic sphere, it is arguably the economic which then impacts the nature and development of the other spheres (Berberoglu 2003; Schirato & Webb 2003).

Understood to be operating on a broader worldwide scale than earlier stages of imperialism, globalisation operates on the logic of private capital accumulation. This often works through exploitation of resources and labour (noted in the previous chapter in the discussion of Empire). The industrialised countries in the North export raw materials from the global South through cheap labour and then sell them back the finished products at excessive prices. This

unequal exchange can be traced back to precolonial times and encapsulates the international division of labour which ensured that Africa remained consigned to the margins of the global economy (Ajulu 2001). As the African states gained independence and most of them accepted Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (see discussion of ESAP in Zimbabwe in chapter 1), in an effort to make their economies competitive on the global market, argues Ajulu, the programmes instead further weakened them and so the pervasiveness of globalisation served to further intensify the marginalisation of African economies. In a critique of the global capital and its effects, Santos (2012) employs the term global South as a metaphor that reflects the human suffering effected by capitalism and colonialism globally as well as the forms of resistance employed to overcome such suffering. He argues:

> It is therefore an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, and anti-imperialist South. It is a South that also exists in the global North, in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia and racism (Santos 2012: 51).

This quotation describes the postcolonial condition in a globalised world that this study endeavours to capture. The marginalised and excluded populations often turn to online platforms in order to be heard but then again this is not always a neat process. Whereas celebratory approaches to globalisation would envision globalisation as having revolutionised the way people relate and that the boundaries of human society have transformed into a new arrangement of global interconnectedness, whether real or virtual (Chen 2012), the study takes a critical approach that recognises that this global networking does not in fact equate to access for all especially considering the existence of the digital divide and class inequalities. Rather, Schirato & Webb argue, "it reinscribes differences and inequities; the old patterns of us and them, core and periphery" (2003: 152). It is important to note that the digital divide does not only refer to the division between countries but also discrepancies can exist within a country along demographic or geographic lines (Prinsloo 2011b). In addition, celebratory approaches to globalisation also claim that the shrinking world and the related time-space compression (Giddens 1984), result in close interaction and similarities in different aspects of society so that people's thinking and behaviour is redefined by a sense of community and the forging of new identities (Chen 2012; Castells 2009).

What these celebratory evaluations often miss are the nuances attached to community (as highlighted in the previous section) and identity formation. In contrast to some approaches which assume a natural state of origin or commonality between two people or a group, identity should be understood as a construct and therefore can be signalled as a marker of difference (Hall 1996; Brah 1996). As such, identities can be constructed through designations of the 'Other'. Identity is a highly contested term which speaks to our subjectivities as shifting rather than as having an essence. The process of identity formation thus becomes complicated when considered within the context of globalisation which has displaced populations through forced or voluntary migrations (see Schirato & Webb 2003; Hall 1996; Santos 2012). Brah (1996) considers how in the age of globalisation identities are constantly in flux, being shaped by a combination of personal, social and historical circumstances. In other words, because identity cannot be considered as fixed in this new dispensation with accelerating movements of people, cultures and finance, it should be considered within these various spheres with their capacities to inscribe various subjectivities as enabled by different power relations. For Schirato & Webb (2003), technology plays a big part in influencing the nature of our subjectivities especially considering that it is always deployed for someone's profit, power or even pleasure. Identity formation processes are therefore always implicated in these complexities as discussed below.

The internet constitutes the modality through which identities are performed, contested and negotiated. Social networks in particular, have been identified as sites for self-representation and identity (Papacharissi 2011; Boyd 2011; Morozov 2011; Van Dijck 2013). Van Dijck narrates how users' needs have transformed from that of personal self-expression to that of self-presentation and self-promotion particularly for professional users. This transformation has been accompanied by related shifts in the architecture of the social networks respectively. Whereas in the first stage of their development, sites like Facebook were premised on community, that is, the need for connectedness, the focus later shifted to an emphasis on data mining. It is further argued that in architectural terms, they transformed from being databases of personal information to taking on forms of storytelling and narratives of self-presentation (Van Dijck 2013). This is exemplified by personal branding profiles of ordinary people who become influencers by virtue of having many followers, celebrity or even political actors seeking to boost their public profiles.

It is also argued that people seek to present different identities of themselves, for instance their professional and personal identities, but this often goes against the owners of the networking sites' wish for a single identity which can be easily traced for marketing purposes. Papacharissi argues that online identities are always a performance "to multiplied audiences, via multiplied tools and on multiplied stages" (2011: 308), in the creation of a networked self and the result is a compromised sense of identity or remixed identities. The consequence is that offline and online behaviour is blurred (Boyd 2011), and some users take on an attention-seeking, "look-at-us" attitude in their presentation whose behaviour reeks of narcissism and over confidence (see Papacharissi 2011: 315; Morozov 2011: 187). Morozov further argues that some Facebook users shape their online identities in implicit rather than explicit ways, meaning that the kinds of groups they join or campaigns they support reveal more about them than their profiles.

The problem arising from the performance of online identities is primarily that of the tension produced between users' desire to assert their multiple identities vis a vis platform owners desire to have a single identity for their users which they can commoditise, as stated above. Van Dijck's description of this tension warrants a verbatim quotation:

> Social media profiles…are not a *reflection* of one's identity…but are part and parcel of a power struggle between users, employers/employees and platform owners to steer online information and behaviour [for profit logic] …The conflation of self-expression, self-communication and self-promotion into one tool, which is subsequently used for personality assessment and manipulating behaviour, should raise the awareness of users in their roles as citizens, friends, employees, employers and so on. After all, social media are not neutral stages of self-performance – they are the very tools for shaping identities (Van Dijck 2013: 212-213, emphasis in original).

This quotation serves to buttress once again how global capital continues to shape social and communication processes. It is important to note also that the performance of the self is simultaneously a performance of collective identity since the performance is based on recognition by one's social connections. Collective identity is formed around common experiences of categories like class, religion, gender or political persuasion. Collective identity, just like individual identity, also has the power to unite or disunite (Schirato & Webb 2003). These scholars argue that our identity is tied to our national identity but is always being negotiated across local, national and regional spheres. To this end, they argue further, globalisation has transformed the idea of the subject and also what makes up a

collective identity by breaking down "the 'natural' connection being identity and the body, identity and place, identity and tradition" (2003: 152). They hasten to note however, that this does not entail freedom of movement for everyone and pose the question of to what extent we can refer to a global subject or global culture within this context. This question of global culture is framed within the debate of cultural homogenisation and cultural hybridisation.

Broadly speaking, cultural homogenisation, or the cultural imperialism thesis (Tomlison 1991) refers to the manufacture of universal cultural products which arguably give rise to global consumerism. Consequently, distinct cultures and identities become detached from specific times, spaces, histories and traditions (Hall 1992b; Robins 1991; Appadurai 1996; Spracklen 2015). Cultural imperialism is often characterised by the unequal flows of information from the global North to the global South (as discussed above). These global flows which operate in the form of information, news and entertainment are argued to serve as carriers of American culture which then dominates or even displaces cultures of the global South (Tomlison 1991). As a response to the homogenising assumptions of this thesis, a rich set of theories about the intersections between the local and the global exists.

One argument pertains to the assumption of essences constituted by a national culture. There is a longstanding concern about how national cultural identities are being displaced by the process of globalisation. It is argued that historically African cultures and nations were disrupted by violent processes of slave trade and colonisation so there is no authentic culture or tradition to be 'returned to' (Spracklen 2015). Furthermore, the nation should be considered as a construct sometimes employed in the service of dominant corporate interest or nationalist interest by authoritarian governments. However, on the contrary, allowing that "people are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the *idea* of a nation as represented in its national culture" (Hall 1992b: 292), national identity still remains a powerful source of meaning in contemporary society. These meanings are of course constructed through various discursive strategies that render nations as "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006). This means that the difference between nations is constituted in the different ways they are imagined. It is important to note that a nation also functions as a structure of cultural power, serving as a cohesive force to unite different ethnicities and social classes within nations (Hall 1992b). Within this discourse, globalisation is seen to threaten such sovereignty through the processes of cultural homogenisation. This position is

countered by arguments that the local remains significant in a globalised world. Globalisation is understood to foster an exchange of ideas, values and identity to enable cultural hybridity. In other words, globalisation heightens the tension between the global and the local and the challenge is to find a balance of this global-local nexus. Appadurai stresses the importance of locality in the global condition because, he argues:

> [I]n the end, this is where our vitally important archives reside. Localities – in this world […] – are temporary negotiations between various globally circulating forms. They are not subordinate instances of the global, but in fact the main evidence of its reality (2013: 69).

Understood in this context the global and the local are mutually constitutive and culminate in the formation of identities as influenced and/or produced by accelerated global cultural flows. In addition, "globalisation is never a total project capturing all geographies with one force" (Appadurai 2013:67). Rather, it is patterned differently across societies and manifests in different forms. It is therefore unlikely that current global flows in the globalisation era would result in a homogenous cultural regime (Appadurai 2013). Further, there is no evidence that cultures outside the global South consume media products uncritically. Instead research indicates that people mediate media products and appropriate meaning according to their specific cultural context of consumption (see Strelitz 2002; 2004 for examples of studies to this effect).

The acceleration of the movement of cultural artefacts across regional and national boundaries can also be seen manifested in the discourse of human rights, within which minorities such as women, children, immigrants and refugees among others express their rights. Celebratory accounts state that the feminist movement in particular has seen women across the world uniting in collective action against their everyday oppression because "they see the transformation of their condition in the family as connected to their intervention in the public sphere" (Castells 2010: 260; see also Harcourt 2011). Whilst the movement may display different orientations depending on various factors which may be cultural, political or institutional, the argument goes; there is unity in deconstructing patriarchal structures and other hierarchies of power in every sphere of society particularly deploying online technologies in recent years (Mann 2014). The result, it is argued, is a redefinition of womanhood so that we cannot speak of one but many identities (Castells 2010). These identities, Castells further argues, are self-constructed even if sometimes they are demarcated

by ethnic or national boundaries. This self-construction of identities is also a form of power making. An example is how women's movements have used the Internet to build transnational movements that collectively fight violence against women. As Harcourt argues;

> [the] Internet has emerged as a tool that can be navigated and shaped by women's movements around the world in their struggle for rights, justice and social change. In the last decade, women's networks have increased and strengthened with the connections made possible through the Internet, web 2.0, imaging, writing, sharing, lobbying, connecting. New strategies for greater equity and feminist transformation that respect cultural difference are being crafted from these global connections, ultimately creating new structures of power and new forms of culture (Harcourt 2011: 20).

However, despite her celebratory tone, Harcourt further argues that this gendered perspective on the use of new media technologies and the Internet helps to show that they are not necessarily operating in a safe place considering the global structure of power relations that that renders the Internet as a space of contestations. Other writers are more critical in their approach, pointing to the limitations offered by the Internet as a neutral space for promoting the interests of women, noting how in particular the globalisation discourses are gender and racially neutral (Acker 2004; Connell 2009). Connell argues that gender was actually restructured by imperialism which in itself was "a deeply gendered system from the moment of colonial conquest by a workforce of men…neoliberal globalisation similarly restructures local gender orders, as well as being itself a gendered process" (2009: 92). This can be observed in the low wage labour exploitation of women for profit making purposes and in the glamourised images of the working woman that circulate in the media.

In her discussion on global feminism, Woodhull (2003) emphasises the consideration of African feminisms as contributing to political activism and cultural production. Importantly, she suggests that taking a global frame means taking into account the neoliberal forces driving globalisation, together with the repressive effects of this process as controlled by multinational corporations and 'First World' influences. She argues that this provides a critical lens to appreciate the ways in which feminisms are being shaped by disparities between the global North and the global South as well as the rich and the poor. In a similar vein, Acker (2004) also notes that working class women and women from the global South in general are "often seen as docile, cheap to employ, and able to endure boring, repetitive work, whether or not [they] see themselves in these ways" (2004: 34). Recognising that

poverty and inequality are a result of global power and capital, it is this critical lens that my study draws on, identifying in particular how Zimbabwean women negotiate all these structural influences in constructing and performing their identities online. Social networks, before the advent of the Internet, have always been a source of community building and spaces where identity is negotiated and performed (Spracklen 2015). These spaces can be considered as a form of public sphere, to which the discussion now turns.

3.3 The Internet and the Public Sphere

The public sphere, whose original conception is attributed to Habermas' foundational text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989 [1962])[45], is a concept that has attracted plenty of attention in debates about the democratic potential of the media – to the extent that we continue to see "the rise and rise of the public sphere within media studies" (Lunt & Livingstone 2013: 87). This attention owes partly to the sustained interest in the globalising network society which raises questions about the potential usefulness of the public sphere in the current context. This section outlines the now familiar trajectory of the concept of the public sphere, various critiques, revisions and triumphs in order to locate the present study within the agonistic debate of this concept.

In a historical account of the democratic role of the media primarily in England from the turn of the 17th century to the first half of the 19th century, Habermas notes the emergence of a political space in which the issues of the day could be debated without influence from the state. It was a "public sphere in the political realm… [which] evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society" (1989: 30-31). The public sphere as a realm that lies between the state and the public can also be understood as "a network for communicating information and points of view" (Habermas 1996: 360). Habermas argues that the development of early modern capitalism brought with it an autonomous arena of public debate. This arena was preceded by a literary public sphere through the genres of novels and letters which were centred on revealing the self in a top-down manner (Randall 2008). The blossoming of coffee houses and salons and the emergence of an independent market-based press during that era saw the sprouting of a new public engaged in "rational-critical public debate" (1989: 28). Coupled with increased literacy, these webs of communication were argued to allow the discussion of

[45] The book was originally published in German in 1962 but was only translated into English in 1989.

matters which emanated from relatively small groups into affairs of the state and politics. Subsequently, a reason-based consensus was forged which shaped the direction of the state (Curran 1991). This arena is therefore ideally separate from the state and is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can even potentially be critical of the state. It is in this context that the mass media, and more recently the Internet are understood to facilitate communication between citizens and those who hold power in society. A fully functioning public sphere would ideally be composed of an association of communicative spaces in which ideas, information and healthy debate circulate freely to form public opinion (Dahlgren 2005).

However, this reason-based consensus, Habermas (1989) argued, became threatened after the second half of the 19th century as the media and, due to increased state interference, ceased its critical and empowering function. Subsequently, a new corporatist pattern of power relations was established in which the media became part of the process of a 're-feudalisation' of the public sphere as state, industrial conglomerates and the media underwent a process of fusion (Curran 1991: 82; Susen 2011). It is argued that the media became a tool of manipulating mass opinion and people started being treated as consumer units rather than a discerning public. In other words, rational-critical debate gave way to the consumption of culture. The influence of the Frankfurt school is discernible here and is reflected in Habermas' wariness of the 'dumbing down' of the media which coincided with technological advancements and which assumes a fairly strong effects approach (see Habermas 1992). The public sphere has been a significant focus in theorising about the democratic role of the media and as a consequence, his conception has been reformulated many times in response the ever-changing media environment. Habermas too has revised aspects of his initial formulation (Habermas 1992; 1996). He has been critiqued on various grounds. First, it has been argued that he idealises the rational discussion as debates rarely function procedurally as there is always some form of dissent (Calhoun 1992; Dahlgren 1995; Thompson 1995). Then, his public sphere is critiqued for applying not to the world at large "but the specific world of a privileged reading public that engaged in free commerce and established itself as the powerful force of a new bourgeoisie class [that claimed] to speak in the name of humanity" (Chouliaraki 2013: 105-106). This presumed exclusivity of the public sphere has been one of the major sustained criticisms on several fronts. It has been argued that besides being class-based it also excludes women and does not take into account racial and ethnic diversities

(Benhabib 1992; Fraser 1989; Crossley & Michael Roberts 2004). While Fraser acknowledges the indispensability of the public sphere in a democratic society[46], she strongly argues that it needs to be interrogated and reconstructed "if it is to yield a category capable of theorising the limits of actually existing democracy" (Fraser 1992: 111).

Fraser thus disallows the existence of a public sphere so this 'reconstruction' cited above entails that members of subordinated groups constitute alternative publics where they can discuss matters of direct concern to them such as women, children, blacks, gays and lesbians among other categories. As such, Fraser argues;

> I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (1992: 122, emphasis in original).

It is important to note that subaltern counterpublics specifically originate under conditions of dominance and subordination. The reconceptualisation suggested by Fraser is particularly useful for this study. It provides a frame through which to critique the various women's groups as subaltern counterpublics in which they can recast their needs and identities in a space dedicated to them and thus eliminate the extent of their disadvantage in the official public sphere where they are subordinated. Similarly, Benhabib argues "[t]he public sphere comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms of action engage in a practical discourse, evaluating their validity… there may be as many publics as there are controversial general debates about the validity of norms" (Benhabib 1992: 87). An ideal public sphere should thus be inclusive and composed of multiple publics. Notably, the term counterpublic is often used interchangeably with the term alternative public sphere. The alternative public sphere is generally understood to engage with different publics from the traditional public sphere; it uses different sources; concentrates on different issues using different forms of discussing/debating; and, above all. takes place elsewhere than in the mainstream mediated public sphere (Ornerbring & Jonsson 2004; Fraser 1992).

[46] Recognising that democracy is a deeply theoretical term and thus imbued with multi-dimensional meanings, I use it loosely here to refer to democratic ideals of justice, equality, diversity, participation, openness etc., see Dahlberg (2007).

The Habermasian public sphere has also been criticised for binding political communication to the nation state, an idea that is incompatible with today's globalised world (Trenz 2009). This is attributed to its origins within a Westphalian[47] political imaginary which not only cast humans as equal interlocutors but also imagined nation states as equal in contrast to the global world order with its hierarchies of nation states (Chouliaraki 2013), a crucial dynamic not captured in Habermas' initial conception. In a post-Westphalian world, it becomes necessary then, to rethink the public sphere theory in a transnational frame so that it has relevance within this current world order. It is arguably possible to "reformulate *the critical theory of the public sphere* in a way that can illuminate the emancipatory possibilities of the present constellation" (Fraser 2007: 9, emphasis in original). Furthermore, Fraser argues, because all interlocutors should be equally able to engage for deliberation to be considered legitimate, it follows that a gathering cannot be limited to national borders or political citizenship. If interlocutors can be in a group setting, say online for instance (but happen to be from different countries), if there is a fair discussion and everyone is given an opportunity to speak (as Habermas insisted), then that group constitutes a public sphere, or a transnational public sphere (Fraser 2007).

As highlighted above, the Internet with its global reach is seen as offering this democratic potential. It is argued that it has opened a boundless space of communication which connects free and autonomous individuals with shared orientations and concerns (Dahlberg 2001; Dahlgren 2005; Trenz 2009). The potential of the Internet to stimulate debate by engaging and integrating people from different backgrounds is lauded as among the truly democratising principles of communication in online spaces by internet enthusiasts. However, seeing the internet as a marketplace of ideas is viewed by some as a disadvantage in itself. As the argument goes, access to a multiplicity of information does not translate to critical processing of information (Curran et al. 2012; Pinter & Oblak 2006). Even Habermas (2014)[48] - in an interview - does not show much enthusiasm for the perceived or real emancipatory potential of the Internet, he argues thus:

> … we are confronted with a sort of "activation" in which readers themselves become authors. Yet, this in itself does not automatically result in progress on the level of the public sphere…Rather, the classical public sphere stemmed from the fact that

[47] Nationally bound and consisting of equal interlocutors (see Fraser 2007; Chouliaraki 2013).
[48] www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022437 "Internet and Public Sphere: What the Web Can't Do". Jürgen Habermas interviewed by Markus Schwering.

> attention from an anonymous public was "concentrated" on a few politically important questions that had to be regulated. This is what the web does *not* know how to produce. On the contrary, the web actually distracts and dispels.

Habermas' belief in a bounded public sphere is still evident from this quotation. He believes that "digital noise" makes it difficult for people to know and comment on relevant issues. In other words, the role of multiple providers of information shifts from public reasoning and deliberation to self-representation and image politics as argued earlier (also Trenz 2009), which defeats the purpose of an autonomous public sphere of political reasoning and discussion (Benhabib 1992). Furthermore, as already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, corporate interests also compromise this democratic potential of the Internet. It has been argued that the internet came to reflect the inequalities, linguistic division, conflicting values and interests of the real world, especially considering the 'digital divide' (Curran et al. 2012; Mudhai et al. 2009). To rescue the Internet from these bounds, targeted policy reforms that are context specific and that bypass corporate interests have to be implemented to ensure a truly democratic space for citizens the world over (Curran et al. 2012; Dahlberg 2007; Morozov 2011). There is a strand of debate within the public sphere that allows one to envision the possibilities of a public sphere despite all its criticisms. This strand, which informs the understanding of the public sphere within which this study is situated, is the agonistic public sphere and is given attention in the next section which also situates the public sphere debates in a global South perspective.

3.4 The agonistic public sphere

There is a growing scholarship that evaluates the usefulness of the public sphere concept in the global South (Mustapha 2012; Ndlela 2007; Santos 2012; Willems 2012). These scholars offer varying insights on how the public sphere can be appropriated in postcolonial contexts. In the first instance, one of the most cited scholars on African publics, Ekeh (1975), insightfully argued all those years back that the spirit of African politics can be captured by a careful consideration of how the colonial past "has defined for us the spheres of morality that have come to dominate our politics" (1975: 111).

If therefore we are to seek to understand any African public spheres, we have to consider how the effects of colonialism have structured the various publics of the postcolonial nation. It is therefore argued that the initial unitary public sphere concept proposed by Habermas

becomes problematic as it fails to appreciate the alternative publics that emerged both during the settler period and after independence in most African countries (Willems 2012). In fact, Santos (2012) questions the need for the concept altogether arguing instead for global South epistemologies which proceed from an immanent concern with its associated geo-political realities. In a similar vein, Mustapha (2012) argues that the public sphere in Africa has to be reformulated to suit African contexts and in the process the concept will be "de-Westernised" so that its applicability can respond to the specific cultural, political, social and political contexts (Ndlela 2007: 325). In simple terms, the postcolonial Zimbabwean woman is not nationally bound; she inhabits diasporic locations for various reasons. As she attempts to make sense of her new surroundings, she may have periods of yearning for home and the online spaces dedicated to Zimbabwean women offer her a space to 'belong'. The spaces are a form of public sphere, an agonistic public sphere, where she negotiates her identity – spaces which are also spaces of conflict and contestation.

The agonistic public sphere can best be understood as a place of struggle which supports not only the reproduction of dominant social relations but also their contestations by subordinate groups (Dahlberg 2007). It goes beyond the deliberative democracy norm of rational-critical deliberation advocated by Habermas to deal with issues of power and antagonism in deliberative communication, which Laclau and Mouffe (1985) refer to as agonistic pluralism. Antagonism is an acknowledgement that there will inevitably be differences in a democratic society, but these differences can be addressed with tolerance. Agonistic pluralism acknowledges the multiplicity of voices in a democratic society and also notes, at the same time, the complexity of the power structure (Mouffe 1997). Pluralism "refers to the fact that society is an open and discursive field, giving way to multiple identities… the formation of an identity be it individual or collective - is an act of power requiring an I/you or us/them distinction, thereby setting up an adversarial relationship to the other" (Kapoor 2002: 465). The realm of the other, however, is not necessarily to be seen as "an enemy that needs to be destroyed, but whose right to defend those ideas [will] not [be] put into question" (Mouffe 1997: 47). Against this background, it is therefore argued that a unitary identity or social objectivity implied by the deliberative democratic model is inadequate as it does not deal with exclusion and disregards the power dynamic (Chouliaraki 2013; Fraser 1992; Susen 2012).

Two important points have been made here in relation to the agonistic public sphere, one being that it incorporates the question of power and the second that it is concerned with a de-universalisation of social actors, two concerns which are the cornerstone of poststructuralism, the conceptual frame of the study. As discussed in chapter 2, poststructuralism breaks with essentialism or universalising theoretical tendencies. Furthermore, as informed by Foucault, the approach to power is taken to mean that power is not simply repressive but also productive. By stripping power of its automatic negative connotations, power is decentralised, operating not only in the public realm of politics, but also in the micro-politics of everyday life. This occurs then in the online spaces Zimbabwean women occupy where dominant discourses can jostle with contesting ones and constitute complex subjects.

It would appear as though there is an intellectual impasse between advocates for deliberative democracy in their defence of reasoning, justice, and universality and the poststructuralist influence on agonistic plurality in its defence of antagonism, pluralism and contingency (Kapoor 2002). However, more recently Dahlberg (2007; 2013) while noting the tensions between the two approaches that address the role of the public sphere in a democratic society, allows an infusion of a post-Marxist discourse theoretical framework to help her 'radicalise' the deliberative public sphere. She contends that deliberative democracy should not only focus on cultivating deliberation, but it must go further to focus on the "development of counterpublics of excluded discourse and the contestation of the discursive boundaries of the mainstream public sphere on and offline" (Dahlberg 2007: 61).

In conclusion, this study adopts a tripartite framework in its consideration of the Zimbabwean women's online spaces as particular public spheres. First, it establishes a concern with the context and specific application of the public spheres in the global South taking cognisance of its postcolonial condition; second, it is concerned with the effect of this context which taken together with the accelerating conditions of globalisation, has contributed to the formation of diasporic publics; and, third, it considers the constellation of these with the agonistic potential of the public sphere to destabilise taken for granted identities and reveal the power dynamics involved in identity making processes. Ultimately the study acknowledges the public sphere as a space of conflict and contestation and thus can be resistant or conserving of patriarchy.

3.5 Conclusion

The aim of the chapter has been to show how the Internet can be considered as a public sphere particularly in a globalised world. While some scholars point to the emancipatory capabilities of the public sphere and even tout the Internet as a global public sphere, others are quick to point out its limitations. Locating the study as informed by agonistic pluralism, the chapter has opened up the interrogation of online spaces occupied by Zimbabwean women as particular spaces where the articulation of identities and oppositional discourses take place. It provides a framework within which to analyse their postcolonial and diasporic condition outside of the discursive boundaries of the mainstream public sphere and how their mediations intersect with the manifestation of globalisation processes. The next chapter details the research methodology and procedures for data collection and analysis that were employed in this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> Virtual worlds are places of imagination that encompass practices of play, performance, creativity, and ritual… As ethnographers, what interests us about virtual worlds is not what is extraordinary about them, but what is ordinary (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 1).

> An important perspective in CDA is that a text is very rarely the works of a single person. In texts discursive differences are negotiated. They are governed by differences in power which are themselves in part encoded in and determined by discourse and by genre. Therefore, texts are often sites of struggle, in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance (Wodak 2001: 5).

4. Introduction

Consistent with the fact that qualitative inquiry has been frequently lauded for giving voice to the marginalised and has an intrinsic political purpose of challenging the powerful (Hammersly & Atkinson 2007), the study adopts a qualitative methodology to probe the nature of engagements of Zimbabwean women's online discourses. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design and the data gathering procedures employed in this study. It begins with a discussion of qualitative research, placing particular emphasis on certain aspects relating to qualitative internet research. It then provides an overview of debates in the field of internet research. The third section describes the ethnographic approach employed in this study and the associated ethical dilemmas before focusing on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a procedure of textual analysis. Following Fursich (2009), I consider texts to be worthy of analysis in their own right as a critical moment in the circuit of culture that goes beyond the intentional meanings of the producers and the decoded meanings as interpreted by the audiences. It is at this moment that texts reveal their tensions and contradictions and, through independent textual analysis, one is able to discern particular discourses in a given context such as the Zimbabwean women's online spaces analysed in this research and consequently how hegemonic power is discursively performed.

The discussion then moves to an overview of the data and sampling procedures employed before detailing the eclectic approach to critical discourse analysis that I adopt. The chapter concludes by discussing issues of validity and reliability by considering critiques that have been levelled against CDA.

4.1 Qualitative Internet Research

Qualitative Internet research has been described as "the study of the multiple meanings and experiences that emerge around the internet in a particular context" (Orgad 2009). These meanings and experiences, Orgad explains, refer to contexts of use or contexts of design and production processes. It has been my overt interest to inquire into the meanings and experiences produced within Zimbabwean women's online discourses and this influenced my methodological choice. Recognising the internet as a contested space (Baker 2013), and in turn qualitative research as a contested terrain (Silverman 2013), employing qualitative research as a methodological choice meant that I had to be clear about my understanding of the internet as this would influence my research design and procedure. I take as my point of departure the understanding of the internet as a communication medium, a global network of connection, and more importantly as an agonistic sphere where meanings are discursively contested.

First, conceptualising the internet as a communication medium directs attention to the communicative abilities afforded by the internet. I understand *Makhox Women's League* and *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries*, the two internet sites that I examine as having been primarily established and existing for this basic purpose. Second, recognising it as a global network points to the ability of the internet to collapse distance and time. This is significant as this means that diasporic populations are able to communicate beyond physical boundaries and across different time zones. Third, conceptualised as an agonistic sphere, the internet offers a unique space for a discursive interrogation of the negotiation of meaning and identity and, as a researcher, it affords me the opportunity to analyse the role of language in the discursive construction of meaning and consequently knowledge production.

The overarching research question that underpins the study is: what is the nature of engagement of Zimbabwean women in the selected online spaces? As discussed in chapter 1, this necessarily implies a concern with the discursive constitution of Zimbabwean women as particular subjects as contained in their discussions. As they negotiate different discourses and identify with particular subject positions, there is a contestation that occurs between different regimes of 'truth'. I am therefore interested in how these different regimes of truth are validated and how the different gendered identities are constituted in this agonistic space.

The qualitative researcher, Murthy notes, is not devoid of bias, their "data selection and analyses are always biased by agenda, personal histories and social norms" (2008: 40). In my narrative I therefore offer a reflexive account of my inquiry into the online discourses of Zimbabwean women. This means that I acknowledge (as stated in the first chapter) my location in the context and process of inquiry recognising that "reflexive analysis of one's own boundaries is an ethically powerful way of identifying for the self and for others those limitations and factors influencing one's research choices" (Markham 2009: 152).

For my research with its particular textual emphasis, I employ a qualitative approach for its "contextualist" or holistic research strategy (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 272), and its "interpretive particularisation" (Ang 1996: 71). This means that the primary strength of qualitative research is to study human behaviour using inductive and interpretive methods (Markham 2009; Orgad 2009; Lindlof & Taylor 2002). I therefore chose the two internet sites for a close reading so as to understand the contexts within which women's online discourses take place. In order to interrogate the nature of this engagement, I employ an ethnographic approach with its traditional emphasis on thick description (Geertz 1973). Before giving details of my ethnographic approach, a brief discussion about the nature of research on the internet is necessary.

The advent of the internet and its continued embeddedness in people's everyday lives has brought with it important methodological concerns. Discussions about research on the internet centre around the significance of merging the online and offline on one hand (Gajalla 2009; Bakardjieva 2009; Miller & Slater 2000) and on the other hand whether old or new methods should apply when researching online practices (Livingstone 2002; Jankoswki & van Selm 2005; Boellstorff et al 2012). I discuss these in turn.

There is a broad consensus that the online and offline should not be considered as separate entities since individuals exist both online and offline, and since when they are online they are not essentially 'disembodied' (Gajalla 2009). Hence, there appears to be no reason to separate the online and the offline because they are entwined (Bakardjieva 2009). Similarly, Miller & Slater argue that internet media "cannot escape into a self-enclosed apartness" (2000: 5) because they are embedded in other social spaces (see also Hine 2000; Murthy 2008, Markham 2004; Orgad 2005; Baker 2013).

However, Hine (2000) cautions, researchers should remain critical as to the reasons why they move from the online setting to the offline setting. If it is for triangulation purposes it is acceptable (Orgad 2005), but if employed to authenticate online data using offline data then it is considered problematic precisely because it puts into question and disqualifies the credibility or accuracy of independent online data on its own terms. Furthermore, Hine argues, contacting online informants in the offline contexts potentially carries the risk of compromising the relationship between the researcher and the informants. Orgad captures these complexities well:

> Do we need offline data to make sense of online phenomena? Do we necessarily need offline information to be able to adequately account for online meanings and experience? Or can we produce quality, persuasive, and grounded qualitative research of an internet phenomenon that draws merely on online data? What claims can a study relying only on data retrieved online make? The opposite question is as intriguing: If the internet is treated as a means of communication that is used in an everyday social context, can it therefore be studied as such - that is; merely by using methodological procedures in offline contexts, without any online data? (2009: 37).

This points to the need for careful consideration in decisions to mix data from online and offline contexts. Notwithstanding these cautions, Orgad (2005; 2009) argues that the choices should be consistent with the research goals. More helpfully, I am inclined to agree with Bakardjieva (2009: 58) who suggests a move away from the online/offline dichotomy to more useful distinctions like user-centred versus medium centred approaches, naturally occurring versus researcher elicited data, and participant observation versus non-participant observation, among other typologies that might enhance our research design choices.

Similar anxieties plague debates about methodology with "different camps of qualitative researchers orient[ing] differently to [the internet's] ambiguous gifts" (Lindlof & Taylor 2002: 265). Lindlof and Taylor identify these camps as composed of discourse analysts whose orientation is towards an observational role for researchers and a close analysis of data on one hand, while the other consists of ethnographers whose orientation is towards participation in a culture by researchers. My research advocates for a "building bridges" approach (Miller & Fox 2004: 35) that merges these two methodological 'camps'. The linking of two methodological strategies (being ethnography and critical discourse analysis) is mutually enriching and shares common interests in how social life is constituted through language use and reflexive accounts of research processes. They are also both empirically

based and, taken together; these two perspectives offer a discursively oriented ethnography that:

> … focuses on setting members' interpretive and interactional competencies, including those that are so taken for granted that members are unlikely to mention them to one another or to qualitative researchers…Discursively focused research on social settings…emphasises *how social realities are always under construction*. It considers how setting members continually assemble and use the interactional and interpretive resources "provided" by social settings to construct, defend, repair, and change social realities (Miller & Fox 2004: 38, emphasis added).

This is achieved through a careful reading of texts or discourses in these social settings as I do in my research. The point to emphasise is that the two methodological approaches are not dichotomous, but rather complementary because they have shared interests in illuminating the way individuals and groups construct, resist and even sustain power differences.

What has been of particular concern in methodological debates is whether to study the internet using 'traditional' methods of data collection or follow an adaptive approach (Livingstone 2002; Jankoswki & van Selm 2005; Boellstorff et al. 2012; Miller & Slater 2002; Hine 2005a). It is argued that internet research is not 'different' from other forms of social science inquiry to the extent that it "requires unique, yet-to-be-refined methods of study" (Jankoswki & van Selm 2005: 200). While acknowledging that methodological innovations do occur, Jankoswki and van Selm argue that most innovation seems to occur at the micro level rather than the macro level. The micro level deals with specific data gathering methods while the macro level deals with epistemological issues such as positivism, interpretative investigation, and critical analytic studies.

Similar to this position, an adaptive approach to internet research acknowledges that while social science research is largely dependent on precedent in measuring methodological adequacy (Hine 2005b), it is important to recognise that the "internet provides new opportunities for the formation of research relationships and the specification of research sites and strategies" (2005b: 245). Thus, a researcher approaching the internet as a 'new' research site might use 'traditional' data gathering methods but adapt them appropriately for technologically mediated interactions (Hine 2000; Baker 2013, Miller & Slater 2000). This argument has been developed more fully in debates about ethnography in relation to the internet which I discuss further in the next section.

4.1.2 A double-sited ethnographic approach

As reflected in its name (*ethno* - people and *graphy* - describing/writing), ethnography is committed to analysing social practices in different cultural contexts and how people make meaning out of them (Lindlof & Taylor 2002). While traditionally associated with physical geographic boundaries popularly known as the field, ethnography has recently been applied to the internet and has had to adapt to a different context while maintaining its epistemological foundation of describing or narrating (Murthy 2008; Hine 2000). Ethnography of the internet therefore examines how the technology is experienced and negotiated within specific contexts of its use (Hine 2000; 2009; Boellstorff 2012). The aim is to unveil the taken for granted ways in which people make sense of themselves and their lives. While seemingly straightforward, conducting ethnographic research on the internet is not without problems as the various terms employed to make sense of this kind of research indicate, for example "virtual ethnography" (Hine 2000), "netnography" (Kozinets 2002), "digital ethnography" (Murthy 2008), "cyberethnography" (Gajalla 2009) and "social media ethnography" (Postill & Pink 2012). Here, I maintain the phrase online ethnography for my research.

Therefore, to the extent that it can be defined at all, online ethnography refers to "an adaptive self-reflexive 'lived experience' negotiated between the researcher (who constitutes the primary research instrument) and the context of research" (Mabweazara 2013b: 100). As an adaptive approach, ethnography employs a variety of methods often responding to local contexts (Hammersly & Atkinson 2007; Hine 2000; 2005b). However, this openness and flexibility should not suggest disorderliness as its critics often do, but rather attests to its strength. As Hine notes, "ethnography might be adaptive, but it is still purposive" (2009: 6). Furthermore, the researcher's central role as the primary instrument of inquiry involves long term participation by the researcher in the research context (Jankowski & Wester 1991).

Accordingly, my research approach captures these concerns as it entails a long term engagement in a social setting (Miller & Slater 2000). My research is carried out in a double-site context (being the two sites described below) which constitutes the social setting(s). Immersion in a field setting is recognised as a central tenet of ethnography (Baym 2009; Lindlof & Taylor 2002; Jankowski & Wester 1991; Rutter & Smith 2005). It is also recognised as a precursor to critical textual analysis which Hall (1975) describes as a long

preliminary soak in the data. To this end I 'lived' online during the year 2015 when I collected the data used for analysis in this research. The reason for this period is that the data is largely repetitive and nothing new would be gained from extending the period of research as there would be basically same situations but different characters or circumstances. Following Gajalla (2009), this 'living' online became my strategy for data collection as I observed intensely Zimbabwean women's interactions on these forums. The nature of engagement in both sites demands this intensity as there are numerous postings in a single day and there is a corresponding high response rate from group members.

During this period, I 'lurked' on the Facebook pages of *Makhox Women's League* and *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* so as to avoid compromising "naturally occurring interaction" (Lindlof & Taylor 2002). Naturally occurring talk refers to spoken language or everyday conversation which occurs without any manipulation or without being set up by the researcher as in the form of a questionnaire or experimental research (Potter 2004). The Facebook groups I chose as research sites fit into the description of naturally occurring communities that can be found in cyberspace because of their self-documenting nature (Hammersly & Atkinson 2007). Thus, the members of these groups actively produce and circulate written material which then has been identified as the raw material for analysis. I took particular note of interesting and significant posts in relation to how feminine subjects were constituted. I therefore chose topics that seemed unusual and invited controversial views which I would then copy and paste onto a Microsoft Word document and archive into different folders for each site (this is dealt with further later). The advantages of lurking lie in the unobtrusive nature of the method which also enables rigorous analysis of data (Lindlof & Taylor 2002; Hine 2008), although critics have described it as equivalent to "active deception" (Farrimond 2013: 182).

As the researcher and in relation to my particular textual focus I decided on covert rather than overt participation. It should not be inferred however that the covert researcher is disengaged, "but [she] is also to some extent a participant, sharing some of the concerns, emotions and commitments of the research subjects" (Hine 2000: 47). I became so engaged with the activity on these sites that I was online catching up on the latest discussions in every spare moment, even during taxi rides. I followed up stories on *Makhox Women's League* diligently and, often with a mixture of intrigue and disbelief, I became engrossed in the stories being

told and advice offered. With regards to *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* I became so engaged that I developed the habit of taking screenshots of information I found to be personally helpful. (There are a number of recipes which I confess I have tried and refer to frequently). At the same time, I had to keep a critical distance so as to avoid "going native" (Orgad 2005: 56). Going native refers to being deeply engrossed in the culture that is the object of research to the extent that the researcher loses their critical edge and becomes part of the community being researched. I submit that not posting anything on my part on any of the groups allowed me to maintain a critical stance.

4.2 Some ethical considerations

As alluded to above, ethical dilemmas abound in internet research. One of the primary issues concerns privacy of these sites which ranges from public, semi-public to private. If it is public and the information shared is not sensitive, then it is argued that one does not need to obtain consent for research (see Sveningsson 2009; Ess & Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) 2002; Markham & Buchanan 2012; Buchanan & Zimmer 2012). This however also raises the question of whether in that case researchers should rather respect the participants who create a "public private space" (Farrimond 2013: 182), that is a private space for participants in a public group. In turn, this raises another set of problems concerning obtaining consent for groups with thousands of members as it is difficult to get each and every person to sign a consent form (both groups have a membership which is over 95 000 each). It is argued that obtaining consent in such situations has the potential of causing confusion as participants are not online at the same time and seeing the same message asking for consent each time they log on poses a potential exit from the group by some users (Sveningsson 2009; also see Boellstorff et al. 2012). However, while this works against acquiring broad consent at the same time, it is further argued, interactions in social media sites are about sharing experiences and in as much as they may be public it is unlikely that members would consider that their interactions might be used by researchers (Farrimond 2013; Boellstorff et al 2012; Markham 2012). As a result, some members may object to it. One way of overcoming this ethical pitfall is to ensure anonymity of participants by, for example, adopting pseudonyms or using pronouns (she, they) as I have done in this research.

However, the issue of ensuring anonymity in internet settings comes with its own set of related dilemmas. Concerns arise as to whether it is necessary to further anonymise data

considering that most user names are already relatively anonymised as opposed to the fact that data mining software can trace original sources of data even if anonymised (Farrimond 2013; Markham 2012). At the same time, this is arguably a fitting point of departure for internet research ethics that challenges the idea that traditional research ethics are a perfect fit for research in internet contexts. In this regard, Sveningsson (2009) argues that at times we need to look beyond ethical guidelines to see what values we want to uphold. As Markham (2012) notes, the sister concepts of harm and vulnerability should always be considered within privacy issues thus "when we ensure that our research subjects are not harmed, humiliated, or offended, it may not always be necessary to follow single rules and regulations exactly" (Sveningsson 2009: 84). Nevertheless, because of the volatility and ambiguity of the internet, a set of guidelines or recommendations exist for internet researchers in the form of reports by AoIR (see Ess & AoIR 2002; Markham & Buchanan 2012). Developing from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee of 2002, Markham and Buchanan stress that because of the dialectical tensions of the internet a case-based approach should be favoured by internet researchers.

The issue of privacy and ethical practice takes on a different meaning when considered in the context of Facebook and other social networks where people seem to 'display' their private lives; it has been noted a number of times that people tend to reveal more about themselves online (Hine 2009; Stern 2009). As discussed in the previous chapter, a tension exists that concerns expectations about privacy on these platforms while at the same time governments and the corporate world also seek access to people's personal information for their purposes (Baclau 2009). Needless to say, this presents a complex situation for qualitative researchers: drawing the line between what is private or public becomes blurred (Stern 2009). For instance, as mentioned earlier, people may participate extensively in the public realm but still have perceptions of privacy (Markham & Buchanan 2012). Furthermore, they may consider the privacy of their public communication as contextual (Markham 2012). Here Markham aligns her argument with Nissebaum's (2010) concept of contextual integrity which holds that privacy can be understood by tending to the nuances of each situation as it arises. Nissenbaum argues that the right to privacy does not constitute a right to secrecy or a right to control, but rather a right to the appropriate flow of personal information.

Fuchs (2011) takes concern regarding privacy on Facebook by applying a critical political economy lens. He argues that Facebook as a capitalist enterprise is premised on the logic of capital accumulation. In order to maximise profits, privacy is conceived as something that individuals have control over (which he conceives as the liberalist privacy concept) and yet, paradoxically, in order to actually use the platform, they have to agree to yield some of their privacy. He elucidates this point by quoting Facebook's privacy policy which states that they may share some of the users' information with third parties. What is not explicit however, is how they share this information, with whom and to whose benefit. To put it in Fuchs' words:

> So the main form of privacy on Facebook is the intransparency of capital's use of personal user data that is based on the appropriation of user data by Facebook… The private-public relation has another dimension on Facebook: the privately generated user data and the individual user behaviour become commodified on Facebook. This data is sold to advertising companies so that targeted advertising is presented to users and Facebook accumulates profit that is privately owned by the company. *Facebook commodifies private data that is used for public communication in order to accumulate capital that is privately owned* (2011: 157, emphasis added).

Facebook users, therefore, are exploited by the company since they are not paid for the surplus value they produce. As argued extensively in the previous chapter, data mining serves as the conduit for the company's economic ends (Fuchs 2011, 2014; Andrejevic 2011, 2014) so a critical political economy approach questions the legitimating privacy concepts that cultivate social inequality by protecting the corporate interests of companies like Facebook. Fuchs (2011) therefore advocates for a socialist privacy concept that protects workers and consumers as opposed to a liberalist privacy concept that purports to uphold individual privacy when in actual fact it disguises the operation of private capitalist interests.

Along the same vein, in recognition of the fact that nowadays most people are connected through digital media and networks, Ess (2014) makes a strong case for shared ethical responsibility. He argues that instead of an individual being solely responsible for their actions online, there must be a distributed responsibility for the various actions we undertake on digital media. Seeing as how our use of social networks envelops us in a "complex web of interactions between social networking service users and their online and offline communities, social network developers, corporations, governments and other institutions" (Vallor 2012), it becomes imperative that our ethical choices and responsibilities be shared across such networks in the same manner. To this end, Ess (2014) argues that digital media

ethics should be approached as globally oriented ethics that is sensitive to different cultures across the globe.

A related topic of concern relates to the differences in epistemological ethical understandings of privacy in the global North and the global South. The argument holds that individual privacy in the global North is given primacy and thus privacy policies will tend to reflect this fact (Ess 2014). In contrast in the global South, particularly in Africa where the philosophy of *ubuntu* (see chapter 1) is held in high esteem, individual privacy is not as significant as being part of a community (Burk 2007). The protection of communal information is prioritised more so attempts to withhold personal information might be considered deviant since personal identity is dependent upon the community, Burk further states. To this end therefore, Ess (2014) argues for ethical pluralism which dispels the dichotomous right or wrong approach to ethics but instead advocates for sensitivity to contexts and cultural nuances in trying to understand ethical concerns in the digital media age. It is also this spirit that the AoIR 2012 report captures as quoted below:

> The uniqueness and almost endless range of specific situations defy attempts to universalise experience or define in advance what might constitute harmful research practice. We take the position that internet research involves a number of dialectical tensions that are best addressed and resolved at the stage they arise in the course of a research study. In saying so we reiterate the value of a casuistic or case-based approach (Markham & Buchanan 2012: 7).

Against this background, I would like to emphasise that the ethical choices I made in my research were context specific. Noting that ethical concerns (such as privacy, consent and anonymity) did not disappear with the onset of online communications and/or research but rather became more important (Zimmer 2010), I carefully considered these in my research procedure. I approached ethical considerations in both groups differently.

First, *Makhox Women's League* is a public page of which to be a member one simply has to 'like'/ 'follow' the page as it is publicly visible and therefore open to anyone with an email address (Farrimond 2013). Interestingly however, *Makhox Women's League* raises privacy issues to its members in the form of posts every morning urging members to be vigilant. They also protect the privacy of those who post on the groups by hiding their identity. It is only in job related posts that identity is not hidden and the identity of those who comment on posts is visible. Privacy is therefore emphasised as the personal responsibility of group members or

participants. Following recommendations by Ess & AoIR (2002), there were fewer obligations for me to protect individual privacy and the right to informed consent since this group is acknowledged as public. Moreover, due to the sheer size of the group, as mentioned earlier, I made a decision not to seek informed consent because it is highly unlikely that all group members would have consented to have their interactions analysed. As argued by Farrimond (2013), having a dual researcher/site member role has the advantage of helping the researcher to assess the likely impact of being researched on that virtual community as a member.

On the other hand, however, *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* is classified as a "private group" meaning that anyone can find the group, but it is only members who can see posts and other group members. Existing members simply 'add' friends to the group for them to become members or prospective members can send a request on the page to join the group. It was not going to be ethical for me to not seek informed consent due to the private nature of the group, however at the same time I worried that revealing my position as a researcher would affect the "naturally-occurring" talk which was essential for me to capture the untainted discourses that Zimbabwean women engage in online. I also faced the same dilemma as before regarding how to handle seeking consent due to the size of the group. I therefore approached the (seven) group administrators as representatives of the group members in the form a letter requesting for informed consent which was granted (see Appendix 1). Taking the concept of 'do no harm' into consideration, I concluded that there would be no harm beyond feelings of being "spied on" by some group members and so therefore to further minimise any harm I decided to anonymise all member comments and not use photographs from the group in order to protect their privacy.

4.3 Critical discourse analysis 'with an attitude'

With its explicitly stated focus on interrogating gendered identities and power relations, this research had to settle on an approach that would effectively unravel these various identities and relations of power within Zimbabwean women's online engagement, hence I employed discourse analysis "with an attitude" (van Dijk 2001: 96). This kind of approach is 'critical' in the sense that it focuses on the role of discourse not only in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination in various forms but also on the resistances to such instances. In other words, critical discourse analysis seeks to unravel opaque

relationships of power with the transformative aim of achieving social justice (Wodak & Meyer 2009; Hart & Cap 2014). Critical discourse studies with an overt concern with feminism sometimes fall under the title of feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA).

FCDA emerged from within discourse studies to distinctly label work within the field that has an explicit 'feminist' concern and can be loosely described as a political perspective of gender (Lazar 2005). Such work takes a critical feminist stance in relation to gender (as it intersects with other power relations) with a broad understanding of gender that encapsulates "sexuality and reproduction; sexual difference, embodiment, the social constitution of male, female, intersexual, other; masculinity and femininity; ideas, discourses, practices, subjectivities and social relationships" (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 5). This critical perspective helps one to investigate gendered lives and experiences as shaped by taken for granted social assumptions that are discursively produced, reproduced and also negotiated and challenged at the same time with a view to change these hegemonic power relations.

With overlapping social emancipatory goals, CDA provides FCDA with critical tools to analyse different forms of inequalities, including the critique of discourse that maintains the patriarchal social order. This can be done through unveiling how gendered relations of power are produced, maintained and contested "in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and personal identities in texts and talk, (Lazar 2005: 11) as I do in this study. I therefore take CDA and FCDA not as separate entities but mutually informing approaches to my analysis of gendered identities in Zimbabwean women's forums.

It is important to state from the outset that critical discourse analysis (CDA), or critical discourse studies (CDS) as some scholars prefer, is a multidisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary approach to critical social research, most often involving textual analysis. It therefore has no monolithic theoretical or methodological premise. This makes studies in CDA "multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds, oriented towards different data and methodologies" (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 5; see also van Dijk 2001; Meyer 2001; Philips & Jorgensen 2002). Theory and methodology are therefore understood to be eclectic and applied according to their effectiveness in illuminating social problems under investigation.

As such there are a number of approaches to CDA, including but not limited to a socio-cognitive approach, dispositive analysis, dialectical-relational approach, social actors approach, discourse-historical approach and corpus-linguistics approach (see Wodak & Meyer 2009 for detailed descriptions of each). To this list, Hart & Cap (2014) add emerging developments namely, critical metaphor studies, cognitive linguistic approach, the legitimisation-proximisation model and the Neuchatel/Fribourg school of critical cognitive pragmatics. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss each in detail but I refer the reader to Hart & Cap (2014) for greater detail. However, mentioning these diverse approaches indicates how the scope of studies under the CDA umbrella is constantly evolving and expanding into new territories. Also important to note is that these categories are not cast in stone but rather show theoretical affiliations, methodological connections and even epistemological roots which also tend to reflect interdisciplinarity (Wodak &Meyer 2009; Hart & Cap 2014). They therefore cross-pollinate each other. Certainly, the sheer volume of entry points ranging from humanities, social and cognitive science, and critical linguistics can be overwhelming for the critical discourse analyst. Whilst this can be construed as a weakness by some, the ability to draw from different approaches in one's analysis is readily lauded as a particular strength as Philips & Jorgensen argue:

> It is possible to create one's own package by combining elements from different discourse analytical perspectives and, if appropriate non-discourse analytical perspectives. Such *multiperspectival* work is not only permissible but positively valued in most forms of discourse analysis. The view is that different perspectives provide different forms of knowledge about a phenomenon so that, together, they produce a broader understanding (2002: 4, emphasis in original).

4.3.1 Discourse, power and language

The concepts of 'discourse' and 'power' are often conceived of differently in all these approaches mentioned above but they share points of convergence. As already established, I take a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis that regards discourse as not only functioning to simply reflect reality, but rather shape and also enable social reality (Jäger & Maier 2009; Hall 1997). Therefore while discourse is shaped by the situations, institutions and social structures in which it operates, it also constitutes these situations, institutions and social structures, including the social identities and relationships between their discourse participants (Hart & Cap 2014). In other words, discourse produces subjects and social reality. This is the entry point I find useful for probing the identities of Zimbabwean women

as they interact in these various groups. Understanding the women as active co-producers of discourses (and meaning) means that, through their interactions, I am able to analyse the ongoing process of producing 'reality'. If discourses regulate ways of talking, thinking and acting and thus produce regular effects of power (Foucault 1980), then it is possible to identify and analyse the discursive contestations among these groups by establishing who speaks, with what authority and what topics are foregrounded or eschewed.

A Foucauldian critical discourse analysis pays attention to how knowledge is historically established and the role of knowledge in constituting subjects of particular discourses (Jäger & Maier 2009). Accordingly, the analysis of discourse within this framework is interested in the power/knowledge nexus as it relates to the formation of identities and societal knowledge (Mengibar 2015). Applying this lens in my study allows me to analyse the way discourses in both sites in my study function to produce particular subjectivities. Additionally, identifying the 'truths' and/or knowledge produced in these sites is a precursor for identifying the associated power dimensions. And if power is everywhere and operates in a net-like organisation (Foucault 1980), it means that it can either be discursively legitimated or contested/challenged. My concern therefore is unravelling these different discourses. As one of the opening quotes of this chapter suggest, texts are often the sites of struggle where discourses battle for dominance (Reisigl & Wodak 2009; also Fairclough 1998).

It is necessary to distinguish at this point that while the words 'text' and 'discourse' are often conflated; there is a distinction between the two. "*Discourse* implies patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures whereas a *text* is a specific unique realisation of a discourse" (Wodak 2008: 6, emphasis in original). In other words, the text can be considered as a linguistic or semiotic unit but in its broader, poststructuralist sense, it can be understood as any cultural practice that can be 'read' so it can be any spoken or written discourse which encompasses any audio or visual cultural artefact (Fairclough 1995b; Fursich 2009; Phillipov 2013) such as the internet sites in this study. So 'reading' these internet sites as texts provides an opportunity to identify the versions of reality that are made available across these particular texts and the subject positions they enable, all the while mindful of the fact that a single subject can occupy different or even contradictory subject positions from which they speak (Philips & Jorgensen 2002). It is important for one to be able to distinguish the power effects of a discourse and the power effects of texts; a single text (such as a film or a

photograph) hardly has effects in contrast to a discourse whose significance lies in the repetition of statements which solidify into knowledge over time (Jäger & Maier 2009).

This implies an overt interest in language as a "machine" that generates and consequently constitutes social reality through discourse (Philips & Jorgensen 2002: 9). Language, therefore, is dialectically related to power to the extent that it "indexes power, expresses power and is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power" (Wodak 2001: 5). An important point to note, however, is that power does not derive from language, but rather, language can be used to challenge and also change perceptions of social reality (Wodak 2001). To this end, CDA is not concerned with language use *per se* but with the linguistic character of social practices and structures (Richardson 2007). Given that words and language (notwithstanding images and videos) are key resources in the presentation of the self online (Vasquez 2014), an analysis of social media interactions is invaluable for the opportunity to investigate how in those instances "identities are discursively (and semiotically) constructed and dialogically performed" (Seargeant & Tagg 2014: 6).

4.3.2 Fairclough's CDA approach

As a critical linguist concerned with issues of power, Fairclough (1992, 1995a, 1995b) formulated a three-dimensional model of analysis that shows the systematic links between the text, discourse practice and the socio-cultural practice. He explains his approach thus:

> By 'critical' discourse analysis I mean discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (1995b: 132-133).

Fairclough is interested in the relationship between texts and the wider social practices. He places emphasis on the opacity of the relationship between language, power and discourse because these linkages often go unnoticed. In his model therefore, on the level of texts, one attends to the analysis of language, that is, its form and content (Fairclough 1992; Deacon et al. 1999). Textual analysis can be done at micro and macro levels as well; from looking at vocabulary and grammar to looking at sentence construction and cohesion as well (Richardson 2007). However, it should be noted that because of the size of my data it is not

possible to engage in detailed linguistic analysis. (I detail my eclectic approach in the next section.) The second level of the discursive practice dimension attends to production and consumption processes. It addresses how production processes affect the text that is produced and also simultaneously considers how the audiences decode these messages while recognising interpretation as socio-culturally contingent. Understanding that production and interpretive processes are influenced by the institutional and social contexts in which they operate leads to the third level, socio-cultural practice. The analysis becomes 'critical' discourse analysis, Richardson (2007) argues, because the first and second levels are expanded and viewed in relation to the wider society. This level constitutes "the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of" (Fairclough 1995a: 57), the communicative event referring to the text. It requires subjecting discourse to immanent critique by questioning and challenging features inherent in the discourse that aid in sustaining or contesting unequal relations of power.

Fairclough's model has been widely used as it is argued to provide an accessible and practical way of *doing* CDA (Philips & Jorgensen 2002: Richardson 2007). By positioning it as textually oriented discourse analysis, Fairclough (1992; 2003) advances his model as complementary to other theoretically aligned methods of discourse analysis. His objective is to bridge the gap between textual analysis and social analysis by combining aspects of the two in a holistic approach that sees language use as a form of social practice and not an individual activity. This positions language in three related ways: first, as a part of society and not external to it, second, language as a social process, meaning that texts play a central role as they bear 'traces' of their production and at the same time offer 'cues' for their interpretation (Fairclough 1989: 24) and third, seeing language as social practice means considering how production and interpretive processes are conditioned by other non-linguistic aspects of society. Fairclough's value lies in his recognition of the fact that social analysis is intrinsic to a critical study of discourse (Deacon et al. 1999). He sees his approach as operationalising Foucault's insights in a "discursive and linguistic analysis of real texts" (Fairclough 1992: 62). Furthermore, it is useful because it provides multiple points of analytical entry because:

> … it enables the analyst to focus on the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxtapositioning, their sequencing, their layout. However, it also requires that the historical determination of these selections is recognised in order

> to understand that these choices are tied to the conditions of possibility (Janks 1997: 329).

Janks' argument serves to reiterate Fairclough's argument that texts should be analysed with the consideration that they operate as part of socially regulated discourses which also has a bearing on productive and consumption processes. I adopt the three dimensional analytic model in my study.

4.4 Data and sampling

The two sites studied in the year 2015 consist of *Makhox Women's League* and *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries.* There were numerous posts and articles throughout the year and given that critical discourse analysis is particularly an in-depth and time-consuming method of textual analysis, it was impractical to analyse every post and article during that period. As most studies in CDA analyse "typical texts" that are chosen for what they will contribute to the particular social problem being investigated (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 23), I employed purposive sampling to select the texts for analysis as informed by the research objectives and questions guiding the study (Hansen et al 1998; Punch 1998; Deacon et al. 2007).

As mentioned earlier, the overarching research question underpinning the study is: what is the nature of engagement of Zimbabwean women in the selected online spaces? To determine the nature of this engagement required that I filter and categorise those topics that created a definite response among the readers on each site. I considered posts that had at least 30 comments to be deemed of significance, but generally comments exceeded 100. 'Comments' on Facebook are arguably indicative of the care and thought that has been invested into making particular associations (van Loon & Unsold 2014). Furthermore, van Loon and Unsold argue, comments are often more performative, rather than informative, so it is important to pay attention to them in order to interrogate the performance.

In the first round of reading, I simply copied and pasted (onto a Word document) topics that had a high response rate, and to a smaller extent, likes and shares thereby indicating their significance. In addition, I selected those topics that generated controversy around an issue pertaining to gender, notably how women oppose or support relationships outside of wedlock, marriage and Christianity. I was also interested in what they were saying about sex and therefore looked for those posts, usually accompanied by a hint of scandal. The topics had to

link to the way the women are constituted as traditional, modern, customary and postfeminist subjects and how they negotiate these subject positions. At this stage however, I was more interested in what types of discourses Zimbabwean women were producing about themselves in general rather than having a rigid guiding framework on what to look for. I consciously opened myself up to surprising insights and intuition arising from the data (Sullivan & Delaney 2016). Indeed, to investigate the consequent gendered identities facilitated by these discussions "encourages attention to the humble, the mundane, the little shifts in our ways of thinking and understanding, the small and contingent struggles, tensions and negotiations that give rise to something new and unexpected" (Rose 2004: 11). This 'something new and unexpected' that Rose refers to is an effect of discourse.

In the second round, I paid particular attention to the comments in the posts I had selected and started identifying the narrative structure, the arguments and the characters as well as the themes that were becoming more regular across the texts. From the 38 posts that I purposively selected I came up with three broad categories on *Makhox Women's League*: love and relationships, sex and nationhood. What became immediately clear to me was the importance that was attributed to marriage and sex in particular, so in my next round of categorisation I paid attention to these themes. I considered what was being said about marriage and sex and therefore combed through the comments looking for the moral points that were being made regarding each. Regarding the category of nationhood, I considered the animosity that seemed to exist between Zimbabweans living in South Africa and those living in Zimbabwe.

I was faced with ambiguous discourses relating to patriarchal privilege, religion and spirituality, financial independence and belonging. I then revisited theory to establish linkages between academic literature and my data to help me explore these contradictory discourses. From this point, it was a back and forth process between the theory and data, identifying points of convergence and contradiction, refining my thought process along the way and further filtering the data. I selected posts that had divergent views and in which individuals explicitly articulated specific subjectivities by positioning themselves as traditional, liberal modern subjects and postfeminist subjects. From the 38 posts that I had initially identified, I specifically reference 20 lengthy posts which are representative of the whole sample as the topics recur, in chapters 5 and 6 in which I discuss the findings and

analysis related to *Makhox Women's League.* The majority of these posts are in *isi*Ndebele, and I footnote them as they appeared on the page, and offer an English summary in the discussion. With regards to comments that appear on the posts, I quote them verbatim and immediately put the literal translation in brackets.

I applied the same strategy for *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* in which the following themes emerged: household finances, motherhood, intra-household relationships and house work. Again, what immediately struck me was the importance accorded to marriage (husbands in particular), managing intra-household relationships, finance and general housework. My goal was to identify controversial posts related to these issues. I considered controversy as relating to the way subject positions are engaged or mediated. Subject positions include conservative, traditional or customary views in relation to marriage, relationships with husbands, children and helpers that are negotiated from different positions including postfeminist and Christian subject positions. This platform allows members to search for topics so after the initial categorisation, I did a search on topics that seemed to be mentioned often particularly relating to husbands and *sadza/isitshwala* (stiff porridge), the staple food in Zimbabwe. I was faced with interesting discourses about submission, spirituality, housework and emancipation and considered the contesting views that were being advanced. Using the same process as for the other group, I moved back and forth between academic literature and my data, looking for the linkages to help me process my findings. From the initial 31 posts I had selected for analysis, I specifically allude to 14 of these in the findings[49] (in chapter 7) which contained conflicting views regarding the themes identified and in which participants explicitly aligned themselves within specific traditional patriarchal discourses and/or liberal modern discourses. The posts on this group are relatively brief considering that they are mostly accompanied by photographs[50] and so most of them are paraphrased and a few are footnoted. The posts (and comments) usually incorporate both English and Shona and I offer translations of Shona in brackets.

Below is the final sample I selected for analysis:

[49] Some posts which share the same theme are referred to in passing and not necessarily included in the list of the final sample to avoid redundancy.

[50] I made a decision not to use the photographs as this entailed a potentially tedious process of contacting each original poster and requesting permission to use their photographs. This was the condition that was attached to the informed consent that was granted as far as using the data on the site.

Makhox Women's League sample of posts

Item	Date (2015)	Title/Summary	Comments/Likes
1	8 Jan	Concern with Zimbabweans living in SA: we are losing our language	278 comments 41 likes
2	8 Feb	Husband left me for another woman	243 comments 27 likes
3	20 Feb	*Lunyoka* saga (married woman stuck with lover during sex)	356 comments 98 likes
4	22 Feb	Follow up on *Lunyoka* (let's sympathise with this woman)	183 comments 47 likes
5	22 Feb	My husband is abusive and he also cheats on me	53 comments 13 likes
6	23 Feb	Help, my husband beat me after he saw my post asking for advice on *Makhox*	105 comments 13 likes
7	25 Feb	Cheating husband, *makhwapheni* has given him *isichitho*	143 comments 10 likes
8	8 May	Ladies how do you manage to kiss your husbands during the night or in the morning before you wake up without brushing your teeth? I find it repulsive	93 comments 21 likes
9	20 May	Ladies, I have a friend who wants to elongate her labia minora, what can she use?	42 comments 11 likes
10	12 Jun	Ladies please help; small house wants to destroy my marriage. Prayer advocates wait, I just want a seer	63 comments 12 likes

11	20 Jun	A prophet once told me I would go mad if I visit my estranged family, I did visit them but I am still normal. Don't be too trusting of *prophets*.	49 comments 25 likes
12	Oct 18	I am a 26 year old lady with a boyfriend and a child but I have recently started being attracted to women. I know this is wrong and I need to get rid of this demon.	85 comments 19 likes
13	Sep 12	Thank you for teaching us tricks to "beautify" our vaginas	82 comments 12 likes
14	Sep 24	Advice: Don't date a married man-speaking from experience	127 comments 79 likes
15	Oct 8	I fought with my husband and he criticised my vagina, how do I continue living with him?	181 comments 51 likes
16	Oct 27	I met a man on WeChat, he's 20 years older than me and wants to marry me, what should I do?	323 comments 36 likes
17	Nov 25	I met a white man 19 years older than me, he wants me to go and join him overseas and marry him. What should I do?	110 comments 12 likes
18	Dec 12	Zimbabweans in SA don't do these things when you get home (language)	256 comments 58 likes, 3 shares
19	Dec 12	Soul brothers *njiva* joke meme	186 comments 130 likes, 4 shares
20	Dec 13	*Njiva* joke	148 comments 20 likes

Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's diaries sample of posts

Item	Date (2015)	Title/Summary	Likes/Comments
1	15 Jan	Picture of husband's breakfast plate with four boiled eggs	355 comments 557likes
2	27 Mar	Dad cooking with baby on back	532 comments 1126 likes
3	28 Mar	I'm making coleslaw what else should I add, daddy has the baby on his back	187 comments 547 likes
4	Jul 12	Survey: ladies do you expect your teenage sons to cook and clean	239 comments 75 likes
5	Jul 13	These are my family's plates tonight, including the maid	353 comments 601 likes
6	Jul 23	Diet tomorrow, *sadza* days are the best	120 comments 178 likes
7	Aug 10	What do you think of women who hate sadza and won't cook it yet their husbands like it?	94 comments 52 likes
8	Aug 15	Lunch for hubby	80 comments 965 likes
9	Sep 17	Breakfast for self with maid	84 comments 733 likes
10	Sep 25	How do you manage your household budgets?	119 comments 47 likes

11	Sep 29	*Sadza* shape	48 comments 83 likes
12	Sep 30	Hubby came for a quick lunch (drink served in plastic cup)	77 comments 67 likes
13	Oct 17	Announcement: no *sadza* for a whole month -2015 accomplishments!	17 comments 43 likes
14	Dec 19	How many times a week do people eat *sadza*	214 comments 32 likes

4.5 Methods of critical discourse analysis

My study adopts an eclectic approach to critical discourse analysis by drawing on analytic strategies associated with media studies (particularly with regards to narrative and rhetorical analysis) and this is complemented with linguistic analysis which attends to lexicalisation and transitivity choices in sentence construction (Janks 1997; Dewa & Prinsloo 2012). Narrative analysis is useful in identifying and scrutinising how a story is organised (Branston & Stafford 1996) which is fundamental to understanding how meaning gets constructed in the media and elsewhere. Rhetorical analysis is useful in showing how different rhetorical strategies such as argumentation also play a role in particular framing of events and opinions (Richardson 2007). I discuss these to demonstrate how they inform my analysis.

4.5.1 Narrative analysis models

Narrative theories were developed by early structuralist theorists in an attempt to make sense of narratives by identifying a common structure and can therefore be studied in relation to others (Prinsloo 2009b). In fact, Barthes (1977: 79) proclaims narrative is simply there "like life itself". Paying attention to narrative structure is productive because narrative, like language, helps us make sense of what is real (Fiske 1987).

The two approaches to structural narrative analysis include the syntagmatic and paradigmatic. A syntagmatic analysis focuses on the chronological order of a narrative following the linear sequence of events; both Todorov and Propp's models fall under this narrative structure

(Prinsloo 2009b). Paradigmatic analysis focuses on the latent meanings embedded within the narrative and Levi Strauss' model is representative of this.

Todorov's narrative model

Todorov's narrative model concentrates on how stories function as a social narrative of the struggle between social order and disruptive forces (Fiske 1987). He specifies the levels of equilibrium and disequilibrium. These determine the linear progression of a narrative through five steps (Wigston 2001). The narrative starts with a state of equilibrium or social harmony. This equilibrium is disrupted by some action early on in the narrative following which there is recognition of the disruption (usually by the hero). The hero then attempts to restore the equilibrium and finally (ideally) the equilibrium is restored. The significance of Todorov's model is in recognising the ideological work that goes into labelling the state of equilibrium and disequilibrium and subsequent transformation to a new state of affairs (Fiske 1987). Essentially the choices made in the narration of the narrative can favour or challenge the status quo, applying Todorov's model can help to deconstruct and make explicit this positioning. This idea links to Thompson's (1990) critical conception of ideology in which he recognises narrativisation as one of the modes of legitimating dominant positions, where legitimation refers to the ways that relations of domination are presented as just and worthy of support. (This can also be achieved through being rationalised or universalised). The strategy of passivation relates to deleting the agent of a certain action in order to deflect attention towards particular ideological ends.

Propp's narrative model

Propp (1968) developed a structural approach to narratives. By analysing one hundred Russian folk tales, he identified 32 narrative functions which he identified as sequential and common to all folk tales, although not all folk tales necessarily have every function (Wigston 2001). Basically, the narrative involves the progression of events, often in the form of a struggle between the hero and the villain (see Fiske 1987: 135-137 for details). In addition, Propp identifies eight character functions according to what a character does to advance the narrative (hero, villain, donor, helper etc.) rather than who they are. Basically, the hero goes on a quest to restore the equilibrium that has been disrupted by the villain. On this quest, the hero can be assisted by the helper or the donor who provides a magical agent, that is, the

object(s) that help to restore the equilibrium (Wigston 2001; Prinsloo 2009b). The struggle between the hero and the villain is described as "a metaphorical transformation of that between the forces of order and those of disorder, good and evil, or culture and nature. Such a struggle is fundamental to all societies, and the narrative explores the role of human and social agents in it" (Fiske 1987: 138). This points to the fact that events (and people i.e. 'characters') in narratives are constructed in particular ways by assigning them certain roles. These constructions may also serve to create binary oppositions between good and bad as elaborated in Levi-Strauss' theory. Binary oppositions consist of large abstract generalisations such as good versus evil and are transformed metaphorically into concrete representations in narratives, for example law versus crime (Fiske 1987; Wigston 2001). Characters are similarly open to analysis along such binary axes.

4.5.2 Rhetorical analysis

Rhetorical analysis draws on Aristotle's seminal text on Rhetoric and attends to the analysis of rhetorical discourse (Richardson 2007). Rhetoric is defined as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle 1335b cited in Richardson 2007: 156). The goal is not just to succeed in persuasion but rather it is to discover the persuasive facts in each case. Adopting this premise, Richardson (2007) applies the rhetorical perspective in his approach to rhetorical argumentation. Argumentation, he argues, puts emphasis on the arguer, audience and argument as interacting with each other during argumentation. News and letters to the editor are argued to take the format of argumentation or persuasive discourse (and I add online interactions to these). Three varieties of rhetorical discourse or argumentation are noted, namely forensic or legal rhetoric; epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric; and deliberative or political rhetoric. The first division, forensic rhetoric attends to the past and entails the condemnation or defense of someone's past actions. Second, epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric is concerned with the present and operates through the means of praise and censure to either give admiration of someone's actions or disapproval. Third, deliberative rhetoric concerns itself with the future and operates with a view to induce or dissuade the audience to do or not do a certain action. Viewing the online interactions as argument, I argue, has the potential to illuminate how certain discourses get validated over others, which are contested, and how this is done.

These operate further through specific modes of argument which I find relevant in my analysis and these are *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. An *ethotic* argument is dependent upon the arguer's good character to be successful; a *pathotic* argument relies on emotion to persuade the listener, whilst a *logetic* argument appeals to the listener's support using logic (see Richardson 20017: 159-161).

4.5.3 Linguistic analytical tools

As noted, my intention is not to conduct a detailed linguistic analysis due to the large data set, but I do employ certain linguistic analytic tools in my analysis of the discursive work members of the group engage in. Beginning with "naming and referencing" I detail the linguistic tools I make use of.

Lexical analysis

Lexical analysis refers to the choice and meaning of words (Fairclough 1989, 1992; Janks 1997). This includes aspects of naming and referential strategies which serve to frame events within particular discourses (e.g. colonial, neoliberal etc.) or label people according their differences (e.g. black vs white) (see Janks 1997; Richardson 2007). Referential strategies which are deployed through naming and predicational means serve to influence how certain people are viewed, in other words they "bear the imprint of value judgements" (Richardson 2007: 52).

Predication

Predicational strategies involve the more direct representation of social actors by their values and characteristics. They can be employed to describe people's attributes (physical or otherwise) in a positive or negative manner to achieve particular ends in the form of adjectives, presuppositions, nouns and pronouns (see Richardson 2007; Reisigl & Wodak 2001).

Modality

Modality refers to value judgements that a speaker makes in relation to the degree of commitment they make to the claim they put across. Modal verbs such as *will, must, may, could, should* and their negations *will not, must not, could not, should not* or adverbs such as *certainly* are examples (Richardson, 2007; Fairclough 1992). The chosen modality impacts

on the discursive construction of social relations and knowledge reservoirs (Philips & Jorgensen 2002). This operates through truth claims, judgement, speculations or opinions; an example would be the 'predictions' that usually occur towards election times. To that extent modality also points to the existence of an individual who is qualified to pass certain judgements (Fowler 1991).

Rhetorical tropes

Rhetorical tropes are often embedded in argumentation that takes words and uses them to denote or connote something other than their ordinary meaning (Richardson 2007). It entails the use of figurative language. Metaphors tend to configure the way people think, act and behave so when we signify things in a certain way we are constructing reality within that particular frame of reference (Fairclough 1992). In some cultures, certain metaphors have become so naturalised that they are no longer seen as such. Consequently, the choice of metaphor serves a discursive purpose. Similarly, hyperbole refers to the excessive exaggeration of events or character traits and can influence thought about certain events so as to emphasise the positive or negative traits (Chandler 2007). Other rhetorical tropes I employ include simile (to indicate likeness of things), pun (twisting the meaning of words towards particular ends), onomatopoeia (words that represent an echo), paradox (using contradiction to create sense), irony (represents the opposite of what statements actually mean), euphemism (substituting harsh/blunt expressions with mild expressions) as well as allegory (use of characters or events in a story as symbolic representations). In addition, I make reference to idioms and proverbs as culture specific forms of signification that carry advice or warnings and are employed frequently in the discussions on these forums.

4.6 Of methodological adequacy

Methodological debates show a tension between the epistemological foundations of quantitative and qualitative research. The notion of methodological adequacy relates to issues of reliability and validity of research and has been the standard measure of quality in social scientific research. However, some qualitative researchers (Silverman 1993, 2003, 2013; Hewson et al. 2003) and critical discourse analysts (Jäger 2001; Meyer 2001; Wodak & Meyer 2009; van Dijk 2001; Wodak 2001) have called for different approaches to evaluating quality in qualitative research in general, and CDA in particular, due to the contextual nature

of such studies. Validity refers to credibility regarding the interpretation of data, and reliability speaks to the extent to which the results or theoretical claims can be supported with evidence from the data (Silverman 2013).

CDA has been critiqued for being biased or prejudiced in the sense that it searches for typical texts that will support the theoretical claims of the researcher (Breeze 2011; Molina 2009). However, it has been counter argued that results in CDA are open ended; moreover, there is no guarantee that empirical or quantitative research is free of the researcher's own value judgements (Phillipov 2013; Wodak & Meyer 2001). It is argued that quantitative research does not hold the "'golden key' to validity" (Silverman 2013: 536) and therefore cannot claim methodological purity. Moreover, from a constructionist approach and particularly invoking Foucault, Ramazanoglu (2002: 87-88) argues that prioritising validity, rationality and the scientific method in research could be seen as a way of establishing "the authority of particular forms of knowledge… [which] are also taken to be discursively constituted in particular ways of thinking". This means that there is no 'true' criteria for judging which way of knowing is more valid since by so doing we may put ourselves in the "dangers of methodological hegemony" (Phillipov 2013: 210).

Another criticism that has been levelled against CDA pertains to the often purely textual focus of most analyses. For instance, one emphatic argument states that "CDA must admit that a text's contents may, under certain circumstances, be a deceitful, even an irrelevant, data" (Molina 2009: 185). This line of argument privileges 'real' experience over what is considered abstract textualism but this insight falls short by assuming that the shortcomings of textual analysis can be 'fixed' through conducting interviews (Phillipov 2013: 210, 218; Fursich 2009). Instead, it is argued that the focus should be on the productive combination between ethnography and textual analysis because it has the effect of "conceptualising the articulations and interrelations of discursive and social practices" (Orberhuber & Krzyzanowski 2008: 194; see also Hine 2000). Along the same vein, Fursich argues that:

> [t]his goes beyond the question of how a specific audience member may read/misread or analyse/appropriate media messages. It goes to the larger question of which life stories or life plans, and which gender, class and ethnic identities the current cultural sensibilities (as expressed in this text) encourage and which ones they exclude (Fursich 2009: 248).

This is more than what empirical research can do as it is limited to readily observable phenomena and fails to probe the constructed nature of discursive utterances. Textual analysis provides a wide spectrum of ways in which a text can be understood or 'read' and this points to the ways a text can position audiences (Phillipov 2013; Fursich 2009; Hine 2000). The consideration of the intertextual and interdiscursive character of texts is particularly advantageous in this instance as the analysis involves the relationship of texts with other texts and social phenomena that can affect textual meanings (Wodak & Meyer 2001). Baym (2009) argues thus:

> … dialectical thinking is also important in understanding our very understandings of quality. From a dialectical perspective, our goal is not to convert others to our own way of seeing. We are not after one true way of seeing/explanation. Rather, we are after a thorough, grounded, trustworthy voice that makes meaningful contributions to ongoing dialogues and on which others can build (Baym 2009: 189).

My approach is based on the premise that any reader who engages with my analysis should find my conclusions trustworthy, not because of "the construction of impeccable depictions of formal order in whose actual existence nobody can quite believe" (Geertz 1973: 18) but because they can also identify the "similarities in the pattern… the homologies" (Hall [1983] 2016) that hold my analysis as a meaningful contribution to ongoing debates about the constitution of Zimbabwean women's femininities in this internet age, on which they also can reflect.

CHAPTER 5: MAKHOX WOMEN'S LEAGUE (PART I)

> The 'interpretations of [our] history' which constitute our identities are the stories we tell of ourselves: in telling them – to others and to ourselves – we produce our sense of self (Thornham 2007: 19).

5. Introduction

To establish the nature of engagement of Zimbabwean women, I consider the selected online spaces as particular 'webs of significance' (Geertz 1973). Conceiving culture thus enables me to consider the different 'stories' that *Makhox* women tell as evidence of the 'webs of significance' that connect together and give these narratives meaning. These narratives, in turn, discipline their conduct, in a Foucauldian sense.

I discuss the main topics found in *Makhox Women's League* (hereafter referred to as *Makhox*) according to two broad themes, each with subsections. The first theme relates to love and relationships, and the posts on *Makhox* present a disturbing picture of marriage coloured with tales of abuse, adultery, witchcraft and pain. In these posts, different types of femininities contest with each other: traditional femininities constituted within customary discourse stand in contrast to rights-based modern femininities. These competing sets of feminine subject positions presume different truths and discipline their subjects differently too. To discuss the different kinds of femininities constituted within these discourses I examine marriage within *Makhox* as a contestation between married and unmarried women (*oMrs* vs *Omakhwapheni*).

The next theme turns to the specific forms of advice given to distressed women which can succinctly be summarised as 'pray', 'bath' and 'leave' and considers the technologies of self consequently validated. While discourses of tradition and modernity are still evident, postfeminist discursive elements coupled with evangelicalism emerge. They exist uncomfortably alongside each other, always at loggerheads, questioning the authority of the other and in the process reveal the fascinating intersection of Christianity and tradition. These discourses which function as tactical blocks (Foucault 1978), sometimes run parallel to each other and at other times are in contestation.

5.1 Love and relationships on Makhox: "oMrs versus Omakhwapheni"

The majority of posts on *Makhox* relate in some way to romantic and sexual relationships. Of the 20 purposively selected posts, 13 relate to this theme and of these a total of 8 focus on cheating. Four relate explicitly to issues of the vagina and sex while another 4 relate to nationhood. As some posts overlap in terms of themes particularly in the comments, there is no neat separation of the themes and/or posts.

What stands out from these various discussions is the significance attributed to marriage, a key identity marker for Zimbabweans and a signifier of respectability (Christiansen 2007; 2013). That a married woman is constituted as having significantly greater social capital than an unmarried woman is evident in the conversations on *Makhox*. A discursive struggle occurs between two camps, married women on one hand and, on the other hand what is popularly known as *omakhwapheni*. The colloquial term *omakhwapheni* refers to women who date married men. Another group of single women, those who do not necessarily date married men, frequently become conflated with *omakhwapheni*, thus introducing a third set of actors in this conflictual scenario. It is also notable that *omakhwapheni*, more commonly known as 'small house' in Zimbabwean circles, become conflated with prostitutes and the terms – though semantically different – can be used interchangeably (Christiansen 2013). The discursive contestation presents itself through a war of words between *oMrs* and *omakhwapheni*. This is most clearly demonstrated by an incident I term the *lunyoka*[51] saga, a hot topic of discussion on *Makhox* for a number of days in February 2015.

The first post of 20 February regarding the *lunyoka* saga informed people of an adulterous couple who had become locked together during sex, remarking on the crowd that had gathered to witness the event on Grafton Street and Harley Avenue in Yeoville, Johannesburg. When some posts confirmed the incident, others demanded pictures as proof. Typical of social media and village gossip alike, the news went viral and within hours a picture was uploaded showing the crowd that had been gathered (see Figure 1 below).

[51] *Lunyoka* (fidelity charm) is a traditional way of 'locking' a spouse, usually a wife, to curb infidelity so that whoever has sex with her will get stuck and only her spouse can 'unlock' them. See Dewah & Mutula (2014) for a detailed discussion of this practise in Zimbabwe and the ethical considerations associated with it.

Figure 1: Crowd gathered outside a Yeoville residence in Johannesburg to witness a couple affected by *Lunyoka. Source: Makhox Women's League* Facebook group.

This image is captioned "Crowd *ezobona abaxakeneyo yiwo umvuzo wokutshontshisa manje ngiyathumela esokuxakelana* watch this space", loosely translated as "crowd gathered to witness the 'locked' couple, this is the result of cheating, I'll send the actual picture of them stuck together now, watch this space". One cannot miss the intrigue behind this post which sparked the interest of many with 308 comments, 96 likes and 11 shares. Many theories emerged relating to the incident and the identities of the couple involved. It was alleged that the husband of the woman was a *malayitsha* (cross-border transporter renowned for smuggling goods and people) and that her sexual partner was a Nigerian national. Rumour also had it that the *malayitsha* demanded 30 cows in compensation before he could 'unlock' them. Others claimed the couple had been taken to the hospital later that evening and the woman had died while some claimed both of them were dead. As a way of lending credence to the event, the story was carried by the news website *Bulawayo 24* under the headline "Married Zim woman stuck to Nigerian man after illicit s*x"[52] and *Daily Sun*, in typical tabloid fashion, carried the headline "Sex cheaters get stuck"[53] with a more outrageously

[52] https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-africa-byo-63173-article-married+zim+woman+stuck+to=nigerian+man+after+illicit+s*x.html. Accessed 26/06/16.
[53] Daily Sun, 23 February 2015.

explicit title on their Facebook page, "Stuck in *Punani*!"[54]. While there was a great deal of gossip about the characters and the circumstances, what really drew my attention was how the discussion quickly escalated to a confrontation between *oMrs* and *omakhwapheni*.

The first few comments posted indicate sympathy for the woman who had been 'stuck' arguing that there are reasons that might justify the woman's infidelity; people, therefore, should not be so quick to judge and mock her. This was enough to give those who support *omakhwapheni* ammunition and an onslaught of vulgarities ensued. Some of the insults were directed at the 'stuck' couple, for example, "what kind of people sleep with each other in broad daylight like dogs!" and some were directed at the woman (and married women in general) calling them "shit" and "whores" amongst other profanities. Such profanities which are otherwise socially disallowed in everyday speech are some of the affordances enabled by social media. Consistent with this 'freedom' (Markham 1998), the anonymity of social media in some instances allows people to say things they would not in a face to face conversation (Koh 2002). Some of the criticisms of married women are captured below:

> *oMrs ngcwelengcwele bathini ke nxa sekunje kwaaaaaaaaa* (What are the Mrs Holier than thou's saying now when things are like this (laughing).
>
> *Bathule zwii oMrs namhla ngani ngumakhwapheni yooo inhlamba zakhona* (OMrs are dead quiet today if it had been a *makhwapheni* (exclamation) they would have been hurling insults around).
>
> *Kkkkk phansi ngabo mrs* (laughing... down with *oMrs*).
>
> *Eye bo Mrs nangu phela omunye wenu khulumani phela njengoba lihlala lithi omakhwapheni ngamawule* (yes boMrs here's one of your own, let's hear you talk since you always say *omakhwapheni* are whores).
>
> *Abakhonkhothe phela manje sizwe iwule liwule ngitsho ligqoke esomtshado* (Let's hear them bark now; a whore is a whore even if adorned in a wedding gown).

The posts on *Makhox* draw on the rich figurative expressions of the Ndebele daily language and the effect is a conversational tone of easy banter with interesting inflections. Suffice it to say that one cannot miss the calculated sting in these comments. Here the honorific title 'Mrs' (generally used in English to refer to a married woman) acquires a negative inflection; it tends to sarcasm with the intention of undermining married women. Additionally, I propose, it seeks to destabilise the idea of the institution of marriage as 'perfect' and representing the

[54] https://www.facebook.com/sadailysun/photos/a.169084006480506.45315.159938927395014/905704402818459. Note: *Punani* is a colloquial term for female genitalia.

ultimate social standing. The married woman, therefore, as a signifier of this perfection and the embodiment of virtue due to her married status ("holier than thou") is relexicalised as a "whore" despite the wedding gown (marriage).

This incident amongst many others provides a moment of reprieve for those women frequently denigrated to *omakhwapheni* status and the opportunity to traverse the institution of marriage. Simultaneously, it also provides an important moment for cultural analysis which shows how relations of power and inequality are negotiated and contested through everyday rhetoric, even among women themselves.

5.1.2 When married women cheat: "If ungalasono faka ulike sibone"

The cultural constructions of issues to do with marriage and morality are demonstrated through argumentative discourse as demonstrated below and represented by two contesting discursive positions. On one hand, there are those who sympathise with the woman and who represent themselves as modern subjects and, on the other hand, there are those who insist that she must be accountable for her actions and endorse conservative and traditional subjectivities. In this discursive contestation, arguments in support of the adulterous married woman uphold the woman's status against all odds. Let's consider this comment below and a similar long post[55].

> *A married woman's infidelity is always justified. Whilst it's the human nature for men to cheat, women have no propensity for cheating. A married woman must be provoked for her to cheat, it is possible that this man has been abusing her or has been cheating on her for a long time so she was taking revenge.*

The writers using this line of thought use inductive argumentation by mobilising modal truth claims which make their arguments believable. First, they draw on the common knowledge associated with the respectability of a married woman, the fact that she is ever faithful and perseveres through hardship. Second, they reiterate the common understanding of the

[55] Pliz hide n post for me, bomama namantombazana nabocc nghamba ngendaba yayizolo eyenzakele eYouville, l'm not here to justify prostitution, kumbe ngisapote orMrs or what but there are things l wld lyk you to take into consideration whether you agree with me or not. In my opinion akula mfazi ongaphongujolela indoda for no reason ingamenzelanga lutho olubi ,laphemhlabeni akulamuntu obekezela njengomfazi, ungabonasephuma endleleni kutsho uyabe esezwile esekhathele,You may find that this lady was in an abusive relationship ,ejolelwa for a long time but ebekezela.Yu may think y angamdevorcanga myb she was being threatened to stay in the relationship, myb uthe ebona kungaphumeki wacabanga to find some happiness phandle of wc indoda ithe isinanzelela ukuthi umfazakasamnaki waba nejealous wabona kungcono amfake ulunyoka asukumkhawulisa, l think we all know ukuthi oMalayisha banjani phandle la yizifebe zokugcina loba eqala eryt bt bayajika. My point is let us not blame this woman singaz istory sakhe let us not be quick to judge, angsapotibulema but let us not blame anyone. Thanx for posting.

'natural' cheating inclination of men, even more so of *omalayitsha* in general and their documented abusive nature towards women[56]. For instance, one comment stated "*omalayitsha* always have their trousers by their knees", a metaphorical statement that suggests they are always having sex 'on the go' as emphasised in the hyperbole employed in another comment that "they sleep with women all the way from South Africa to Zimbabwe and back". By mobilising these truth claims as fact, the aim of the writer is to argue that this woman's 'cheating' is justified on the grounds that she has probably experienced untold suffering and heartache at the hands of her *malayitsha* husband. This pathotic argument seeks to persuade the audience to support her position.

In the responses to the long post quoted in footnote 55, an interesting exchange takes place between married and unmarried women which raises questions about marriage, morality and cleanliness. These contesting discourses about marriage and morality function as disciplinary practices, I submit, that act on the woman's body in order to regulate her conduct. The participants use different modes of argumentation and persuasion to make their points. The first person to comment on the thread constructs herself discursively as morally superior and judgemental (*Get away from here you Mrs, you must learn to close your legs, don't justify something disgraceful… the thing is, what she did was wrong full stop*). The point she emphasises is that a woman must never sleep with two men at a time whether married or not. Through constituting herself as a morally upright woman using an ethotic argument, "I'm not a *makhwapheni* and I will never sleep with two men at the same time" she positions herself authoritatively as deserving to be listened to. Clearly she either convinced some of the respondents to follow her line of reasoning or they concur with her sentiments. They support her by using logetic arguments as follows:

> *yea these Mrs are full of shit, if it had been a makhwapheni they'd be saying it serves her right so that they stop sleeping with our men, but because it's one of their own they're commenting while 'hiding their heads under their blankets'.*
>
> *what we are disagreeing with is that if oMrs cheat it's justified and if a single person dates a married man a whole lot of noise is made, why must it be like that? So in other words it means the whoring* [sic] *of oMrs is admirable.*

These women's comments presume that a person's marital status should not be the basis of judging one's morality. However, as is the nature of large groups, not everyone holds the

[56] See for instance Datsile, N. P. (2013). "*Omalayitsha Bayasithwala*: Stories of Women Caught in the web of illegal cross-border migration". *Indilinga- African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*. 12 (2): 277-289.

same opinion and a struggle to legitimate contrasting points of view ensues. One respondent quickly turns the discussion to marriage. Informed by a traditional view of marriage in which the woman is subservient and must expend her energy in order to get herself a marriage partner, she argues thus:

> *By the way you don't have men and yet they* [married women] *have them in 2s because they bath… No man can stand for an unkempt woman with no manners and a body that is touched by every other man. If you see yourself dating John, Paul etc… and they leave you successively it means you're not perfect enough to them for them to make you a wife, if you didn't know.*

She claims that one has to 'bath' in order to get a suitor which others dispute by arguing that bathing and marriage are not related (I deal with the bathing discourse further below in detail). In fact, one sarcastic response states:

> "*wuuuuuuuuuu* (sarcastic exclamation) *the results of your bathing and looking attractive have made one of you get stuck, let some of us who don't bath keep quiet.*

The unmarried women who articulate a modern discourse argue that they prefer dating before marriage so that they 'test the waters'. When yet another respondent comments about how those who have sex before marriage are the ones most likely to get stuck, she is immediately laughed at for her naivety. She is belittled and effectively silenced by using the popular Zulu phrase "*ustrong boy*" (you're strong/brave) a comment which passes as biting sarcasm although veiled as praise. It takes the position that women nowadays do not wait for marriage to engage in sexual relations; they are 'free' to explore their sexuality as much as men are. This response presumes a postfeminist position in that it repudiates traditional femininity (in its emphasis of the virgin bride), to emphasise sexual freedom and autonomy. However, another respondent working within a traditional framework in relation to gender relations suggests that having multiple partners before marriage is a sign that one is not marriage material and is not something that a woman should be proud of.

These contesting discourses about marriage and morality function as disciplinary practices in order to regulate her conduct and so act on her body. This is evident as on one hand the woman is called on to always strive to 'bath' in order to get a suitable marriage partner. This means that she must deploy various technologies of the self to ensure that she always looks good and not date too many people to achieve the ultimate prize of marriage. She must police

her behaviour and responsibility is placed squarely on her to make sure that she gets a suitable partner. However, the opposing discourse interpellates her as 'free' and entitled to experiment as she chooses without pressure to be married. I return to these arguments below.

There is also an element of sisterhood that is evoked in the sympathetic narrative as several comments quote the Ndebele saying "*umfazi uhlekela esigxingini*" literally "a woman only laughs inside a gourd" which means that a woman does not laugh at another woman's peril as she is bound to be a mother someday and her children might do even worse things that would potentially embarrass her in the community. This is yet another way in which women's behaviour is policed on this platform and in Zimbabwean society in general. Women are thereby constrained from commenting on critical issues for fear of either being judged or of some looming vengeance coming back tenfold on them should they dare question the conventional. Limiting the range of discursive spaces that women can inhabit has a direct effect on gendered identities.

Another point to be made regarding the marriage and adultery focus pertains to the title of this section "*ongelasono kafake ulike sibone*" (those without sin must press the like button), a pun from the Biblical verse John 8:7 where Jesus is described as saying "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her"[57], the latter being an adulterous woman. In the age of the Internet, the 'like' button here is likened to the stone to be cast. This verse is invoked here to remind people that they should not judge the adulterous woman caught up in the *lunyoka* saga for they too are not without sin. Religion as a disciplinary discourse, as I discuss below, serves here as authoritative legitimation of the argument and is powerfully invoked because the *Makhox* women, majority of whom are Christian, are likely to respect this sentiment.

5.1.3 "A married woman is not allowed to cheat"

The arguments that are hostile to the adulterous married woman also mobilise modal truth claims and notably have an unrelenting authoritative approach.

> *Vele umfazi kavunyelwa ukufeba no matter what the situation endlini is, ubuwule yibuwule as long ulendoda don't do it, never compete lendoda uyenze ihlazo* (Of

[57] What is more pertinent is that this statement was uttered by Jesus when he was being tested by the Pharisees. In this biblical account, the Pharisees brought him an adulterous woman to be charged before him, and during those times, adultery was punishable by stoning. They challenged him to judge her to which he gave this response.

> course a woman is just not allowed to cheat no matter what the situation at home is, adultery is adultery as long as you have a husband don't do it, never compete with a man because it will be a disgrace).

This particular comment is striking in several ways. The use of the adjectival phrase "*vele*" (of course) as a show of absolute disapproval here endows the speaker with a sense of authority. It serves as an emphatic precursor to the declaration that a woman is not allowed under any circumstances to cheat. Note how the agent of the prohibition is deleted (Richardson 2007); it is not clear whether it is a person, a law or a religious belief system that disallows cheating by a woman. The implication is that men in contrast are *allowed* to cheat since women must "never compete" with men when it comes to cheating. It is a disgraceful act for women but, implicitly, not for men. Unlike male adultery where the man is most likely accepted back into the woman's life, female adultery is unacceptable to the extent that it is even punishable by death (*lunyoka* sometimes results in death: see Dewah & Mutula 2014). Now, this is where it starts getting interesting. While this is couched as a contesting argument to the previous one, both these arguments tap into the same cultural resource in order to make these claims. I propose that patriarchy is the deleted or silent agent. In a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe, patriarchal values forbid certain conduct from women, such as cheating, but paradoxically legitimate male adultery as natural. These are clearly double standards. What becomes additionally clear is that the perceived 'respectability' of a married woman ironically becomes a form of oppression, for she must suffer in silence in order to preserve her respectability.

A striking aspect of some responses include joking statements that state their apprehension when their husbands came home late after the incident and how they could only relax upon their return, evidence that he was not the one who became 'stuck' to the woman. An inherent discomfort laces the jokes with variations of "you can never trust them" and "if he's at home, thank God" which indicates further recognition that men are likely to cheat. This notion of men's sexual drive as biologically conditioned (see Farvid & Braun 2006), with men as predators and women as prey, is therefore naturalised and legitimated (Thompson 1990). By minimising the gravity of being cheated on, these women collude with (or are subjects of) patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. Some Ndebele idioms are enlisted in relation to this saga to emphasise that she clearly got what she deserved:

Umzenzi kakhalelwa kukhalelwa umenziwa: literally- sympathise with the offended not the offender, meaning "you reap what you sow".

Iqhawe lifela ebuqhaweni: literally- a soldier dies in battle, meaning your actions or the company you keep determine your fate.

Akukho qili elake lazikhotha emhlane: literally- a cunning person can never lick his own back, meaning your bad deeds will catch up with you one day.

Kuhle nxa kuthwa imbuzi ingqikila inja, kodwa nxa inja isiluma imbuzi kuthwa idla isitshebo: it's good when a goat overpowers a dog in a fight but when the dog bites the goat, it's accused of eating meat/relish. (In short, this lengthy idiom means payback is painful).

5.1.4 Cheating, abuse and witchcraft

Attention to the *lunyoka* saga enables me to consider the contestation between *omakhwapheni* and *oMrs*. This verbal warring is not unique to the *lunyoka* saga but extends to general posts relating to adultery. Interestingly, these are intricately linked with complex stories of cheating, abuse and witchcraft which intersect to paint a bleak picture of the struggles that Zimbabwean women deal with daily. These accounts occur frequently in posts about cheating partners; the advice offered often degenerates into angry quarrelling which is indicative of a discursive struggle between a femininity that validates conservative traditional practices and values and consequent passivity in marriage, and a contesting femininity represented by unmarried women who perform a more sexualised and active femininity.

Drawing on Todorov's model, the initial equilibrium would presume a harmonious marriage between a man and woman. This equilibrium is then disrupted by the presence of a *makhwapheni* and is followed by an ensuing struggle to restore the equilibrium. The wife often takes the role of the hero who goes on a quest (in Proppian terms), to 'rescue' the husband from the claws of *umakhwapheni* and restore peace in the marriage. Interestingly, while generally an *umakhwapheni* is cast as the villain, online respondents are usually quick to attribute blame to the husband; hence the role of villain can simultaneously be occupied by both the husband and *umakhwapheni*. In some accounts, the wife blames the *makhwapheni* for luring her husband away whilst in others she laments her husband's roaming eye. Mostly, it is the respondents that apportion blame to the husband who has sex with another woman in spite of his marital status. Two examples suffice here and they lead us into a complex web of tales about cheating, abuse and witchcraft. These tales establish a discursive tension between

discourses about witchcraft and religion which are dealt with in greater detail in the next section.

In the first post which attracted 92 comments, we encounter a woman lamenting that her husband is having an affair[58]. She declares that the *makhwapheni* is not only using *'isichitho'* on them, but has furthermore given him a love spell and 'disabled' his manhood. The wife therefore seeks help from *Makhox* on how to restore his manhood and undo this love spell. *Isichitho*[59] is a form of break up spell or curse that causes one's partner or other people in general to lose interest in the victim. One effect of *isichitho* is impotence; consequently, the victim cannot have sexual relations with their partner.

In a similar post which received 143 comments, a woman who wrote clearly in a state of panic suspects her husband was about to leave her for another woman[60]. She narrates how the husband verbally and physically abuses her and how at one time he even strangled her until she bled through the nose. She therefore seeks help from *Makhox* 'ladies' to give her the name of a traditional healer to help her "fight for herself" by returning the *isichitho* "back to the sender".

If these subjects are constituted as willing subjects of traditional marriage that presumes perseverance in marriage, it is not surprising that blame is not apportioned to their husbands because, interestingly, in their distressed state they *know* who the enemy/villain is, namely *omakhwapheni* with the help of *isichitho*. Their husbands are not to blame because they are under the influence of *isichitho*. Being willing subjects of customary marriage, these women

[58] unjani sisi ngicela ungivale ngingabonakali ubusuyiphosela kubomama indaba yami linjani boaunt labomama ngingu mama oshadileyo indoda iyangijolela into ebuhlungu lomuntu ajola laye wazi kahle ukuba lumuntu uthethe inkinga ufaka isichitho emzini wami sihlala sixabana njalo lendoda since losisi wangenela emshadweni wami okunye usembophile lobudoda bakhe njalo wamdlisa ukuba alandele yonke into etshiwo ngulosisi bengicela usizolweni ukuba engakhululwa njani abuyele ukuba ngubaba njalo ngingadinga ini ezomphalazisa into ayidlayo ngisebunzimeni ngilapha ngingalujabulela usizolwenu ngiyabonga.

[59] http://khokhovula.co.za/healing/isichitho-sothuvi-isichitho-human-shitwaste. Accessed 4/11/17.

[60] Hie, plz hide borrowed account, bomama shuwa nanku ngisaliwa ngu hubby,uthandana lenye intombazana,ngihlala ngibona ama charts abo and vele umuntu kaswubambi umshina,ulala engflatele sesile 1month manje sehlala etshinga,uyangitshaya,wangikhama ngaze ngaphuma igazi ngamakhala,bomama ngisemeveni bantu leyo ntombazana ingfonele izolo ingthuka itthi uhubby kudala engala mina ngiyala,bomama locc aqede atshele uhubby ukuthi ngimfonele ngimthreatener,kumanje uHubby ukwatile uthi angimhloniphi why ngithuka igalfrand yakhe kambe bomama yini shuwa mina engiyonileyo kulomhlaba kasalali endlini,bomama I'm so hurt,I dnt kno wat 2 do ngikhala njjalo njje,ngisizeni bantu lami ngisibisele leso schitho umoya wami awukutholi ukuthula,bandla linglayele lapho lami engingathola khona inyanga lami ngifunde ukuzlwela,thanks cc,sorry ngobude bomama,sizani omunye wenu bandla.

must go all out to save their marriages. The helper here is the traditional medical practitioner who can deploy a magical agent and s/he will return the *isichitho* 'back to the sender' so that they can restore peace in their homes. Curiously, these posts were posted two days apart but there are varied responses to both with more sympathy in response to the second post than the first one. A slight digression is necessary here in order to address this issue.

Most responses to the first post do not show much sympathy for the writer, pointing out that the husband is also to blame and even calling him a "snake" and a "dog" which should be tied up. These metaphors point to the devious promiscuity of men. Another set of responses suggest that she should have 'strengthened' her marriage long ago (*umuzi uyaphakanyelwa* and *sukumela umuzi wakho sithandwa, loba kuthwa yibuthakathi mina owami ngiyawukanika*). These comments place the responsibility on the woman to consult traditional practitioners to give her potions for 'strengthening' her home. In the second comment she is advised that her home cannot be affected by witchcraft because she can 'fix' her marriage – supposedly like a mechanic. Constructed as willing subjects of this traditional discourse, some women suggest a healer who can help in that regard. Amazingly, several other women request the contact details of this helper as they need help with similar issues. Consistent with traditional custom in Zimbabwe, when women get married they are encouraged to persevere despite all hardships because the shame of divorce is worse than the pain of abuse. This traditional discourse enables this particular form of patriarchy which constitutes women as its particular willing subjects, as I discuss further below.

To return to the issue at hand, one comment which stood out took a direct attack on married women:

> *Some Mrs do not respect their men at home to the extent that it's not clear who's the head of the house because she also wants her presence to be felt. They* (men) *run away and omakhwapheni welcome them with both hands whilst they* (o*Mrs*) *are busy about going 50/50*[61].

This comment implies that it is probably the woman's fault that her husband has a roaming eye and the equality discourse is evoked as disadvantageous to women. The equality discourse has been turned around to construe it as the cause of broken relationships. It argues

[61] Phela labo omrs abanye abahloniphi obaba ezidlini akusacaci yiphi indoda la endlini ngoba naye ufuna kukhale sakhe, bayabaleka vele omakhwapheni bayaba welcome ngazozombili bona be busy ngama 50/50.

that while women are busy fighting for gender equality, their men are seeking refuge in the arms of *omakhwapheni*, because the women have neglected their roles as wives. In essence, this discourse proposes that women must be invisible in the public sphere and stick to the domestic sphere where they perform best and not be seen to be getting carried away with *ama 50/50* which will serve to destroy their homes. This argument effectively poses that there exists an explicit choice between being a wife and being an equal partner.

Another post is written in the mode of a confession, a mode that online interactions enable[62]. Foucault (discussed in chapter 2) identified confession as a technology of self:

> … in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell anyone else, the things people write books about (1978: 59).

By confessing, we enact certain subject positions which shape our conduct, define our being and the way we understand ourselves and thus our relationship with others. This particular woman is warning other women that they should not fall prey to married men as she once did and was left heartbroken when she discovered that the man was married as he had lied to her. There are again varied responses to this post: those who believe that marriage is overvalued, those who believe it is sacred, those who are simply nonchalant, and those who choose to date married men.

Vehement responses from those who believe that marriage is glorified indicate the animosity between married and unmarried women as shown by the following few comments:

[62] Hie, may u post and hide ID. How r u bomama? I have a word of advice to those dating married men. I also dated a married man. Apparently at that time the guy was fighting with the wife, so he told me he was planning to divorce her, ethi mfe. Lami I was carried away bomama ngaze ngehlukana leboyfriend yami coz zazingakhiphi and he was ugly. The married guy was handsome and engipha imali. So lami I was on cloud nine at that moment. I was happy for those few months. Uthe eselungisile izinto lomfazi wakhe wangilahla njenge nja. Ebesesender amamessage abhedayo lomfazi wakhe kimi. It was a stressful moment for me. I had a few mnths of joy and the whole year of misery. All I can say is indoda emarried if he comes to u, he jus wants a distraction from his problems coz akula mshado ongenankinga. So if u know u r dating a married man think twice. And kuyehlisa isthunzi futhi. Mina I will never date a married man again. We all learn from our mistakes and I learnt from it. At that time ubungeke ungitshele ukuthi ngehlukane laye coz I loved him and I thot he loved me. He had also promised to 'marry' me. That was 2yrs ago bomama now I hev my life on track. Married men are not worth the trouble. I know bakhona abakusituation enje. Thanks bomama.

> *I seriously* [believe] *not everyone gets into a relationship hoping fo a marriage...I juss hate it wen evrythng is ol abwt marriage. marriage this.. marriage that..what do you lose if u not married? Phela le marriage thing sokwaba yinsikavukela umchilo wesidwaba..especially with us women..u wld swear it's a huge achievement..*

This comment is presented in an argumentative manner and written in Ndenglish (a combination of Ndebele and English) which is common even in everyday speech. The writer is clearly irritated by the glorification of marriage and uses a proverb to emphasise her point, "*Insakavukela umchilo wesidwaba*" (recurring event), to signify a recurring focus of discussion. The following comments also use Ndenglish but I translate them to full English for ease of analysis. Of the 51 direct responses to this comment, I quote a few for illustration purposes.

> *Yah it's now boring coz it's as if those with husbands are better compared to single ladies of which it's not true, most single ladies are independent, they are doing things for themselves, they are happy compared to those who are married. You find someone without even a pair of sandals and yet boast about having husbands, what is the use?*

> *We're not saying it's a crime to get married but we're just pointing out how some married women behave once they get married. They mistreat others especially single ladies…of course it's not a crime to enjoy and cherish your marriage ...but it could be done with dignity and humility. And neither are we advocating for dating married men but who are we to judge? It takes two consenting legally recognised adults to get into a relationship…we can't always blame the lady for that unless she knows about the marriage and perhaps knows the wife.*

These responses counter the traditional discourse of marriage that emphasises a dutiful wife, with a modern discourse of a woman with rights. In the first response, single women are constructed as happier than married ones and implicitly marriage is constituted as disadvantageous when it ties women into poverty. This respondent resists the traditional view of marriage that positions women as economically dependent on men. She thus implies that marriage should be materially beneficial for a woman to count for anything. In contrast, she presents a distinctly postfeminist view of singlehood bliss, implicit in the referencing of ideas ("independent", "doing things for themselves") associated with 'girl power'. The second comment, while appearing more balanced and emphasising the matter of choice, in effect endorses particular practices for single and married women. The discourse of *choice* presumes an autonomous modern subject who has the freedom to choose whoever they want to date on their terms. Thus, if they choose to date a married man and break with convention, this indicates that they are 'liberated', rather than accepting the strictures of patriarchy with

its constricting rules for women in the dating game. This stance infuriates some respondents as shown in this exchange between arguer 1, arguer 2 and arguer 3 (A1, A2 and A3).

> *A1: …but honestly speaking if you are a God-fearing person yah wldnt even dare to involve earthly laws on somebody's marriage…only somebody who's not God fearing can say whatever and do whatever when it comes to marriage…coz we all know as Christians that marriage is something sacred…*
>
> *A2: Lols..no twa…no let's not involve God..we can't all be perfect..like I said there are reasons behind those affairs. Hence I am not promoting having affairs with married men.*
>
> *A1: No with marriage God is involved, why would we leave God out…so that singles can brag about being home-wreckers…with no guilt, we need that God to remind those singles who make it a point to 'snatch' that God is watching them…lols.*
>
> *A2: There is a difference btwn hvng an affair w a married woman/man and snatching that woman or man after all…I condemn what the guy did to maloba* [writer of the original post] *that is stringing her along and making her believe that he would marry her. Had he told her the truth maloba would have chosen whether to date the man or not.*
>
> *A3: I don't condone loose morals but my point is why not deal with the hubby because surely he is the one who can't keep his hands off other women. They too like oMrs were proposed to, so you can't blame someone for falling in love and shield someone who proposes to that person!... So it's ladies who are homewreckers and not the married man, who breaks her marriage vows, betrays his wife, hurts his wife and kids! I don't think so but I believe the one who breaks her vows, betrays his loved ones is a homewrecker!*

In this exchange A1 draws on religious discourse to dispute 'earthly laws' while others support her argument of marriage as ordained by God. She specifically disputes the argument that had been made earlier that "two legally consenting adults" (i.e. over the age of 18) can enter a relationship regardless of marriage status. A2 rejects this religious discourse by arguing that everyone is not perfect. A1 emphasises that "God is watching" the homewreckers and in the process invokes how the all-seeing eye of God sees everything, quietly judging and disciplining in the process. The application of religious discourse serves to govern and to regulate conduct (I expand on this argument in the next section). As the argument rages on A3 however refuses to bow down - pun intended - retorting that "God is watching all of us me luv the married and the single". Neither the married nor the single are exempt from the constant 'surveillance' from God. She further insists that "the word homewrecker" should apply to men as well, rejecting its use "selectively to blame only women cc" (cc is a slang shortcut for sister deriving from *sisi* in *isi*Ndebele). Another

respondent also articulates (and complicates) a conservative Christian discourse declaring *that* "not all marriages are ordained by God, as long as one did not follow the Word (which states that God must be the centre of the relationship) from courting, dating to marriage – God does not condone such marriages/arrangements".

In other words, A2 and A3 establish a counter discourse of female autonomy in their arguments in contrast to A1s hegemonic discourse pertaining to heteronormative marriage underpinned by Christian values. As these two discourses jostle for recognition, A2 uses an ethotic argument as she arguably shows a condescending attitude particularly in how she refers to A1 as "*twa*" an endearing name for children taken from the Ndebele word "*umntwana*" meaning child. By so doing she establishes herself as older and therefore with more wisdom. Even as the argument continues, A1 is already at a disadvantage because as the 'younger' arguer her points are not backed by the experience that gives the others more weight. In this way, on this forum, some ideas gain prominence over others as determined by various factors such as age and how well one is able to express oneself. At the end of the thread, another comment applauds A3 for well thought out arguments. Her viewpoint is thus endorsed at this stage. A3's postfeminist arguments emerge as prevailing in this instance.

There is another unlikely set of responses to this particular post perhaps, perhaps triggered by A2's argument. In response to some comments, (comment 1 and comment 2), these women (W1 and W2) believe that they can and they will date married men.

> *Comment 1: Some men have affairs to the extent that the wife is replaced by the girlfriend so it's a win or lose situation.*
>
> *Comment 2: A man will never leave his wife for a girlfriend, if he does it's either he's been given a love potion or bewitched.*
>
> *W1: They can snatch out here; they took my husband after 16 years of marriage. They went on to have a white wedding while I was still dazed so I agree if it's a win or lose situation. You can only get a man from another woman.*
>
> *W2: If he can be 'taken', I will take him; they were also snatched from us. Right now I'm left alone with no man, I don't have time to waste, I don't give him a love potion but I use my knees to pray.*
>
> *Comment 1: Would God bless that union that you are praying for, taking away someone's husband? I doubt cos God loves marriages he would never give you another woman's husband and destroy their marriage that I refuse. I don't know maybe another god.*

W1: It's so painful ladies cos a man will cheat on you until he goes on to have a white wedding[63] *and you don't gain anything except the pain and those memories. He is the one who gets blessed. I'm talking from experience, if you have never come across this you don't know what you're talking about because I'm coming from there. If God is to bless me with another woman's husband I will accept it because people are too cunning. I was really disgusted because it is a Shona woman who took my man demnii!!*[64] *So she has peace wherever she is, ladies don't judge us because what we went through is a very painful situation and painful moments.*

W2: You're right mine was taken by a Nyasa[65] *from Hwange, so if I get him* (another woman's husband) *I'll drag him kwaaaa (laughing).*

The two women are clearly unapologetic about dating married men, possibly because they 'lost' their husbands to other women. They, however, represent an important counter discourse that resists the strictures of monogamous marriage as elaborated in the sections that follow.

The significance attributed to white weddings among African Christians is striking: it is a "blessing". This indicates how increasingly traditional marriages, once legitimate, "are today not considered proper unions until they have been brought under the authority of the church in Western-style weddings" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2017:35).

A sense of indignation by the ever present discussions of men on this forum is expressed by yet another group of people who argue as follows:

Ladies, do you live for men? That's why your men cheat because you talk about them everyday.

Nxxxxxxx get a life we're tired of one topic in and out 4 the whole year can't we spice things up on this page without mentioning men, personally can't help [read take] *it.*

Very true, it's as if life here revolves around men. There are more important things in life than this.

[63] There is an emphasis here in the idiomatic expression on *umtshado omhlophe nke - a white wedding: as white as snow.*
[64] As established in chapter 1, Shona is one of the dominant languages in Zimbabwe which makes up the ethnic group that is in tension with the Ndebele ethnic group. I address this issue when I discuss ethnicity in chapter 6.
[65] The Nyasa people are a minority ethnic group settled in the coal mining town of Hwange in North-Western Zimbabwe. They are originally from Malawi and parts of Tanzania and Mozambique.

5.2 Pray, leave, bath: Advice on Makhox as a disciplinary practice

Thus far I have tried to highlight the complex issues that women raise when they post and the conflicted advice that they receive on *Makhox*. I have attempted to show how when someone posts innocently about their problems, the issue is frequently reduced to a showdown between *oMrs* and *omakhwapheni* and how those who fall into neither category try to establish their own counter narratives. To expand on the ideas I have raised so far, I turn to the kind of advice that is given on *Makhox*, particularly to women who have been cheated on or with marital problems as these are the most common posts as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Generally, the kind of advice that is given on *Makhox* consists of three sets of responses which can be pithily summarised as pray, leave and bath. I have thus far indicated here and there some postfeminist attitudes evident in some comments that the women make. In the sections that follow, I offer a detailed account of how a certain postfeminist position underpinned by the resonating discourse of neoliberalism explicitly manifests alongside other 'governing' discourses such as religion.

5.2.1 Pray: evangelical femininity

Understanding religion as a discursive formation allows me to unpack the constitution of subjectivity on *Makhox*. Allowing that "the subject 'makes' him/herself in a particular space [...] from the available repertoire of systems of ideas that people can constitute themselves and be constituted in the process of self-disciplining their thoughts, actions and imaginings, but within the parameters of the discourses in circulation" (Prinsloo 2009a: 84), religion as a discourse prescribes certain moral obligations that the subject is invited to perform as part of self-disciplining practices within these discursive parameters. The religious landscape in Zimbabwe is shaped by Christianity and traditional religion. In some cases, traditional beliefs in ancestors have been negotiated to produce syncretic religions. As such, the religious discursive realm in Zimbabwe can be understood as a mixture of beliefs and practices that operate as tactical blocks (Foucault 1978), that co-exist in parallel or in direct opposition with each other. In this section, I unpack these and show the tensions and contestations inherent as demonstrated by the conversations on this forum.

There is a notable kind of evangelical Christian femininity that is promoted as an ideal through the conversations that women have on *Makhox*. Noting that the term "evangelical" itself is complex (see Gifford (2008) for more on this argument), I am employing the term

here to the extent that its defining features includes a focus on the individual and developing a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ – through prayer, Bible study, worship and witness with the guidance of the holy spirit[66] (see Balcomb 2017 for a detailed discussion on essential features of evangelicalism). In contestation with this Christian discourse, is a traditional religious one that manifests through a range of beliefs in ancestors and prophets as I detail below. My argument is that evangelical Christianity on *Makhox* and in Zimbabwean society in general, operates as a hegemonic discourse that proposes particular 'truths' which in some instances serve to expurgate those who are not its subjects. Traditional religious discourse automatically operates as 'other' in this space, fighting for legitimacy. In these discursive realms, religion therefore serves not only as a moral compass, but more effectively as disciplinary practices whose effect is to 'govern the soul' (Rose 1999), and social phenomena are understood within this discursive realm.

The advice women offer to each other is an attempt at 'governing the soul' and this disciplining frequently has recourse to spiritual and religious truth. In almost every post in which somebody is troubled, the reflex response is an encouragement to pray. Beyond this, people post prayers every morning and the response is always in the affirmative. This is consistent with Zimbabwe being a predominantly Christian country (see chapter 1) and also taking into consideration how Christianity has become such a pervasive force across most of Africa[67]. This prevalent "pray" response is advocated in emphatic ways, particularly when there is a post about a woman who is being cheated on and/or being abused, as some of the earlier examples show. In most instances the woman is advised to "pray like your life depended on it; fight for your marriage by prayer" and even more indignant responses such as:

> *By fire by force, pray and claim your husband back coz he rightfully belongs to you not to the so called chancer, bombard all this craziness by the blood of Jesus coz prayer conquers all; I won't leave my husband fr someone else never ngamane ngasubuka idolo kutshe levoice* (literally translated: I'd rather pray until my knees graze and my voice disappears). *Stand your ground maloba there's nothing like he doesn't want you anymore he's just confused by his girlfriend's nonsense, even if he moves out he'll come back eventually, don't worry keep praying Jeremiah 33v1-5.*

[66] In the Christianity discourse this would appear as Holy Spirit. I have made a conscious decision not to capitalise it here in order to signal its discursivity.
[67] See the extensive volume by Ross et al. (2017), *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* for meticulous detail on how Christianity has spread in Africa over the years and has thus acquired a particular African character.

> *My advice is don't leave your husband so that he can be taken by another woman cc, fight for your marriage by prayer, Satan knows that as women we are weak, if something small happens we give up on our marriages. Refuse this in Jesus' name and don't fight with both of them just be quiet, persevere and stand by prayer. If there is isichitho just call upon Jesus' blood to destroy everything. NEVER LEAVE PLZ.*

The first comment can be linked to the particularly 'violent' prayers usually enacted by Pentecostals who believe that praying is equivalent to embarking on spiritual warfare with forces of evil (Ogunewu & Ayegboyin 2017), hence the use of a warlike lexicon that includes "bombard" and "by fire by force", dramatically topped with the imagery of knee abrasions and a disappeared voice. Religious discourse, in the examples cited above is evoked to encourage women to persevere, informed by its discursive truth and the concepts underpinning it. They render marriage as ordained by God (as already established earlier). Accordingly, there is no situation that is beyond God as long as one is willing to humble themselves before him through fasting and prayer. What is notable here is that great responsibility is placed on the individual in order to benefit from this relationship with God; the emphasis consequently is on a personal relationship with God. Tithing becomes instrumental in 'reaping' success in the form of health and good fortune. This then serves to endorse their acceptance of the consumer-oriented world of capitalism (I return to address this aspect more fully shortly). In being advised to "be quiet, persevere and stand by prayer", a particular patriarchy consistent with selected Biblical tenets is legitimated and deployed to govern women's souls and consequently their conduct. Women are constituted powerfully within this discourse that they 'perform' (in Butler's terms). They limit their agentic possibilities as they are constituted as willing subjects of Christianity. Thus, women often remain in abusive relationships in the belief that some sort of evil has been sent to them and the only way they can rise above, is to 'pray without ceasing', because they are conquerors through Christ. This relegation of misfortune casually to evil is common in most African societies[68]; there is a strong conviction that misfortune does not happen "by 'accident' or 'chance': it must be 'caused' by some agent (either human or spiritual)" (Mbiti 1990: 209).

[68] It has also been argued that the blaming of misfortunes on evil and witchcraft has become a defensive mechanism for Christianity in its bid to address the shortcomings of the prosperity gospel which is common throughout Africa and foregrounded mostly by Pentecostals. The prosperity gospel in short thrives on promises of success for Christians who are in good standing with God. The narrative of evil therefore arguably seemed as the only way to explain why it is not all gospel abiding Christians that become successful, Asamoah-Gyadu (2017).

In this case, it is Satan who preys on women's weaknesses (notably lack of patience/perserverance), and *isichitho* (which can be destroyed by Jesus' blood), as suggested by the comments above. By rationalising the effects of cheating in this way, the discursive subject must stay and fight this evil targeting marriage. Ironically however, by joining this invisible force of fighting against evil, she is exposed to personal suffering while waiting for her spouse to return to her, sometimes for months and even years on end, until, and if, the evil is finally conquered. Having endured such torment, it is presumed that she will emerge victorious in the end and her pain will be turned to joy, but meanwhile she is advised to ride the tide, so to speak. This provides one of the numerous instances when certain elements of the Bible – presumably a source of solace – are selected to justify the position and particular governing of the souls of women as willing subjects of patriarchy through promoting a conservative understanding of marriage in which the woman must make all sacrifices to keep the marriage intact.

Furthermore, by quoting bible scripture, the comment quoted above is stamped with a distinctive truth and authority. The scripture in question (Jeremiah 33, verses 1-5) is appropriate as it speaks of restoration; how God will fight our battles and restore all that is lost if we call unto him in prayer. Biblical quotations are powerful in this context as "African Christians have a much greater respect for the Bible, which they are willing to accept as the authoritative word of God in a literal manner" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2017:37; see also Balcomb 2017). Scripture is quoted repeatedly on *Makhox* to console, to strengthen and also to legitimate the viewpoint of the person responding. It is evident that Christianity operates as a governing discourse that regulates the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1982: 220-221), by proposing certain ways of being as its 'truths'. In performing these 'truths'; women become constituted as willing subjects of two very powerful discourses in the form of patriarchy and Christianity. Importantly, in as much as the subject is discursively constituted through various strategies of self-regulation, these discourses do not only produce docile and subjugated bodies but subjects that can also engage in practices of subjective self-constitution (Hall 1996). It is here that the subject actively negotiates, struggles with or resists certain discourses that seek to regulate their conduct.

To demonstrate this, in the account that follows I give examples from two posts in which a range of religious beliefs are visible and consequently, the constant struggle for recognition and/or supremacy in religious beliefs is demonstrated.

In the first post a woman gives a personal testimony of how *prophets*[69] lie and advises that people should rather put their trust in God[70]. She begins by stating, as a matter of fact, that "we all go to consult prophets and traditional healers even if you deny it" and immediately places herself as knowledgeable and authoritative. She narrates how she had consulted a number of prophets who had told her that she needs to go to her paternal home, but, as she was at risk of going mad, she should pay some money to avert this potential misfortune. Having no money, she narrates how she prayed by herself and when she went home nothing predicted ever happened. Her point is that *prophets* sometimes lie and people should not depend on them. The post is received with an overwhelming response from people with their own personal testimonies of failed prophecies. Notably, these failed prophecies are narrated by those constituted within the Christianity discourse and have to do mostly with predicted death, failed marriage and failure to bear children, among other problems. There are some accounts of sexual abuse[71]. Some of the comments of failed prophecies are captured below:

> *The ones from Zion are worse, I wonder where they get this spirit that shows them lies. They lie so much to the extent that if you believe them you'll fight with so many people, you can even be afraid of coming out of the house because you were told*

[69] These are not prophets in the strict biblical sense of prophets but in contemporary African society some church leaders are increasingly referred to as prophets (particularly Pentecostal churches and Independent churches). In this post, prophets would belong to the category of diviners, seers and mediums that provide spiritual help in many instances, see Mbiti (1990).

[70] Sawubona Sisi ngicela ungiphosele kubomama.....bafazi ngiyazi ama prophet lezinyanga siyakuhamba even if liphike there is a point in life ojika khona anyway bengithi ngike ngishare udaba lwami kubomama ngake ngabhoda amaprophet bengitshela ukuthi kumele ngiye kithi hai vele nami ngangikwazi ukuthi kumele ngiye ngangingakaze ngihambe....isimanga babengitshela ukuthi kumele ngikhiphe imali bangilungise ukuze ngiye or else ngingafika ngilahlekelwa zingqondo or ngingakhoni ukubuya.....hai ngokuswela imali ngaguqa phansi ngathandaza ngaziyela kithi kuyikuthi omunye wabaprofethi wathi kithi bazafika bangihlabele imbuzi emhlophe engela bala ngesikhulu isimanga bafika bangihlabela ingulube. kwenzeka ke ngaspenda iskhathi lomndeni wami ngabuya lanamuhla ngithanda ukucabanga ukuthi ngikwanile.....into engizama ukuyisho vele njengomuntu wenyama sibuthakathaka kodwa masingathembeli kuma prophet kakhulu kwesinye isikhathi kabala qiniso.....olendoda ayithandayo umuntu angathi ngeke akuthathe yena umdali wawubusisa umshado lanini ofuna ingane kalandele indlela ezilungileyo ukuze amithe aye lasesibhedlela before uthemba abakutshela ukungazali.....go to clinics bomama lingazilimazi ngenxa yokuthemba Umuntu kuzwa.....liye lase sontweni even if lizoya kumaprophet.....at least kabakutshele nawe usebenzise ilogic kokuzwileyo don't be too trusting..... Please don't forget to hide me.

[71] One narrated how she was molested by a prophet but she managed to escape and another one how she was told she would miscarry and the only way to avert this would be to have sexual intercourse with the prophet but she did not succumb.

you'll get an accident and die, they really love this death story kkkkkkkkkkk [laughing].

Death z inevitable guys we cnt live foever, asomavampire (we're not vampires), *size la okweskhashana singabavakashi vele* (we're here on earth for just a while, we're really just visitors), *lets be real hle* (please), *happy ever eva* [*sic*] *ngeke uyibone n wat I kno ukufa komuntu kufihlekile utixho wuye yedwa okwaziyo. Amen.* (we can't always be happy, only God knows when we're going to die).

I'm proud of my Jesus…I don't want stress from lying prophets…the Holy Bible says Jehovah is the greatest healer.

Most of the comments in this line of argument suggested that there was no need to go to *prophets* when one could just kneel down and pray. In this comment the Zionists[72] are singled out and constructed as the chief peddlers of lies, a common stereotype that is also a symptom of denominational intolerance that prevails in Zimbabwe, as noted by religious scholars. Mukonyora (2008) argues that the fact that Zimbabwean Christianity is divided denominationally and theologically, has led to some Christians being considered 'fake Christians' because they also acknowledge witches and ancestors. This attitude is evident in some of the comments in these posts.

A small number of responses presented positive feedback. The comments below provide an illustration of acceptance of *prophets*' beliefs as legitimate.

It depends on your beliefs maloba, some of us pray and nothing changes so we end up going to consult with prophets, there are those who lie outright, those who 'see' (revelation) *but fail to help and then there are those who tell you the truth and also help you at the same time.*

There is nothing wrong with prophets, even in the bible it is written that they were given to us so that they help us. The problem is with us people who put our trust in a human being who is just like us. The bible says you must discern if prophets are driven by the Holy Spirit, then pray to God to give them power to help you, you must also believe they will help you and pray for yourself as well in order to help the prophet or your traditional healer.

I'll never stop going to prophets until I die, I won't lose the energy because they're helpful and they tell me the truth.

People have different problems maloba. I don't go to church but if there's something not going right in my life I go and consult prophets. There's one who told me when I was 16 that being a chef is my real job. I've had so many jobs and they never last but it is only this year that I got a job as a chef and I am finally happy and content.

[72] This is an abridged reference to the Zion Christian Church, one of the largest African indigenous churches https://relzim.org/major-religions-zimbabwe/african-indigenous/ Accessed 21/0718.

Clearly, some believe that there should be co-ordination between the Christian and traditional religions in order to have a lasting solution whilst others believe the discursive realms should remain separate. Perhaps a more interesting case is offered by this second post that I refer to here[73]. This is the one post where the division between Christianity and traditional healing is stark. In the post, the writer states that she needs desperate help because her marriage is falling apart and her husband has "developed horns" (a figurative expression that means he has become untouchable) because of *umakhwapheni*. She is therefore looking for an elderly woman who is a spiritual seer or a *prophet* or anyone who 'works with people'. Interestingly she cautions "abokuthandaza abame kancance" loosely translated "prayer people please stand back" because how can she possibly pray when she is "weeping and no words are coming out". If, in the previous post, the dichotomy between those who believe in prayer and those who believe in traditional methods for solving problems was implied, in this post they are starkly explicit. Let's consider these few comments:

> *Heh maloba it's funny how you say how will you pray whilst weeping…I personally fasted for 7 full days for my marriage when I could see that my marriage was really sinking and my husband was telling me painful things and that he's tired of me yet he was just fighting for his girlfriend…I prayed until this demon gave in, makhwaps was telling me point blank that she wants to take away my husband from me no matter what. When I would hear that, instead of faltering, those words would make me strong and I would pray even harder just to show Satan that he doesn't have power ever!!! Those who know prophets will help, I went to a prophet and it became worse so I said to myself I know the one who died for us, He is the one who will fight for me.*
>
> *I don't believe in Man made Gods, Coz they have eyes but they don't see. I believe in God the creator of everything. So if you don't want to pray I don't know what will happen to you because this is the time to kneel down and pray and tell everything to Jesus. Witchcraft will come back to haunt you, Put God first.*

Astounding affirmations and *Amens* emphatically follow these comments to discursively endorse that prayer indeed conquers everything. A point to note is that many Christians believe that consulting *prophets* and traditional healers is synonymous to witchcraft as seen in the comments above. This is because they believe that by Jesus dying for our sins, a direct line was created to the Father therefore we can talk to him directly without any mediums

[73] Morning dadewethu ngicela ungibekele udaba lwami kubo bombs abahle.....bomama sizani nanku umuzi wami ubhidlika indoda isimile impondo shuwa ongabe esazi ugogo obonayo noma umthandaziseli angincede ukhwaphs usefuna ukungibhidlizela umuzi zithandwa.....abokuthandaza abame kancane ngizathandaza ngithini ngihlaba umkhosi shuwa lamagama awaphumi ngifuna nje osebenza ngabantu nanko umuzi uyabhidlika ngibhekile zihlobo.....please dont forget to hide.

besides the holy spirit. However, Mbiti (1990) notes that in traditional African religion these specialists are usually grouped under the title of medicine-men [*sic*] and are often wrongly referred to as witch-doctors. It is believed that they do not practice witchcraft but can correct problems caused by witchcraft. Both women and men can be 'called' to be medicine-men. It has been argued that the non-tolerance of traditional practices is an indication that evangelicalism is a proselytising force which, in many instances, has to do with forsaking African culture and adopting or converting to Western culture (Balcomb 2017). Some therefore resist this evangelical discourse for this very reason and represent an attempt by Africans to salvage some of their religious practices as illustrated in the comments below:

> *Listen sister, you are right, if there is a chance for you to fix your marriage please go ahead and do so. A marriage should be fixed by right. Don't listen to those who are saying he he he you can't fix a dog etc.*
>
> *Stop pretending to be holier than thou, some things you can pray until you die without getting a solution but if you're helped by a seer the situation changes for the better, maloba just do what you think is right, man-made problems are fixed by human beings.*
>
> *Come to my inbox lobi, obviously oMaria and oAnna will say leave but in future when you start dating their men they will call you a bitch, fight fire with fire ma baby, no time for playing…even long back our grandmothers used to fight for their marriages, but nowadays we live with oMaria who pretend to be holier than thou.*
>
> *Maloba I can make sure she has a never ending period until she comes to apologise to you.*
>
> *Come with a thousand* [rand] *I can help you, makhwaps will roam the streets naked to your great amusement.*

The discursive contestation between Christianity and traditional religion is clearly demonstrated here. The first comment was in response to another comment which suggested that *maloba* should leave and not waste her time trying to fix a 'dog'. In a matter of fact tone, it encourages her to use the specialists to her 'fix' her marriage. The next two also encourage *maloba* to seek help and not depend on the advice of the Marias and Annas[74] of this world. An allegorical interpretation of the biblical references to these women works to construct Christian women as ideally virtuous and steadfast in prayer and therefore never falter. This

[74] Maria in the Bible was the mother of Jesus and she is the primary matriarchal figure in scripture who is considered blessed and highly favoured (Luke 1:28). Anna was a prophetess married for 7 years before she was widowed for the most part of her 84 years during which she never left the temple but worshipped day and night fasting and praying (Luke 2:36-38).

comment is, however, laced with cynicism to suggest that no one is perfect like those biblical figures. The emphasis on "pretend[ing]" is in reference to the criticism that some are Christians by day but at night they consult traditional healers in order not to be seen transgressing the faith by other evangelical Christians who ascribe to the idea that Christianity requires a clean break from traditional practices. The act of quoting specific Bible characters indicates that the responding woman is familiar with the Bible but ascribes to a worldview of broader possibilities. Furthermore, the reference to "our grandmothers used to fight for their marriages" indicates her acceptance of traditional methods which preceded the introduction of Christianity. In other words, it represents a clash between Christianity and traditional religion which, to date, have a complex relationship with each other. Fighting "fire with fire" arguably refers to the infamous metaphorical 'bombs' that people send to each other in order to 'destroy' their enemies. These metaphorical 'bombs' are represented by the two examples given in the comments of the "never-ending period" and "roam[ing] the streets [while] naked" which is believed to be a revenge act of 'sending back to sender'. These 'bombs' are sent using the expertise of various medicine-men, as discussed earlier.

A rather condescending argument is offered by another respondent in this comment with an unmistakable authoritative tone that suggests wisdom:

> *Before we go any further my little sister, let me help you. No matter how much you thunqisela*[75]*as long as there is a loose button your efforts would be futile. I'm not saying you are weak or what but don't give that makhwaps a [sic]space. First of all, don't be moody in times like this, go back to the old days, when he gets home don't ask him about his infidelity. Do your duties. Even when you go to the bedroom concentrate on that, don't dwell on the fact that he's having an affair, he'll be embarrassed by himself, you'll ask me one day when everything is back to normal. There's no muthi that can fix a man, just kneel down and pray and ask for help but always supplement it with good behaviour towards your husband.*

In this comment, there is an outright dismissal of using *umuthi* to lure the husband back home, the woman is rather encouraged to pray but most importantly she is encouraged to supplement those prayers curiously by being submissive (explicit in active verbal command "do your duties"). The woman is again encouraged to 'be quiet' by not questioning the husband about his infidelity but she should rather 'do her duties' even in the bedroom (sex) so that she can salvage her marriage. This oppressive discourse serves to disempower

[75] This is the result of the burning of certain herbs (similar to burning incense) so that the desired smoke is either inhaled or allowed to engulf the home as a protective measure against evil spirits or witchcraft.

women, in the sense that women are encouraged to 'pray' so that they receive restoration in their lives and marriages in particular – a supposedly empowering act – as long as it does not disrupt their gender roles ("just kneel down and pray and ask for help but always supplement it with good behaviour towards your husband [supposedly by] do[ing] your duties"). The result is an uncritical acceptance of Christianity in defining a 'good' woman on *Makhox*. This Christian subject is produced within the parameters of this discourse with its proposed ways of being: a good Christian woman will pray when faced with any adversity and she will conquer as long as she continues doing her duties and not consult traditional healers. These prescriptions on the qualities that a Christian woman should embody, demonstrate what knowledge is put to work through discursive practices in order to regulate their conduct.

Knowledge and power, as already established, implicate one another and work to regulate social conduct. In this instance, those who challenge Christian dominance using a counter discourse are labelled as unbelievers who will die in hell. In fact, these "Pray" responses have become so commonplace; some writers anticipate the responses before they post as evident in the post which cautions the 'prayer warriors' to 'stand back'. In those posts when someone seeks the help of a traditional 'specialist' they are advised that they will never get such help on *Makhox*. Such beliefs are expurgated, and it is evangelical Christian discourse, articulated through the excessive quoting of biblical scripture that dominates this forum. As willing Christian subjects this constitutes their 'truth'. As Hall reminds us "knowledge linked to power...has the power to *make itself true*…[therefore] [k]nowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practices" (Hall 1997: 49, emphasis in original).

What is striking here is the authoritarian and judgemental disposition of the Christian subjects who seek to discipline and govern the 'other'. The lack of empathy displayed is not consistent with liberal feminist discourse which endorses democracy and equality for everyone. Paradoxically, the authoritarian nature of their attitude seems to defer to a conservative patriarchal position. In other words, it requires deference to authority, much as Mamdani (1996) describes in his discussion of how power was/is organised through indirect rule. Indeed, this can be likened to a typical case of a "femininity that giveth and taketh away" (Sullivan & Delaney 2017: 854). In their study of the evangelical entrepreneurial femininity, Sullivan and Delaney argue that this type of femininity provides fulfilment in one instance

but takes it away in the next; the same can be argued with regards to the type of evangelical femininity encouraged on *Makhox* that presumes fulfilment, but defers to the strictures of patriarchy in the last instance.

5.2.2 Leave & Bath: Postfeminism and Neoliberal femininity

Because postfeminism is a slippery term (as discussed in chapter 2), I briefly restate how that I understand postfeminism as both a theoretical approach and an analytical approach (McRobbie 2009; Lewis et al. 2017). Following scholars who constitute postfeminism as a cultural sensibility (Gill & Scharff 2011; Gill et al. 2017), I consider postfeminism as a discourse that constitutes the discursive object and subject and proposes particular forms of governmentality. This signals a concern with how 'truths' become established and present us with possibilities of acting upon the conduct of others towards particular ends and intervening upon particular problems (Rose 2004: 9). As Zimbabwean women converse on *Makhox*, there is, to my mind, a discernible postfeminist rhetoric with its identifiable themes of freedom and choice that constitutes subjects whose thinking and understanding are shaped through this 'disciplining' discourse. However, a postfeminist discourse coexists complexly with other discourses and this produces tensions and negotiations between various discourses.

Approached as a discursive formation, postfeminism as a sensibility has a number of distinguishing features that can be identified as:

> a focus upon empowerment, choice and individualism; the repudiation of sexism and thus the need for feminism alongside a sense of 'fatigue' about gender; notions of make-over and self-reinvention/transformation; an emphasis on surveillance and discipline; a resurgence of ideas of sexual difference (Gill et al. 2017: 230).

This is by no means an exhaustive list but many of the features are identifiable on *Makhox*. However, this is not to imply that postfeminism as a concept that originated in the global North travels neatly to contexts in the global South, but it is a recognition that "postfeminism is potentially and variously available to globally 'scattered' feminine subjects who have *the material, discursive, and imaginative capital to access and buy into it*" (Dosekun 2015: 966, emphasis in original). It thus becomes transnational for it is forged within global neoliberal capitalist discourse. Importantly, this discourse does not arrive in its different locales in uniform or typical 'Western' forms but rather adapts to different contexts. It is with this

understanding that I critique postfeminism on *Makhox* as a pattern of beliefs and practices that are dynamic and susceptible to change.

It is against this backdrop that I analyse the manifest 'leave' and 'bath' responses in various posts. In the 'leave' responses the woman is encouraged through argumentation strategies to leave her cheating and/or abusive husband with immediate effect because "*awuzalwanga unamathelane lendoda*" (you were not born conjoined with a man). In these comments women are encouraged not to be overly dependent on men, but rather, to focus on bettering themselves. Notably, 'leaving' an abusive or cheating partner is almost always followed by 'bathing' as an act of affirming independence. One example will suffice so I make reference here to a post in which a woman was lamenting the harsh words her husband had used following a dispute between them; he ends up calling her names that refer to her genitalia using unpleasant figurative language to describe them[76]. The woman herself uses vulgar language in the post. Apparently, the husband accused her of being deviant when she has employment (suggesting his resentment of her working) and said her genitalia had become elastic. He went further to specifically liken her vagina to *umxhanxa*, a Ndebele traditional soup made from a certain type of melon and dried mealies (maize), that is particularly watery. She argues that even if she leaves (note that she anticipates this response), what reason could she give to her relatives about why she left. At the same time, if she stayed, she would not want to sleep with him after his insults as she would not enjoy sex with him. She is therefore asking for advice about what to do. This particular post attracted 181 comments, and most comments were encouraging her to 'leave' and 'bath' in varying degrees.

The first observation I make about this post relates women and employment with which *maloba* introduces her problem, and which appears to have been the cause of their argument. Historically, feminists had been concerned about the confinement of women in the domestic realm. The recognition that women had to move from domestic, largely unpaid work, to the public domain of paid labour was therefore a welcome development in feminist circles. Even in postfeminist discourse a working woman is considered a symbol of success. However, the

[76] Hi,sisi hope uyaphila. plz post this to the laddies and hide me ngizwe imibono yabo....Bomama ngithemba liphilile.ngilapha ngidinga iadvise kini..bomama izolo ebusuku besixabana losatwa ethi mina ngingasebenza ngiyazenzisa kodwa mina angikuboni konke lokho..kodwa lapho ongikhube khona yikuthi ethi kimi ngegolo eliyirekeni..Yee umxhanxa wegolo..Yazi ngizizwe ngiphelelwa and noma ngingathi sengimtshiya ngakithi ngiyathi ngisukeleni okwesibili kuzoba nzima ukuphinda ngilale naye ekubeni ngisazi ukuthi ucabangani ngegolo lami..Ngeke nje ngisayi enjoyer isex naye dont know what to do or ngikudlulise njani...Ngiyabonga kwabazosiza.

expectations of conventional marriage complicate the relationship between marriage and employment (Leonard 2007). On one hand, a job signifies success and symbolically breaking the dependence on male patronage, a message contained within these comments:

> *There's nothing like that, he's seeing that you're now beautiful and is now afraid of losing you to other men. He wants you to be dependent on him always asking for things, he just wants to hurt you.*
>
> *There are some silly men who say that women start acting up when they start working, buy nice clothes, bath and look beautiful, just ignore him and continue bathing and wear high heels and even sing praises to yourself in front of the mirror and say 'what a beautiful umxhanxa'* (melon soup).

On the other hand, perhaps a strong reaction to the fact that women can earn their own living, some argue that 'leaving' or divorce is appropriate:

> *You can't stand for such abuse in the name of marriage, he must stay with his marriage, you can survive even if you're not married!*
>
> *If you can afford yourself* [*sic*] *leave that place.*
>
> *You'll find someone who'll treat you like a queen (I think he's that type that doesn't respect himself and lacks education). Don't have low self-esteem because of this, just bath and walk tall believe you me, you will smile one day.*

The discourse inherent in these comments functions to construct independent women as having the freedom to be anything they want to be, in essence they can "have it all". It proposes certain 'truths' and modalities in the sense that the woman is encouraged to "continue bathing and be beautiful", "buy [herself] nice clothes", "wear high heels" because she does not need a man to achieve all those things seeing as how "he wants [her] to be dependent on him, always asking for things", but with her newfound freedom she does not even need marriage because "you can survive even if you're not married". There is an unmistakable postfeminist ring in this claiming of 'freedom' and 'emancipation' through these acts. As argued in chapter 2, postfeminism recalls traditional forms of femininity such as grooming and rules about hair, bags and shoes and constructs them as the result of choice rather than constituted as forms of submission as other forms of feminism have proposed. Notably, this postfeminist sensibility obscures the neoliberal imperative; having 'nice' clothes and wearing high heels are acts of consumption in the first place. In this way, the postfeminist subject is simultaneously constituted as an ideal neoliberal subject (see McRobbie 2009). Following this line of argument, I was faced with the task of trying "to

analyse the conditions under which these ideas of freedom and these practices in the name of freedom have come into existence, and try to clarify the lines of power, truth and ethics that are in play within them" (Rose 2004: 10).

What emerges is the conservative traditional discourse that contests with the postfeminist discourse. Accordingly, those constituted within conservative traditional discourse encourage her to let bygones be bygones and "hold on to [her] marriage" because, she should learn to "separate nonsense and real issues in [her] marriage", and to only leave if there was evidence of constant verbal abuse. Once again, we see the constructions of traditional and modern subjectivities in tension in the responses to this post. Essentially, the modern subjects embody the postfeminist discourse that presumes paid employment, ready cash and 'freedom' and the conservative traditional discourse presumes the importance of 'provider love'[77] (Hunter 2010), which makes it difficult to walk away if one is dependent and poor.

First of all, there is an emphasis that this man is verbally and emotionally abusive for having the audacity to speak of his partner's body parts in such a disrespectful manner. Many comments that are sympathetic to *maloba* display chagrin at the disrespect, and note that a 'real' man does not speak like that to his partner. The first comment links this behaviour to a lack of education. Uneducated men are constructed as uncouth whilst educated ones, by implication, are refined. A binary opposition is created between a real man and an abusive man in these terms: educated vs uneducated, respectful vs disrespectful, caring vs abusive, refined vs uncouth. It is argued that when faced with such an uncouth man, the best option is to "leave because there's no future". This woman is encouraged to claim her full independence because she is working, as implied in her post. If, in fact, she is working, she is presumed to be empowered already and therefore does not need a man's patronage. It is my argument that it is precisely because of her working status that she is getting so much support because it is a sign of independence that is always encouraged on *Makhox* as I show below.

> *Excuse me if I will sound blunt: women we waste too much of our lives yazi skhalela amadoda* (crying over men) *than trying to better ourselves hey, uyaze akuphathele umkhuhlane umuntu ulokhe umkhalela, kubuhlungu to lose umuntu omthandayo angali* (he'll end up infecting you with AIDS whilst you're busy crying over him, yes

[77] Hunter (2010) contrasts provider love with romantic love in a study of South African townships. He argues that provider love takes into account the materiality of relationships. In essence it is based on traditional practices (such as lobola) and the ability of a man to provide for his partner. In contrast, romantic love is presumably modern and is based on individual 'choice', monogamy and equality between partners.

> it is painful to lose someone you love) *but the sooner you accept n move on its lesser hart ache*[*sic*] *n little wasted time hey.*

In typical *Makhox* style, any situation can be turned into comic relief. There are some suggestions that she should also take 'revenge' by not sleeping with him; "tell him that melons are off season", or by telling him that because his penis is too small, like a "toothpick", a "teaspoon", or "wire", he does not satisfy her. Alternatively, his oversized penis, like that of a "horse", made her genitalia watery. These resistant metaphors make the conversations on *Makhox* colourful and in a strange way bring a source of comfort to *maloba* as they rally behind her to demonstrate support from sisters.

Predictably, some righteous comments explicitly blame *maloba* for the situation she has found herself:

> *Stop bullying him with your words babes.*
>
> *The truth comes out when you're fighting, tighten your privates sister and submit to him even if you're getting your own salary and see what happens*.
>
> *Your vagina becomes elastic with time so you need to fix your 'elastic'.*

I explore this issue of tightening the vagina in the next chapter. Let me conclude this section by noting that a pervasive response on *Makhox* relates to prayer (an element of evangelical Christian discourse) and paid labour (as constituted within neoliberal postfeminist discourse). The point to be emphasised here is that this 'pray', 'leave' and 'bath' theme is very common. Interestingly, it signals both a postfeminist sensibility that simultaneously connects with an evangelical Christianity and the femininities they validate. A woman in distress is advised to pray, either to make God open her eyes and see that she is in the wrong relationship or pray for strength to leave her relationship. Note the emphasis of responsibility that underlies a neoliberal subjectivity in today's world, further demonstrated below.

It is noteworthy that the individual is held responsible for making the choices in terms of relationships: "where do you get such [crazy] men?" and work: "find a good job". When one has prayed the assumption is that they will be blessed (usually with a job), and they can therefore "leave that bastard" (in the case of the two women who were abused and cheated on as indicated in the examples at the beginning of this chapter). By gaining employment, it is assumed that they will automatically develop a sense of independence "let's be independent",

"let us empower ourselves as women", "get a job work 4 urself, eat [*sic*] your money take yourself out and be stress free". This heady sense of independence and empowerment is, however, illusory as it masks the fact that in the Zimbabwean context specifically, women do not go to work necessarily as a way of asserting independence. The socio-economic situation and the diasporic condition of the Zimbabwean woman have made it an imperative that she works to earn a basic living.

The advice to pray and leave has become so entrenched on *Makhox* that those who post often pre-empt the advice they are likely to receive and so offer likely responses of their own. This is evident in posts where *maloba* anticipates the advice she will receive from her post (as the woman who stated that even if she left her husband for insulting her, she would not know what to tell her relatives). Another example is the case of a woman who was beaten by her husband for posting on *Makhox*[78]; in addition to the advice to 'leave' and put "work first 'balls' last", she identifies herself as already empowered. She states:

> *I left him alone, I don't want him anymore anyway because when his friends ask him for money for beer he gives them without hesitation, but if I ask for money for airtime he goes around in circles, I have even cut my hair so as not to trouble him. It's tough ladies but I got a job, I'm starting tomorrow.*

I argue that the particular feminine sensibility she enacts is consistent with the postfeminist set of values constantly recognised on *Makhox,* earning her the title of "#Beautiful brave woman". It implies that had she stayed with her partner, she would still be in a state of bondage. She constructs herself as having already reclaimed her freedom; she has already found a job; she does not need him anymore. He had humiliated her as she had even been forced to cut her hair, arguably a signifier of beauty that he seeks to constrain. Since she is now independent: she can "bath and be more beautiful, move on [and] not shed a tear…focus

[78] Hie dear labomama. Ladies ngitshaywe yindoda because ngike ngabhalela lapha last week ngi complainer ngokuthi kangiphi imali i grocery nguye oyenzayo endlini. So yena wayibona ipost yami coz ukhona kuleli page and ngangihlala ngikhuluma laye ngakho ngimtshela ukuthi lami njengomuntu ongumfazi ngiyafisa ukuzithengela amabhodo, izitsha, ingubo lokunye nje okwendlini ngibeke but nxa engangiphi imali akula engizakwenza because mina angilamali umsebenzi wami waphela. So wathi ebona ipost wayevele esendlini wangitshengisa i tried to explain ukuthi kungenxa yothando engilalo kuye ngifuna silungise izinto thts why ngidinga ama advice kwabanye omama. Asikho ukuthi ngiyamhleba and vele labantu engibhalele kibo abamazi but kazange afune ukungilalela wangitshaya kabuhlungu ethi yena kangiphi imali bcoz ngiyadlalisa. Kodwa eqinisweni bomama wangipha kanye imali ngahamba ngayathenga okwakungekho endlini because yena wayegula and ama receipts ngeza lawo. Ngihle ngaphuma mina ngamtshiya yedwa angisamfuni vele ngoba nxa abangane bakhe bemcela imali yotshwala uyikhupha egijima mina eye airtime uyaqala abalise inwele sengaze ngagunda ngoba ngingafuni kuhlupha. Kunzima ladies kodwa umsebenzi ngiwutholile ngiyaqala tomorrow. Ngifihle sisi bengangiboni. Nyt ladies.

on [and] love [her]self." 'Bathing' here arguably implies a washing away – a baptismal that constitutes the discovery of one's inner worth that was presumably suppressed when she was in a relationship. It constitutes the (re)discovery of "a more authentic self" imbuing sexual attractiveness that signifies a source of power over patriarchy rather than subject to it (Roberts 2007: 237).

The emphasis on leaving a man and becoming successful is echoed by someone who testifies how she had been in a similar situation and left because her partner belittled her. Now she proudly states, "I'm Miss Independent, I own my business". Within neoliberal discourse, the ability and aspiration to work and to spend are key measures of value, and ideal neoliberal subjects cooperate with their positioning within these parameters (Tyler 2011: 22). It is my conclusion that these posts on *Makhox* articulate a willingness to work and consequently consume, coupled with the celebration of singleness. I propose that the discursive subjects endorsed here presume a neoliberal femininity that incorporates a neoliberal postfeminist sensibility and is underpinned by a deep sense of evangelicalism.

5.3 Conclusion

I have advanced the argument that in Zimbabwean society marriage is a key identity marker because it represents respectability. Heteronormative conceptions of marriage produce particular subjectivities and the associated practices are reflected in the discursive contestations between *oMrs* and *omakhwapheni*. Constituted as willing subjects of patriarchy, *oMrs*' identities are consistent with the traditional gender order that presumes patriarchal privilege and deference to the presumed authority of Christianity. In contrast, *omakhwapheni* are constituted within a modern liberal discourse that presumes rights and equality, but which incorporates strands of deference to the patriarchal gender order. I have also identified religion as a powerful discourse that seeks to discipline its subjects and propose certain truths and modalities to regulate their conduct. Within this discursive realm, Christianity, as the dominant religion, constitutes its subjects and simultaneously expurgates traditional religious subjects. These subject positions exist in contestation and tension with each other and influence the advice that women offer each other on this forum. Also, a distinct postfeminist discourse culminates in the responses to validate particular sexual conduct beyond the constraints of monogamy. It presumes freedom associated with engaging in paid labour and works to produce neoliberal subject positions that correspond with the demands of capitalism.

CHAPTER 6: MAKHOX WOMEN'S LEAGUE (PART II)

> And so cultural analysis not only identifies the underlying patterns, but discovers the similarities existing between the patterns of apparently different spheres of human activity. In other words, the patterns that are the object of cultural analysis exist not just in the ways people behave but within the underlying set of relations which constitute the social formation. The cultural analyst identifies the key ideas, the key words, the key definitions, which hold the whole culture together. But they also expect to find that matrix expressed in other, different practices. The work of analysis consists of looking for the similarities in the pattern, looking for the homologies (Hall [1983] 2016: 35).

6. Introduction

When the conversation on *Makhox* strays away from cheating men, there is an obsession with sex talk which often borders on the indecent, and which I interpret as serving as confession, that technology of self Foucault (1978) proposed. I begin by providing an overview of these conversations, and go on to discuss the subjectivities proposed by looking at the body and various technologies of self that the women have to enact as a result. I also examine the intersections of race, age and class as social categories that structure ideas about sex. In unpacking the various discourses, I identify traditional discourses that exist in tension with liberal modern discourses with regards to women's sexuality and their relationship to their bodies. These confessions reveal deep seated myths about Ndebele women and their sexuality and how these myths are now being contested by 'Western' ideas and practices. The conversations complicate ideas about the public versus the private sphere and raise issues about the disappearing boundaries between them, particularly on social networks. Sex, which was previously in the domain of the private, is now in the public domain.

In the second section, I focus on the issues of language, ethnicity and nationhood and how they variously constitute Zimbabwean women as subjects, while dispersed in foreign lands, in a postcolonial and globalised world. Through highlighting the uncomfortable relationship between Zimbabweans who live and work in Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans who live and work in South Africa (popularly known as *injiva* a term that that connotes 'wealth' and excess), I argue that Zimbabwean women's identities are produced within this seemingly unresolvable tension that manifests from time to time, and influenced by the socio-cultural, political and economic realities in the worlds they inhabit.

6.1 Of sex, amatshuni and everything in between

One of the topics that introduces a sense of intrigue and fascination relates to *amatshuni*, this word being a direct derivative from the English word 'tune'[79] whose colloquial translation means to modify. It is used on *Makhox* to refer to the various ways that women can 'tune', that is 'dress up' or 'tighten' their private parts, presumably for male pleasure. These relate to elongation of the labia minora and to various intra-vaginal practices including the insertion of an assortment of various substances for the purposes of enhancing sexual pleasure. As a cultural practice, labia minora elongation coincides with girls' coming of age, and most girls usually performed this ritual on reaching puberty under the guidance of aunts or other older female family members. However, with the breakdown in family structures over the years, caused in part by migration, this practice is observed by fewer families as an imperative. Arguably social media has filled this gap somewhat as the younger generation turn to social network sites for guidance, even more so in spaces like Zimbabwe where there is intergenerational silence around issues to do with sex.

Before going further, I mention a post in which *maloba* is enquiring, ostensibly on the part of a friend, about how to elongate her labia minora to set the scene[80]. A woman with extended labia minora is constructed as a woman with sexual prowess on *Makhox*. By having the labia extended it is argued that she will become "hyper active" in the bedroom and "*uzoba mnandi okokuthi istress sokwaliwa yindoda uzoba usizwela kubomakhelwane*", meaning "you'll be so sexually satisfying that the stress of being dumped by a man will be something you hear from neighbours". The implication is that extended labia will magically enhance a woman's sexual performance and her ability to give pleasure to her partner. Sex is hereby discursively constructed as requiring work by women to acquire a set of skills in order to ensure fidelity (see Harvey & Gill 2011; Farvid & Braun 2006; Fahs 2011). Interestingly, there is a caution that goes with this advice "don't overdo it; otherwise you'll be so lazy that you'll spend the whole day sleeping without cleaning the house". What is at issue here is the policing of women's bodies to conform to certain ideas of what constitutes femininity within a traditional patriarchal set up. The woman, as a willing sexual subject, engages in the material practice of labia elongation so that she is considered as a 'complete' woman, but wild and frequent sex

[79] *ama* is a plural word that works as a prefix to ama-tshuni, to indicate that there are a variety of these 'tunes'/mixtures.

[80] Mamzo kunjani pliz hide and post kuma ladies and greet them for me....ladies i hv a frend ofuna ukudonsa amalebe i remember seeing a post on wat u can use or smoke pliz guys its urgent. Thank u.

should be accomplished within particular parameters ("don't overdo it"). Her sexuality has to be kept in check to ensure it does not disrupt the patriarchal gender order which relegates all housework to women. To embody a 'good wife' requires finding a balance between her sexual self (performed by being "hyper active" in the bedroom) and domestic self (fulfilling her domestic duties). In fact, it has also been argued that elongating the labia beyond what is considered 'normal' results in overstimulation so that the woman is at risk of cheating on her husband to curb those sexual feelings (Venganai 2016)[81]. Whilst extended labia might arguably also enhance sexual pleasure for the woman, it is generally constituted as more in the service of the man to ensure that he will not cheat, as suggested by the comment above.

In contrast, women without extended labia minora are constructed as sexually lacking, as incomplete women, through the referential strategies that are employed. Consider this comment about what it must be like for a man to have sex with a woman without extended labia:

> *Juss imagine ma nje kungela yona nje indlebe eyodwa ukuba yi valve sekuyi freeway ubhudi wabantu azitshayele one round alale lijike lithi liloyiwe kanti umuntu uzabe ezakitazwa yini… lizofa yindlala yokuzenzela…kufana lokudla imboza udlelendlaleni* (Just imagine if there's not even one ear at least to act as a valve, it's like a freeway, the poor guy will just do one round and sleep because there's nothing to tickle him and then you'll think you were bewitched …you'll die of hunger you created yourself…it's like eating poorly cooked food, you just eat because you are hungry).

A woman's worth is discursively constructed as determined by what she has to offer between the sheets. This comment, whilst sympathetic to the "poor guy", suggests that if a woman also wants sexual satisfaction she must first 'tune' herself by elongating her labia. The metaphor of her vagina as a freeway, and the analogy of such sex with eating half cooked food are intended to endorse the practice and caution against ignoring this practice. The woman without elongated labia is effectively diminished by these bodily representations intended to shame such women and endorse other physical attributes as the ideal. Furthermore, referring to women as *ingudule* (bald head), a metaphor often employed as a

[81] For detailed discussion on these issues see Venganai, H. (2016). "Negotiating Identities Through the "Cultural Practice' of Labia Elongation among Urban Shona Women and Men in Contemporary Zimbabwe". *Culture Unbound*. 8 (3): 306-324.
Martinez Perez, G., Aznar, C.T., & Namulondo, H. 2014. "It's All About Sex: What Urban Zimbabwean Men Know of Labia Minora Elongation". *Cardenos de Estudos Africanos*. 27: 1-15.
Audet, C.M., Blevins, M., Buehler, C., Gonzalez-Calvo, L., Green, A.F., & Moon, T.D. 2016. Understanding Intra-Vaginal and Labia Minora elongation Practices Among Women Heads-Of-Households in Zambezia Province, Mozambique. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*. 19 (5): 616-629.

derogatory term to refer to women without elongated labia, elides other qualities and their whole personhood is reduced to the nature of their labia; this predicational strategy intends "specific body fragmentation" (Reisigl & Wodak 2001: 49).

Whilst the extension of labia minora is a customary practice usually performed as a rite of passage: "we were taught at grade 7", there are specific forms of *amatshuni* that are believed to enhance a woman's sexual performance, performance in the sense proposed by Judith Butler (as discussed in chapter 2). These acts are often performed willingly by sexually active women but most commonly by women in long term partnerships[82]. Since the success of marriage is discursively constructed as women's responsibility, women perform particular prescribed conduct or practices consistent with that discourse. The discussions on *Makhox* present willing subjects who perform their sexualities by engaging in intra vaginal practices, largely because it is 'custom' and they are constituted within this traditional discourse. They willingly embrace *amatshuni* as a way of keeping their straying husbands home. On the other hand, there are subjects who constitute themselves as modern and, citing issues of cancer, understand *amatshuni* from an 'informed' scientific position. An example of a post relating specifically to this to this suffices[83]. In this post, the woman is specifically extending gratitude to *Makhox* women because her marriage of 10 years has been revived by using *amatshuni*. To show that her marriage was crumbling, she uses onomatopoeia for emphasis. She writes "*ubususiwa bhu*" to show that her marriage was literally falling (*ubususiwa*) so that it produces a thud "*bhu*". The specific *tshuni* that she used consists of lemon, sugar and cooking oil, with these instructions for the "recipe"; "take a teaspoon of brown sugar, wet with a few drops of lemon, wrap inside a sock and wear inside your shoe, your shoe will never be loose again". Notably, the metaphor of a shoe is a euphemism for the vagina in an effort to show respectability because "we can't be blunt when there are children". Those who agree with the use of *amatshuni* offer different "recipes" and suggest that 'tuning' will ensure

[82] In particular, as women are heralded into marriage bridal showers or "kitchen teas" and various other gatherings are held for them in which they are intermittently advised how to take care of their genitalia so that they keep them from going elastic and consequently always satisfy their men.

[83] Hie gal, pliz hide I'd.I want to thank the Makhox ladies for the job well done for teaching us about amatshuni. Owami umuzi uvuselelekile bosisi ngoba ubususiwa bhuu. For the first time after using lemon and sugar and cooking oil, my hubby comented in bed during sex, wathi mmmmm yah today u taste different and I like it.we have been married for ten years and he doesn't talk during sex. From there he has been so keen to have sex and he is happy about wat he gets between my legs, so gals let's go for it,tighten that pussy and get some marks, its not too late to get your men bek. Thanx.

"that you keep your man" as that is why most "marriages are still standing". Furthermore, the effects are described figuratively: "you'll be [tight] like a one-month kid" and not like a "dish" (more like an open bowl). Whilst to tune or not is a matter of choice, the 'tuning' is presented like a magical agent that has the potential to save marriages. *Amatshuni,* in this instance, are discursively constructed as representative of an empowering sexual agency achieved by performing this technology of the self. Furthermore, the deployment of a simile to represent the notion of being tight "like a one-month kid" suggests an obsession with a return to an untouched 'original' juxtaposed with a 'dish' that indicates a loose vagina. This functions to construct women as needing to be virgin-like at all times. This validates traditional patriarchal discourse in which women must always be in the service of men, sexually or otherwise.

There are comments by those who disapprove of *amatshuni,* arguably women subjects constituted within a modern enlightened discourse. They suggest that people should "give those things (vaginas) a break" citing the danger of "cancer" and "worms". They propose "vaginal tightening exercises" or a "bath with cold water". Some mock the practices: "fry it and put Rajah [curry powder] I'll testify for you when you have cancer", "is it an engine that it needed oil", "cervixes are going to fall off", "lemon and sugar marinated" to which there are amused reactions. There are suggestions that it is not worth it because "sex is in the mind" and the query: "does he tune his banana for you?" The women who disapprove of *amatshuni* resist the patriarchal restriction regarding the need to pleasure men in the first instance. They suggest that they would rather stay single or stay with their "dishes" because "life has more to offer than that which is in between a woman's legs". These contributors note the double standards in some of these actions. The statement that men will not 'tune' their metaphoric 'bananas' prioritises equal partnerships and is consistent with liberal feminist accounts.

In addition, this type of post incorporates lexical register that suggests youthfulness. There is an implicit suggestion from the post that sex has everything to do with age considering the register that is used in the post "so gals let's go for it, tighten that pussy and get some marks, it's not too late to get your men bek". Here *maloba* uses the slang word 'gals' to suggest a certain youthfulness and there is a certain, almost palpable giddiness in her address that suggests naughtiness, she even uses English slang (associated with the younger generation) in her post "tighten that pussy and get some marks". Getting "marks" implies that tightening the

'pussy' is not necessarily for female pleasure but primarily for male pleasure; and it is sure to "get your men bek" because "it's not too late". In essence, women have to discipline themselves to perform their sexual identity to ensure their men do not stray. In this instance, women perform youthfulness and sex in order to fit the prevailing gender norms and expectations. It is required to perform youthfulness because an older woman is not considered sexy; the technologies of self associated with this performance require they modify their bodies in order to gratify men. As Butler (2004) points out, individuals rarely perform for their own needs, but rather, their gendered performances reveal larger societal discourses which condition their subjectivities and which they have little control over.

To further elaborate, there are different sexual expectations presumed in different discursive spaces and these pertain to age. In the first post alluded to above (about elongating labia minora), there is a comment that suggests that extending the labia minora is for elderly men who can appreciate it and not for "our age group", I quote "*into ezithandwa ngamaxhegu ke lezo intanga zethu* (those things are loved by elderly men, our age group) they have no clue what to do with them" note the juxtaposition between "elderly men - *amaxhegu*" and "our age group - *intanga zethu*". Another comment queries "what are they for, it's embarrassing to have dangling things", to suggest that this is a younger person and this practice has since lost traction. There is a clear dichotomy between the traditional and the modern in this instance as subjects who constitute themselves as 'modern' are usually happier to break with cultural practices. Notably, in the first post the extension of labia minora, possibly due to its cultural roots, is attributed to the older generation hence it is relegated to a traditional discourse. In the second post (relating to *amatshuni*), whilst *amatshuni,* specifically to do with vaginal tightening are imbued with a youthfully appealing discourse, there are some who still reject it.

Embracing *amatshuni* is constituted as savvy, for the youth and a matter of choice although paradoxically it reinforces traditional gender expectations with regard to sex. On the other hand, those who point out its cancer causing risks also read from a feminist 'enlightened' lens. The ambiguity in these positions demonstrates a dichotomy between traditional and Western medicine, which shapes their particular subjectivities.

The talk about cancer is informed by scientific or biomedicine discourse. This can be attributed to the fact that "people have come to experience themselves and their lives in

fundamentally biomedical terms… [and] have become bound to the ministrations and adjudications of medical expertise" (Rose 2007: 28). Rose's argument is pertinent here in the sense that he sees a connection between government and contemporary biopolitics. He argues that there has been a shift from direct biopolitics (in the sense of the control of populations by government); to a more individualised biopower that alters our sense of self in new ways. With promises of a new future, it places choice, prudence and responsibility for this possible future in the hands of individuals. In this instance, by having a fear of cancer, people are constructed into ethical health subjects who will govern not only themselves but others' conduct in relation to health (not least sexual practices) which tells of a disciplining force that seeks to produce ideal neoliberal subjects. As Rose further argues:

> In an age of biological prudence, where individuals, especially women, are obliged to take responsibility for their own medical futures and those of their families and children, these ethical principles are inevitably translated into microtechnologies for the management of communication and information that are inescapably normative and directional. These blur the boundaries of coercion and consent. They transform the subjectivities of those who are counseled, offering them new languages to describe their predicament, new criteria to calculate its possibilities and perils, and entangling the ethics of the different parties involved. It is in this sense managing the present in terms of an uncertain medical future (2007: 29).

There is evidence here of a form of government that acts on individuals' bodies, shaping how they think and understand various events in their lives. It is no longer the medical practitioners that tell us how to live but so many other experts, counsellors and support groups take up this role. Hence, on sites such as *Makhox*, in ordinary everyday conversations as women advise each other and raise concerns about issues such as cancer and HIV/AIDS,[84] they regulate each other's conduct in relation to health so that at the end of the day, individuals seemingly behave out of choice and the invisible hand of authority remains hidden. It is at this moment, Foucault reminds us, that power is at its most potent, that is, when it disguises itself and in the process producing new forms of knowledge and subjectivities. The body and what it is capable of is central to technologies of the self, that is, those techniques that constitute individuals' behaviour and alters their way of being in order to reach a certain state of happiness, purity or freedom (Foucault 1982).

[84] In posts related to cheating, women always raise the concern about the spread of HIV/AIDS and there is a deep-seated concern about contracting the disease. Recently however, there has been a shift as people who post about being positive are given advice about living healthily and not re-infecting themselves. There is tolerance except when it comes to infecting unsuspecting others.

6.1.2 The body and technologies of the self

I introduce this section with an example of women's sexual confession to discuss how the body and its capacities are central to technologies of selfhood. These confessions raise the issue of the connection or demarcation between the public and the private. This particular post[85] is important as it was written by one of the group administrators. It is pertinent for the authority it holds and thus the power of definition. As a group administrator she has the authority to address the women in question in a retributive manner, to name and shame, so to speak. She 'exposes' the women (names withheld by the administrator) who, she suggests, were judgemental of another member who posted a story narrating how when they're being intimate, her husband "gets his manhood up with his hand" which she dislikes. She was accused of posting "a bedroom issue" in public and the group administrator in question admonishes them.

> No ladies you are wrong, this page was officially opened by me and *Makhox* to give us ladies a chance to be open to each other about bedroom issues, including an issue like that one… if you ask about *amatshuni*, and how weak your man is_isnt that a bedroom issue?? If your man is no longer sleeping at home - isn't that a bedroom issue, some are complaining about men who are one minute noodles and others who are carrying teaspoons - isn't that a bedroom issue. Please sisters let's respect each other, if you don't like something just don't comment. Let's stop making others look stupid. Most of you who like insulting and judging it's because you have a low self-esteem and you try to boost it by insulting others. No ladies get something to motivate you.

Through her argument the group administrator immediately "regulates the content of arguments and the conduct of arguers" (Richardson 2007: 156), by virtue of her authority as administrator. She sets the parameters for the discussion of bedroom (or privacy) issues. To this end, I submit that *Makhox* functions as both a governed and a governing space. She rules that all issues related to sex in one way or another to be addressed, such as *amatshuni*, men who no longer sleep at home, men who ejaculate prematurely (the metaphorical "one minute

[85] Sisi kunjani, please ngicela uthumele lemessage to the following ladies abalandeli beMakhox Womens League. (names withheld) I just read lendaba yalosisi othi indoda yakhe ivusa isitho sayo ngesandla and she doesn't like it. labosisi above, bayamjaja bathi this is a bedroom issue hayi bosisi lirongo, this page was officially opened by me and Makhox to give us ladies to be open to each other obout bedroom issues, including an issue like tht one. This page is for ladies only ayikho lendaba yokuthi wht if indoda yakhe iyibone, if u ask abt amatshuni, and how weak yo man is _ isn't that a bedroom issue?? Ukuthi indoda yakho ayisalali endlini- isn't tht a bedroom issue, abanye bakhala ngamadoda angama One-minute noodle namanye aphethe iteaspoon - isn't tht a bedroom issue. Please bosisi ngicela sihloniphane, if into ungayithande jst dnt comment. Siyeke ukwenza abanye abantwana babukeke njengezilima! Most of you who like insulting and judging its becoz you have a low self- esteem and you try to boost it ngikuthethesa abanye. No ladies get something to motivate you, Ngiyabonga.

noodles", and men with small genitals (metaphorically referred to as "teaspoon"). Responding within the parameters already determined by the administrator, it is hardly surprising that those who respond have already been validated and laud the group administrator for taking a stand against perceived detractors.

This post provides the members of *Makhox* the opportunity to present a nostalgic picture of how *Makhox* used to be a space for women to express themselves freely without being policed, but has since become dominated by those who do not take other people's problems seriously. They comment thus: "gone are the days whereby *Makhox W L* used to be a place of advice, when you had a problem and post on this page you knew you would be genuinely assisted", "I miss those olden days". Some attribute this to a generation gap "they've turned this place into a preschool, we are now babysitting", "if an older woman posts her problem they make fun of her because of her age, it's as if there's now age discrimination, where are the women who used to give constructive advice [mentions them by name], they are all gone because of the disorder here" and:

> *If a 58 year old posts with a problem she is told aunty what do you want from a youth page, really ladies! this page is open for all women with a problem to post whether she's 90 or just wants to gossip it's allowed, and those older women are actually the founders of this page so let's show them respect.*

The women lament how they are being policed:

> *If we post jokes nyweee*[86] *they're boring you're not kids, if we post amatshuni nyweee cancer, if we look for 'prophets' nyweee kneel down, a man is 2 minutes noodles nyweee you're belittling him, if we post about business you become dead quiet, if we post about our jobs as maids you think we're crazy, if I ask for a baking recipe you say google, if I ask for medicine for my tooth you say I must remove it haaaaaaaa* [frustrated] *is there anything you don't query except the morning prayer only, you type a big AMEN and I doubt you'd have even read it.*

Read critically, this comment in its almost poetic style questions the production of knowledge. Allowing that the comment is made by a 'traditional' woman, the post takes issue with the conservatism displayed by certain 'modern' Christian subjects in their responses. These modern subjects are constructed as uptight (as they will not laugh at certain jokes), as adhering to Christian principles in their anti-traditional stance (such as not doing *amatshuni* and consulting *prophets*) and as overly protective/respectful of their partners (criticising their

[86] A rhetorical device that indicates incessant blabbering.

husband's sexuality in public is a sign of disrespect). These modern subjects are also constructed as middle class women whose aspirations are limited to getting an office job and hence their knowledge of 'business' is non-existent (in contrast to 'traditional' subjects who are 'hustlers' or street smart). Instead they look down on their working class counterparts ("if we post our jobs as maids you think we are crazy"). It suggests that women concentrate on the trivial instead of actively encouraging each other in the public domain. (I must hasten to add that there has been a shift as *Makhox* women now actively encourage each other to venture into business, arguably in response to the ever diminishing opportunities for formal employment due to the deteriorating economic situation in Zimbabwe).

The statement that the only thing that is not queried on *Makhox* is prayer, is consistent with the argument in the previous chapter about the dominance of Christianity as a religious discourse that disciplines and structures the worldviews of its subjects. It also serves to challenge its dominance as a discourse. This same writer suggests that "*Makhox* should be divided into two, one with those who spend the whole day posting about the bible and another with those who don't care about all these things".

This discursive contestation over who is right and who is wrong, what counts as problems and/or advice and ultimately whether traditional or modern views should be prominent, is indicative of the range of technologies of the self. Subjects constitute themselves as particular discursive subjects and engage in policing practices in terms of speech, in order to perform acceptable elements of those discursive realms in certain ways so as to constitute themselves within those parameters. In other words, the struggles over power and meaning on forums like *Makhox* indicate an intricate form of governance that operates on people's bodies to condition who they are, how they should think and how they should behave. Interestingly, one woman also comments to say that, the very fact that people are being told how to advise is in itself wrong because it is a form of control. At this point she arguably asserts agency by refusing to be a 'docile body'. The administrator's admonishing post is indicative of how online social networks function, in the sense that there should be a regulatory mechanism to keep the rapport going peacefully (Stefanone et al. 2011), even if this has its own problematics in terms of exerting power and shaping certain behaviours, which consequently affect subjectivities.

In another post[87] a woman posted asking whether the other ladies kissed their husbands during the night or in the morning before waking up when having sex since "the mouths will be smelly". She claims that her husband loves kissing her and she hates it and so asks the other ladies how they do it. She also cautions the ladies to say they should not lie and claim to wake up in the middle of the night to go and brush their teeth "like those who claim they wake up and bath after every round of sex". While there are those who are concerned about privacy "why should we reveal ourselves when you are hiding", "why not discuss with him first instead of rushing to this page", other women openly discuss the issue and in typical *Makhox* style there is always humour in every post/situation.

> *Maybe your 'service' is not nice lobi* [short for maloba], *during a nice 'service' all senses disappear and only the joy of that moment remains…you and your hubby need to pull up your socks and get into the pleasure gear.*
>
> *If you love someone by 1,2,3 minutes they will be smelling good.*

The 'service' is a euphemism for lovemaking that shows respectability; in Ndebele the act of lovemaking is called '*inkonzo yabadala*' literally meaning adult worship service. *Maloba* is therefore advised to "be in the mood as long as you love your husband then all these things will not matter". Some advise her to keep peppermints and mouthwash by the bedside table while the humorous ones comment thus:

> *I don't like being fumbled by someone at night when I'm sleeping because my feelings will be faraway and worse I'll be dreaming of myself driving a Lamborghini somewhere overseas then someone wakes me up, I'd fight like it's the end of the world.*
>
> *Or else you're an office lady feeling important then someone nudges you, no ways I'd shout until you make me have the same dream again from scratch.*

[87] Post n hide mma, helloe bomama lina liyabakhisa yini ohubby benu ebusuku kumbe ekuseni ma selisenza isex bantu mina ngithwala nzima coz imilomo iyabe inuka kodwa umkami vele uyabe engakuzwa lokho uyabona sengikhisa kunjalo ngicaphuke ngife ngithi nyaa lina liyakhisana yini bantu ebusuku lekuseni before livuka ma selisenza inkonzo?*ngicela lingathi vuu liqambe amanga lithi liyavuka noma phakathi kobusuku liyexhubha before lenze like labo abathi bayavuka bayegeza after every round of sex betsho besithi mfe* lina lenza njani bo sweety?

This playful banter, enhanced by hyperbole, reveals class struggles when critically read. The suggestion is that for most working-class black people, it is only in their dreams that they can live better lives, drive fancy cars and be "an office lady" because in reality they have to make ends meet under difficult circumstances. While most seem to be "mop drivers" that is, domestic workers, others try to make ends meet by reselling stolen clothes or clothes bought from Chinese shops. I pick up on this issue of race and class in the next section. To conclude this section however, it is important to note that policing of behaviour on *Makhox* produces different subjectivities in which issues of sex and class are contested.

6.1.3 The intersection of race, class, and sex

To elaborate on how bodies are constituted as 'aged' and 'raced' and inevitably 'classed' on *Makhox* I present two examples. The first one relates to a post written entirely in English[88] . This is presumably a young female with a tertiary education who is primarily concerned about the 19 year age difference between herself and her white boss who has promised to marry her and wants her to relocate to Canada. From the comments, pertinent issues about race, class, sex and age emerge. First of all, the R15 000 advance for 5 months' rent seems to be an issue of interest as someone asks "what do you bath with? Some of us don't even get R10?" tapping into an age old belief in African society that good fortune follows you if you bath with *muthi*. Following her comment other people also offer anecdotes about how stingy their partners are and how they only buy them *kota(s)*[89] for R15 or airtime for R5 and cannot even give them taxi fare. They make all sorts of jokes about black men's perceived stinginess and create a binary picture of a white man as generous, rich and peaceful and a black man as

[88] Hello MaNgwe. May u post for me and hide. I'm a 26yr old student on internship. Next year is my final. Our company HQ r in Canada and recently the big boss was around in SA. Thru out his stay he made it a point that I also attend their meetings everywhere sayng I mus learn a lot. He then told me he was attracted to me and wd want to marry me. He's 45 and a divorcee. Since he went bek to Canada last week he's been skyping, emailing me non stop and calling me. Jus yesterday I received some money from him R15 000 sayng its an advance for my 5mnths rentals. I dnt know what to say, he's too old for me and I'm worried abt wat ppo wil say, esp my mum coz I'm the one looking after her at the moment. What happens if I go? The guy said as soon as I finish my internship a job awaits for me in Ottawa. He said I can visit him anytym prior to my emigration. He's caring but how do I tell my mum into enje (26yrs and 45yrs) and he's a white guy. Uthi next year nje he's ready to cum pay lobola and we wed then I relocate. I'm confused ladies. Is it a good move? I never thot I wd marry a white guy but its like kungiqondile manje and I'm confused. I know ngizohlala kahle he's rich bt I heard someone sayn older men are too possessive. Should I go for it ladies? His first born is 23. I dnt wanna make a mistake. I know some wil say follow yo heart, bt my heart is confused now. Advice me. Thanks ladies. #My mum has fully recovered, thnx for your prayers ladies#

[89] A *kota* is a quarter of a loaf hollowed out and filled with all or a variation of these ingredients chips, Russian sausage, polony, atchar (pickle), cheese and egg among other ingredients. It is popularly sold in South African informal shops, mostly in the townships.

stingy, poor and troublesome. Whilst there are some comments which suggest that love is a deciding factor, and not money or race, there are some comments in which the awe with which the white man is held is explicit:

> *This is so amazing; whites are the best regardless of age my love. Go for it you will never regret.*
>
> *The way I wish for a white man…if it doesn't work or you don't want him please contact me…or get me one when you get to Ottawa.*
>
> *To be honest no one wants a man who doesn't have money, go for that white guy and have your coloured kids, I'll be your nanny.*
>
> *I'm so jealous…happy for you darly*******wipes tears.*
>
> *Marry him and invest out of that marriage, he's an elderly man, he'll die soon and you'll be set for life and he can't even get it up anymore so no stress about sex.*
>
> *Ah how can you say she must leave a white man with money?*
>
> *Christmas comes once a year, go for it.*

From these comments it is evident that some women are constituted within a racial discourse in which white men are considered as more generous and wealthier than black men. This reaction should be read against the realisation that the "fabrication of race is the central mode of colonial and postcolonial governance" (Tyler 2013: 42). It implies an internalised or 'epidermalised' (to borrow Fanon's (2008) term) subjectivity. It is therefore not surprising that the discourse of white supremacy informs their assumptions of the nature of a relationship between a black woman and a white man. The notion of dating a white man as desirable endorses a sense of white superiority and disallows critique of this asymmetrical relationship. The declaration that "I'll be your nanny" implies the socio-economic differences between black and white people that is the residue of colonialism. Constructing black men as simply poor and stingy effectively elides the long history of colonialism that rendered the black man and the black woman disempowered so that that these conditions of coloniality continue to inhabit postcolonial Africa. The disempowerment of black men in particular through colonialism has led them to perform a tough masculinity in spaces where they can, hence their seeming 'stinginess' alluded to above. In these everyday utterances, threads of imperiality and coloniality exist as deep-seated remnants that discursively constitute whiteness as better. Fanon argues that the black person is immediately made to feel inferior in their encounter with the white person. It results in an inferiority complex that is "the outcome

of a double process [that is] primarily, economic [and] subsequently, the internalisation – or, better, the epidermalisation – of this inferiority" (Fanon 2008: 4).

While some comments are receptive to this relationship, others are sceptical. They suggest that he is too old for her and thereby stigmatise old bodies.

> *Ahh ayii he is too old for you, at 26 you are still a toddler to that madala boy, tjoo are you gonna be free to model in your pants and all those romantic things u do in the bedroom faced with a shrivelled body, some things are just not possible, you'll end up cheating on him when you see your age mates having fun, it's a no for me sister.*
>
> *Good for you lobi, ain't tryng to scare you but I've seen them young girls coming to Canada with those old foxes then everything changes, it's not like they walk on milk and honey as they represent themselves to you guys but hey try your luck sweetness.*
>
> *A friend of mine met a divorcee (46) long back, he used to give her lots of money then he took her overseas, he'd come to Africa to hire prostitutes, he even slept with her sister. It's not true that white men don't cheat they just have no strings attached sex that's why they don't get caught.*

These comments counter the myth of white men being as better partners, but it is the construction of old white bodies as "shrivelled", "old foxes", near death, and promiscuous that interests me here, while others argue that this does not matter because "these days we look at benefits". I would like to juxtapose this briefly with a similar post[90] in which a woman posted about a man she had met on *WeChat* and discovered that he was 20 years older than her. In her post she does not specifically mention his race therefore it is assumed that he is black. In contrast to the post about the white man whose worst criticism labelled him as having a "shrivelled body" and being an "old fox" and "*madala boy*"; this old man in the other post is dismissed harshly because of his race, he is called an "ancestor", a "fossil" and also referred to as "Lobengula" whose "era passed during the time of Tshaka the Zulu". These referential strategies relegate him as ancient, not fit to be living and actually in the land of the ancestors, whilst the white man arguably still has some semblance of 'life'. Yet another

[90] Unjani cc!! Hide I'd its a stolen account! Bafaz ngathola ijaha ku Wechat ah mina ngangizidlalela eeh nango umntu esiba serious lami ngacina ngisiba serious!!Coz angila jaha! Esengo sender izimali ebank lama etym khonapho kangaz sazana ku Wechat!! Kuthange abethi sihlangane eNorthgate eeh lami thathekiyani ngisiyalapho, masihlangana saxoxa sesibuzana ngeminyaka ngizwe umntu uthi ngoka 1965 aaah ngaphelelwa mina 1985 and uthi ufuna ukungishada wahle wathi kimi asambe siyeyenza I blood test e Dischem aah sahamba sonke si ryt bt inkinga yikthi ungango mama manje ngiyambika ngithin shuwa ebadaleni umntu ongaka?? Sile 6 months si chatter uthi umfaz wakhe washona ku accident & ngowalapha (SA) ngiboniseni bafazi! Sory 4 novel!

comment suggests “no wonder why you have bad luck, it’s because you sleep with your fathers”, an admonition which relates to a generational taboo that likens this relationship to having sexual relations with an uncle. The judgements of a black man are harsher than those levelled at the white man. While they are both ‘old’, presumably the white man is rich and hence the age difference can be overlooked. A white superiority discourse constitutes the black person as inferior and proposes a subjectivity in which “the negro is enslaved by his inferiority, the white man [is] enslaved by his superiority” (Fanon 2008: 42).

It is interesting how issues of race, sex and age intersect to produce different subjectivities. The previous comments imply that the only reason a white man would be interested in a black woman is because of sex. The implication is that there cannot be ‘normal’ relationship between a white man and a black woman as echoed also in this comment “*one thing I’ve noticed, black and white unions are mostly between young black and old white why?”* There is no direct response to this comment but from the responses in the post, it is discernible that while white men will go for black women because of sexual intrigue, black women on their part are concerned about securing a financial future and the status associated with marrying a white man and so they are prepared to accept ‘sexual starvation’.

> *What are you waiting for Grace and Mugabe’s age difference is more than yours and they are happily married.*
>
> *Maloba you’ll remember this white man…white men don’t change their behaviour, if it was a black man I’d say leave him cos one day he’ll want you to think like him. Another thing, chances that you’ll be single if you don’t go for him are high, cos black men don’t want a successful woman they think you’ll control them.*
>
> *You’re learned lil sis, you can fend for yourself, don’t let money be a deciding factor.*

The fact that the then President Mugabe and his wife Grace have a 41 year age gap is offered as a rationale for going ahead with the relationship despite the age difference, possibly due to their political clout then, they embodied acceptable relationship standards. Their status therefore seems to provide validation for relationships across a significant age gap.

The second comment is more interesting in the sense that it implies that successful black women are single. One can relate this to the paradox of postfeminist discourse which encourages young women’s upward social mobility but at the same time produces new

anxieties as these women often fail to find a satisfactory intimate relationship; the pursuit of independence seems to always be at the expense of finding true love (see McRobbie 2009; Gill & Scharff 2011). As Chen elaborates "the permissive, free choice society brings with it a new obligation to be liberated and to enjoy this freedom, but it also produces anxiety, unhappiness and a new form of shackles that eventually undermine its claims" (2013: 448). Recognising this new society as a "society of control", Hardt & Negri (influenced by Foucault), usefully conceptualise it as biopower, whose power is "expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population – and at the same time across the entirety of social relations" (2000: 24). It is through this lens that we may understand how women on *Makhox* unwittingly govern each other's conduct in empowering and disempowering ways. They influence the performance of womanhood, within the group and outside the group in ways that may either challenge or re-inscribe traditional gender roles, and at the same time through the advice they give each other, 'discipline' themselves into ideal postfeminist and neoliberal subjects, and these positions always exist in tension with each other.

The last point I make is related to the construction of relationships as heterosexual. There is little tolerance of non-heterosexual unions or thoughts as these are always referred to in expurgatory terms. For example, in the rare instances that men comment on the group, they are dismissed as homosexuals. There is one post that stands out regarding this issue, which I find interesting because it is articulated within a religious discourse. In the post[91], *maloba* positions herself as in need of help because she has started having feelings for other women, and yet she has a boyfriend and a child. She is looking for a church that can help her remove this "demon…before it's too late" because she "does not want to be a lesbian". We are faced here with another confession, in which *maloba* recognises herself as a 'sinner' and so desires to be 'cleansed' and, by the very act of confessing in public, to get the required absolution from the group members. To recall Foucault's words:

[91] How are u sisi labomama? Ngcela lingilayele isonto yomoya engangisiza ngise Dobsonville.ngingusisi ole 26 nglebf ngilomtwana futhi BT recently angisamuzwa IBF sengihalela umuntu ongusisi ma ngibona osisi abahle imizwa yami iyavuka,even lapha emakhox bakhona osisi engibahawukelayo angisalali ngibacabanga evrytme ma becomenta ngizwa something emzimbeni wami,I knw its wrong that's why I wanna take action ngiyekhipha lelidemon angfuni ukuba yilesbian BT indlela engizizwa ngayo ma ngingashelwa ng umuntu ongusisi ngingavuma shame,ngcela usizo before its too late,thnx ngcela lingilayele or litshiye I number o inbox angibafuni coz nglamahloni ngalento.

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (*or virtual presence*) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile (1978: 61).

Indeed, the group members intervene to *judge*; "that's a disgrace!", so you mean you're a lesbian!!! you need deliverance", to *punish*; "when Bazooka is so nice, how can you wish for a cold banana", "you're to blame stop watching porn lesbian movies and letting your feelings go astray", "I'll clap you if you want me" , to *forgiv*e; "I don't blame you, the devil is confusing God's people", to *console*; "this Satan inside you must come out" and to *reconcile*; " God came for the lost sheep like you". Bazooka is a nickname or euphemism for a penis juxtaposed here with a 'cold banana', signifying typical phallocentric reasoning of the superiority of the penis. A popularly held belief is that lesbian sexual encounters replace the penis with a banana!

The construction of this particular *maloba* as possessed by demons should be understood against the background of Zimbabwe as a homophobic country, as argued in chapter 1. Sexuality is not understood as fluid and non-heterosexual unions have been publicly expurgated by the former President Robert Mugabe. To emphasise this, one comment goes "do it, it's good because in 'your' South Africa Zuma allows it, in Mugabe's country you wouldn't even dare". Religion has therefore been the lens used to justify this expurgation and so it is of little surprise that the responses demonstrate this fact by suggesting a number of churches where she can go for "deliverance" from this "demon", and even *maloba* herself, is a willing subject of this discourse. There is only one comment that disputes this position which is conspicuous as a lone voice articulating a liberal discourse that discourages discrimination in terms of sexuality.

> *Sexuality is fluid, if you desire other girls that's your body reacting to what it wants, some people know that they are gay at birth, some after menopause, just learn to accept your sexuality, God created a QUEER you, no spiritual church can cure your sexual orientation.*

6.2 Language, ethnicity and nationhood

As already established, *Makhox* is targeted at Ndebele women and the vast majority of posts and comments are in *isi*Ndebele. While I do not theorise about language, ethnicity and nationhood, here I discuss how these three identity markers intersect to produce a distinctive subjectivity and how this concurs with the other conclusions I have reached. Judging from the posts and comments, it would seem that most *Makhox* followers are settled in South Africa as indicated by the content of the majority of posts, and the contentious issue of language arises in this context. The issue of Ndebele speaking people adopting *isi*Zulu as a language of communication appears to be a bone of contention. Additionally, that some people have settled down and started new lives in South Africa is met with disapproval among Ndebele speaking people. *Makhox* effectively then serves as a discursive battle space for negotiating identity among Ndebele people living and working in Zimbabwe and those living and working in South Africa. *Makhox* as an agonistic site provides a platform for the expression of anxieties about issues of belonging, migration and modernity and these are fundamental to mediating and negotiating identities in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

My concern is with the construction of diasporic selves in the context of a worsening socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe and the consequent diminishing hope of ever returning 'home' for Zimbabwean migrants, especially as most of them now consider South Africa as a permanent place of residence (Crush et al. 2015). I begin my interrogation with a post in January 2015[92], which is significant because most of the Zimbabweans who live outside the country would be home over the festive holidays. The period between November and January is the period that posts relating to these dynamics are most frequent. In this particular post, *maloba* expresses concern about Ndebele people who live in South Africa who speak and post in *isi*Zulu arguing that they must be proud of whom they are and are at risk of losing their heritage.

[92] Hello, please hide I'd and post. Hello bomama. I hope lizayithatha kuhle indaba le. I just have a concern with how us Zimbabweans living in S.A have completely disregarded isindebele. For example omama abanengi kule I group ngamandebele kodwa uzabona be poster ngesizulu. Why kanti? If we continue like this we will lose our heritage. Abantwabethu bazakhula bengasazi isindebele esijulileyo and akubukeki ngitsho. Even in gatherings okuyabe kulama Zimbabweans kuphela uzathola abantu bakhuluma ngesizulu. Akeni sithandeni ulimi lwethu. Isizulu sizasikhuluma emsebenzini. Be proud of who you really are. Owami umntwana ngikhuluma laye ngesindebele then eskolo ukhuluma ke isikhiwa lesiZulu. Thanx.

From the discursive contestation that ensues, those whom the post addresses adopt a defensive stance thereby creating an 'us'/ 'them' dichotomy and *maloba* is constructed as the villain. She is labelled "dull", "liar", "jealous", "sick", "drunk" and told to "get a life", presumably because she has touched a nerve. They argue that once one lives with people of a certain culture long enough; they adopt that culture and language because, after all, "read history, we are originally from KwaZulu Natal[93]." Furthermore, they argue, "it is good to know many languages". In essence they construct themselves as cosmopolitan.

Those on *maloba*'s side construct Zulu-speaking Zimbabweans as ashamed of their own language and culture and displaying a false sense of superiority by speaking *isi*Zulu. Language for them is the primary definer of one's identity and therefore speaking *isi*Ndebele particularly in Zimbabwe should be a source of pride. For instance, one comments: "some of us have relatives who have been in South Africa, you will never hear them speaking Zulu in Zimbabwe".

> *There's nothing wrong with speaking Zulu but let's also speak our Ndebele so that we preserve it because bit by bit Ndebele will perish and Zulu will survive, so to avoid that, let's speak our Ndebele.*
>
> *Ndebeles like assuming identities that are not theirs…Shonas speak their Shona, Nigerians speak their Igbo, they don't change just because they are in South Africa.*
>
> *Don't speak Zulu with other Zimbabweans.*
>
> *I am proudly African; I'll speak any language.*
>
> *I live in Botswana; my kids speak Setswana.*

A pan-African discourse is evident in the last two comments which refute the boundaries of nation states thus effectively arguing for a fluid African identity. There are, however, ethnic tensions that are also evident as shown in these comments:

> *But please don't speak Shona, your mouth will smell. It's a warning from God.*
>
> *Hah no matter what, as for me I will not speak Shona.*
>
> *I can't speak Shona in public, I'm scared.*
>
> *I can speak all languages but not Shona.*

[93] The Ndebele people were originally part of the Zulu Kingdom under King Shaka in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. When Shaka had a dispute with one of his trusted warriors, King Mzilikazi, there was a great fall out regarding spoils of war. King Mzilikazi broke away and led some of the Ndebele tribe on a journey up north. Most of them settled in present day Bulawayo in Zimbabwe.

These expurgatory comments tend to come up in various comments attesting to the ethnic tension that exists between the Ndebele and Shona ethnic tribes as discussed in chapter 1. There have been calls recently for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission so that victims of the *Gukurahundi* genocide can be compensated, but nothing has materialised. With the new President being inaugurated, many people hoped for redress, but nothing has happened (at the time of writing). Hence the relationship between the two ethnic tribes remains fraught with silent animosity that rears its head from time to time.

If this was an illustration of the mild tension between Zimbabweans living in South Africa and those living in Zimbabwe, things came to a head in December 2015 when the South African rand significantly lost its value against the US dollar. On 12 December, when the official rate was nearing the 16 ZAR mark to the US dollar ($1: R15, 89),[94] and trading between R18 and R20 per dollar on the Zimbabwean parallel market, there was a post making fun of this fact which attracted 186 comments and had 129 likes. This post[95] mimicked a call-in radio programme listener calling a radio station requesting for a Soul Brothers track to be played for all *injiva*, entitled "*Bazobuya sibalindile noma bengela mali*" meaning "they'll come, we're waiting for them even if they don't have money". The original song by this popular South African *mbaqanga* music band refers to male prisoners who were in prison during apartheid and is cleverly adapted here to suggest that the *injiva* (Zimbabweans living in South Africa) will come home for Christmas albeit without money since the rand had lost value. A meme of a man with a dejected expression on his face with his hands holding each of his empty trouser pockets turned inside out accompanies this particular post, with the following text which effectively constructs *injiva* as broke and to be pitied:

[94] https://www.x-rates.com/historical/?from=ZAR&amount=1&date=2015-12-12 Accessed 26 October 2018
[95] Hide identity love and post
Msakazi ngithanda ukubingelela zonke injiva ezikhonale eGoli ngcela libatshayele ingoma eyodwa eyama Soul Brothers ethi 'bazobuya sibalindile noma bengela mali'

Figure 2: Meme depicting Zimbabweans living in South Africa as broke after the rand lost value against the US dollar in December 2015. Source: *Makhox Women's League* Facebook Page.

Whilst posted as a joke and even termed "joke of the year" by some, *injiva* take this as a direct attack on their personhood and what they stand for. In the ensuing exchange, there are contestations with regards to subjectivity and citizenship as I show below. This jest speaks to some tension and resentment towards those who live in South Africa which becomes evident in the following comments:

> *This is just a joke for people to laugh but people are overreacting, it means they're really hurt kkkk* (laughing). *I feel pity for you njivas, we are now keeping money aside to buy your tabs for $2 when you're looking for money to go back* [to South Africa].
>
> *This is a joke bantu* (people) *but ngenxa yokuthi lani njiva lihlala lithathela abantu basekhaya phansi this time labo bathi bake balizwe kudala libambuluzela* (it's because you always look down on people back home so today it's their turn, you've been showing off for too long).
>
> *Hahahaha joke of the year. Relax guys lingenzi ingani alisihleki ngendubo zethu ze Zimbabwe. Khona nxa livakatshile liyeyisa yonkinto, ukudla kwethu, izigqoko zethu everything. Lathi silitholile* (don't pretend as if you don't laugh at our Zimbabwe troubles. When you visit you look down on everything including our food, our clothes, everything. We got you this time).

> *Kanti ohlekileyo kahlekahle ngubani la? Akulamuntu ohlekileyo, people are just calling a spade a spade. Angiboni why lisiba defensive over iRand as if yini ama South Africans. Funny abanikazi bazithulele ngoba they understand ukuthi asikhulumi nge value yerand e S.A but here in Zim.* (Did anyone actually laugh here? Nobody laughed…I don't see why you're being defensive over the Rand as if you are South Africans. Funny the owners [of the rand] are quiet because they understand that we are talking about the value of the rand here in Zim not S.A.

These comments were mostly in response to *injiva* who expressed displeasure for being ridiculed. The comments function to construct a particular image of *injiva* as pretentious which is manifest in their extravagant spending in an attempt to appear rich when they get to Zimbabwe. They often blow their money including their return fares in this masquerade and find themselves stranded when they have to return to South Africa. A fellow *njiva* states:

> *Ngoba inengi iya ekhaya bathwele igrocery lemali yokujika kuphela n abanye abalayo leyokujika bazathengisa iproperty ekhaya n if befika egoli bayacela ukucatshisa amakhanda kubangane lezihlobo ngo January then after that badinage a space to rent. Kunzima bomkhaya!!* (the majority go home with groceries and return fare, those who don't have return fare even sell some property back home just to get money to go back. When they get to South Africa they ask to squat with friends and relatives in January then after that they look for a space to rent. It's tough fellow Zimbabweans!!

This serves to decentre the figure of the *injiva* as something to be desired, to be aspired to. In this instance the *injiva* is resignified as a lone figure in perpetual pressure to please. In light of this attack on their selfhood and in order to 'rescue' the figure of *injiva*, the *njivas* themselves attempt to construct a positive image of themselves as successful and therefore admirable as seen in the comments cited below. What emerges from these comments is the constitution of *injiva* within postfeminist discourse in the way they foreground how living and working in South Africa has afforded them the ability to spend money on 'beautiful' clothes, cellphones and beauty products, conduct that is commensurate with consumer values. This is consistent with the observation made by Repo & Yrjola that "contemporary postfeminist discourse frequently links achievement, hard work and success to beauty, excessive consumption and self-care" (2015: 750). This is evident in these comments that I quote at length below (note: the unfamiliar terms used are explained only at the end in the commentary):

> *Kanti yini efunny ngokuwa kwerand? Lona lelo dollar yi currency yenu yini? This year bayabuya bethenge everything they'll need. Impahla obvious ngeke batshiye oEdgars bezothenga emsikeni wakho. Everything is covered. Don't ever*

underestimate the power of injiva. (What's so funny about the rand losing value? Is the said dollar even your own currency? This year they'd have brought everything they will need [from S.A]. Obviously including clothes because they'll not leave Edgars to come and buy at your flea market).

I jealous yiyo engani ivamile plus icompetition sthuumatshi mani. Umuntu wakhona uyabegqoke I All Blakes wena ugqoke I All Star uzwe kuthwa siyafana…akufani mani. Lingethuselwa boge lilebhonasi ye skin mani (Jealousy seems to be dominant and the competition is just too much. The said person will be wearing All Blakes whilst you will be wearing All Star…it's just not the same. Don't be scared girls you have the bonus of beautiful skin.

Siyeza singelamali but iskin sibutshelezi…looool. Siliphathele amaphaca eR20 (We're coming without money but our skin is flawless (laughing). We'll even bring you R20 slippers (sarcastic).

Kkkkkkk uyazi sekuhleka laboxamu umuntu engelalutho egqoke ipump lika Bree street le handbag lama Thopiya (even lizards are now laughing when they have nothing, [you find them] wearing Bree street [down town Johannesburg] pumps and carrying handbags from Ethiopian shops.

Lihola amadola wona eyimalini vele thina sihlala lapha idola silifuna for ischool fees only kodwa ukudla, lemtsheno lamafoni sithenga santando (You're getting paid in dollars but what are they worth? Ofcourse we live here and we don't need the dollar except for school fees only but as for food, beautiful clothes and phones, we buy as we please.

The bottom line is people who are in Zim are bitter and jealous. People get attacked every year just for being in S.A but you must know that SA is for everyone. Live your life in Zim and let others be.

The emphasis on material possessions is what makes these arguments interesting and constructs *injiva* as having achieved upward social mobility because they exude wealth and class, all symbols of success associated with modernity. They constitute themselves as middle-class neoliberal subjects. Accordingly, they shop in better shops (Edgars juxtaposed with Bree Street, Ethiopian shops and Zimbabwean flea markets). The implication is that buying from Edgars signifies class because the clothes are more expensive and of better quality than those from cheap shops in downtown Johannesburg and flea markets which stock inferior quality Chinese products which are more affordable for 'poor' Zimbabweans. Furthermore, *injiva* can now afford to wear labels (All-Star) as they have graduated from All Blakes; this refers to a popular and affordable pair of tennis shoes worn mostly by people from the rural areas of Zimbabwe which are usually black in colour and cleverly punned here to juxtapose with the more prestigious brand of All-Star.

In addition to this, they also construct themselves as beautiful (they have the "bonus of beautiful skin") and clean ("the dollar that circulates in Zimbabwe is "so dirty [such that] if they give you change you need to use a sanitiser before you touch it"). This is reminiscent of the colonial practice by Native Commissioners of disinfecting hut tax money after collecting it so that disease would not be passed on to white people (Burke 1996). The dollar is also likened to the "newspaper you use to clean windows, it's disgusting". The discourse of cleanliness implies personal grooming, purity, hygiene and ultimately good health. In the religious discourse of Christianity, cleanliness is considered as next to godliness and viewed as crucial to the construction of a modern self in the 21st century (Smith 2007). Locating the cleanliness discourse within the colonial encounter, Burke (1996) shows how this discourse was racialised to the extent that images of cleanliness, appearance and beauty were indicators of social hierarchy and 'civilisation'. Native Africans were therefore considered dirty, repulsive and uncivilised. Constituted as colonial subjects, it is therefore not surprising that *injiva* associate cleanliness and beauty as distinctive and indicative of social hierarchy, which is further compounded by the "influence of Johannesburg's township cultures on the social definition of 'fashionable consumption' in Zimbabwe" (Burke 1996: 183). *Injiva*, therefore, in this instance are set apart from ordinary Zimbabweans because, by implication, the rand they handle on a daily basis is clean and worth more than the 'dirty' dollar that circulates in Zimbabwe. It should be noted, however, that over the years the US dollar has all but disappeared from everyday transactions to be replaced by the local bond note (see chapter 1).

Furthermore, *injiva* also construct themselves as hardworking and binarily opposed to lazy Zimbabweans, implicit in the metaphoric reference to Zimbabweans as *oxamu* (lizards) – assumedly referring to the lizard's habit of lying in the sun. The comment describes those Zimbabweans as lazy and unemployed, yet they have the audacity to laugh at fellow Zimbabweans who work hard in South Africa. The implication is that the Zimbabweans living in Zimbabwe should be eternally grateful for the benevolence in the form of the remittances from fellow Zimbabweans working in South Africa. By extension, *injiva* are admirable as they made the effort to escape the conditions in Zimbabwe where "people go for months without pay", and "there's no money in banks, people have to queue in the scorching heat", which (hyperbolically) "burns four times more than that of South Africa". In addition, "people are getting retrenched" and have resorted to "selling tomatoes" and are "living from

hand to mouth". As such, they have no right to laugh at Zimbabweans living in South Africa because:

> *Ngubani ongakhuliswanga yiGoli kanti # pissed* (who was not raised by [people working in] South Africa really).
>
> *I zim kade sayibamba ngesandla thina esisegoli* (We have literally held Zimbabwe up with our hands for a long time).
>
> *Everyone in Zim has a relative, friend, neighbour osegoli* [in South Africa]*, it's really not funny.*

Zimbabweans living in the country are also reminded by *injiva* that:

> *We're where we are because of our relatives who lived and worked in South Africa, now that we have grown up we're also trying to fend for ourselves. Don't you have better jokes that show maturity? You enjoy sowing division, making fun of us when most of you are being taken care of by your relatives and husbands in South Africa.*
>
> *Maloba some of us took a risk crossing the Limpopo river swerving crocodiles and bypassing lions in the bushes to come and hustle here so what can stop us from taking another risk now.*

And as if to cool down the *injiva* tempers amidst the tension one comments thus:

> *I don't know why people are reacting this way. Really people! I'm not in S.A personally but I want to say big up to the people in S.A who worked hard and made sure that during the 2007/2008 crisis we had food on our tables. OMalayitsha were delivering groceries in each and every household. We didn't become Somalia because of them. Thank you guys who are in S.A. Don't listen to the stupid fools who are celebrating a currency that is not theirs, they are so naïve and stupid. We're also here in Zim and we don't have the said money. So guys come home, celebrate Xmas with your families. Some of us will be happy to be with you just like the previous festive holidays. Big up to injiva you are my heroes.*

Implicit throughout these discussions, the construction of Zimbabwe as 'rural' and marked by poverty and lack as opposed to South Africa, the land of plenty is apparent. They produce, I argue, a model of Mamdani's bifurcated colonial state whose remnants can be identified in the present. Zimbabwe is thus constructed as the discursive rural home that *injiva* have moved away from to settle in South Africa as the discursive 'city' where they work. To further complicate the notions of nationhood, *injiva* accuse Zimbabweans of having "failed to remove *ukhulu"* [grandfather], Mugabe's nickname. This speaks to the fact that since the diaspora vote was disallowed (see discussion in chapter 1), therefore because they are settled in South Africa; it is no longer their prerogative to be involved in Zimbabwean politics. The troubled figure of the *injiva* is a political residue of the Zimbabwean crisis demonstrating

what Mamdani describes as "languish[ing] in a juridical limbo" (1996:19); they can neither vote in their own country nor in their country of settlement.

There are several posts and heated exchanges over the next few days regarding the same issue[96]. The responses to the posts get more vehement and resort to insults in response to posts which prescribe certain behaviours for *injiva* under the guise of humour. One particular post[97] requests that they must speak *isi*Ndebele and provides the meaning of the *isi*Zulu words that *injiva* tend to use, sarcastically reminding them of the *isi*Ndebele equivalents. These posts serve to further divide the two groups such that others query:

> *Why are we laughing? Who benefits? Who gets rich?*
>
> *Kwaaa (laughing) us Zimboz are stupid at times…we trump each other down even when we come from the same dirt poor country…shame shame shame.*

What I have found repeatedly in my empirical research is that this tension is unresolved and creeps in at unexpected moments, but gains intensity towards the Christmas holidays when *injiva* are expected to travel home. This tension results in the production of unstable subjectivities in case of *injiva* (in the sense that they are forced to do menial jobs and resort to

[96] Ngivale ubuso love & post

#JokeoftheDay
Njiva njiva - Ma ? Wozani ekhaya - siyesaba ! ? Liyesabani ?Siyesaba - i $ Dollar !!

☺Siyahlekisana eMakhox ☺bomama kesikhiphe izistress zamadoda,ungangeni ngeheart ☺….its just #Jokes☺

[97] Pliz hide id
To all my fellow Zimbabweans going home; especially those living in SA; here are some things that you must remember when you get home;1) Don't start speaking in tongues when you get home, there is no word "mara"; even in Zulu, kanti manje lina lilithathaphi, selifika ekhaya sekuyisi "mara ne, mara ne"; hayi bo!!!2) Please don't confuse abadala, akudliwa papa eZimbabwe; sidla isitshwala! Tshiyanani lepapa eborder!3) When you want tea with milk, please remember abalwazi ubisi ekhaya, khumbula nje ukuthi ekhaya silubiza uchago, hatshi ubisi, siyezwana angithi? Right!4) Ungabasa umlilo, akuyona inhlamba ukuthi umlilo uyabhebha, ungazimangalisi nxa abantwana bekutshela ukuthi umlilo usubhebha usungapheka! 5) Yeka ukuthuma abantwana ukuthi bakulethele indwangu, uzobaconfuser, indwangu in Zimbabwe is a baboon, ufuna bayejuma indwangu bakulethele yona? Batshele nje ukuthi ufuna ilembu, hatshi indwangu! Sisaselapho, isigqoko is a woman dress, not a hat, ungathi ngilethela isigqoko, bazokwethuka becabanga ukuthi ubaba is now gay!6) Okunye nanku, yekani ukuchothoza indlela okwenziwa izinto ngayo, lokuchothoza izinto zakhona, uthola umuntu ebhizi echothoza ibhasi kaPhelandaba loShushine, kodwa ekhule ehamba ngazo, khonapho uyifananisa leGreyhound angakaze ayigade; (asigibeli siyagada, lingakhohlwa!)7) Last but not least; abahamba ngemota keep money for fuel aside, ziphelile imbuzi zabadala sebethengisa ukuze likwanise ukubuyela eGoli, please lingakwenzi lokho. Labahamba ngebhasi, buy return tickets please. Likhumbuke futhi, R1000=$65! So ungazitsheli ukuthi ulemali, iRand liwe kubi! Lingabuza ukuthi yini ngathi ngikhangele kwelikaMthwakazi lodwa, kungenxa yokuthi yini ongani ulimi lwenu luyaliyangisa, Shonas are proud of their language, abatshintshi, lina bakaMthwakazi yini elifika selimaraza, siyacela, zikhulumele okhule usikhuluma!

petty crime) who find themselves stuck "between the twin teasers of nostalgia for the native land and desire to possess (and be possessed by) the adopted one" (Bose 2011: 168).

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that issues of age, race and class intersect in complex ways in the discursive construction of sexuality on *Makhox*. The effect is that women then perform particular raced and classed femininities that bear the residues of colonialism. In moments when women arguably express agency in terms of their sexuality (by 'tuning'), it often turns out to be in the service of men, which has the effect of producing emphasised femininities that valorise men's pleasure over their own. These practices have been identified as particular technologies of self that women enact in order to perform a particular desirable femininity. I have also discussed the perceived discursive limits of privacy as contested within this group and argued that the different types of subjectivities produced by these discussions are indicative of the different regimes of truth that the women inhabit.

I have also identified how the migrant woman is not fully accepted in her own country; she is considered as having 'betrayed the struggle' and accused of considering herself as superior by the very fact of living in South Africa. Notably, *injiva* (in the context of Makhox) are not particularly middle class but publicly consume goods that show their aspirations for a middle-class lifestyle. The comments charge the *injiva* with having changed her language to *isi*Zulu and she stands accused of abandoning her roots. Yet, the migrant woman is also not accepted as a citizen in South Africa and in extreme cases is forced to do menial jobs; some become petty thieves and as such are considered socially abject. This complicates issues of nationhood because they do not seem to be 'citizens' anywhere.

CHAPTER 7: BAKING & COOKING: ZW WOMEN'S DIARIES

> An analysis of a given society over time that neglects the arena of domestic struggle, the lives of women, and their critical contribution to production and biological and social reproduction misconceives the society as a whole and presents a distorted view of the entire historical process (Schmidt 1992: 1).

7. Introduction

The issue of how domestic work constrains women constituting what Friedan has called "the problem that has no name" (1965: 1) has long been debated within feminist theory. However, in contrast, since the turn of the 2000s there has been a revival of domesticity in popular culture, a discourse that has attempted to point to the agency of women in domestic spaces (see Genz 2009 for a detailed overview). Problematic assumptions inherent within these two positions place the domesticated woman or the housewife as a passive victim of patriarchy whilst the acceptance of domestic bliss on the other hand, has been critiqued for being utopian and rendering the domestic space as "an almost guilty pleasure for some women" (Genz 2009: 109). It is from this "critical impasse" that Genz suggests:

> a new mode of conceptualising the domestic as a contested space of female subjectivity where women/feminists actively grapple with opposing cultural constructions of the housewife…and re-imagine the homemaker as a polysemic character caught in the struggle between tradition and modernity, past and present (2009: 100).

With this premise as the point of departure, in this chapter I focus on the *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries* Facebook page (hereafter *Baking & Cooking*) with the understanding that the figure of the homemaker cannot be reduced to simplistic formulations of oppression. Rather, I unpack how these Zimbabwean women negotiate their identities on this platform by examining how they respond to everyday pressures in their homes. I investigate the discourses that interpellate the woman as homemaker and the various subjectivities that they endorse. I identify three broad themes that arise from the intra-household relationships, namely, the spousal relationship, the parental relationship and the employee relationship (in the case of domestic workers). The woman as the subject mediates these intertwined relationships and, in the process, I argue, femininities are produced in complex and interesting ways. I not only demonstrate the manifest oppressor/oppressed and

tradition/modernity dichotomies but I go further to reveal tensions in the subject positions that women on this online platform occupy.

This chapter consequently comprises four sections. The first section deals with the centrality of spouses/partners in these women's lives, once again placing marriage as critical in terms of Zimbabwean women's social standing. I address how they go about cooking and baking, largely for the benefit of "*Shewe*"[98], that is, the spouse and the technologies of self that women employ to discipline themselves as 'good wives' with cooking and presentation skills through which they seek to satisfy their husbands. The politics pertaining to whether or not to cook *Shewe*'s favourite food at the expense of the rest of the family members is the focus of the second section. The advice women offer each other and which is inevitably disputed seek to serve as disciplinary measures. In the third section, I consider the contestation between traditional and modern subjectivities regarding men who share in domestic chores. In the last section I consider the discursive construction of family. As a baking and cooking group, the focus is inevitably on the home and the majority of posts consist of women showcasing their baking and cooking skills and sharing recipes. In these seemingly mundane everyday interactions, different subjectivities are identifiable, as are the discourses that shape their being. There is once again a clear distinction in the constitution of those whose subjectivities are produced within the customary/traditional discourse and those within a modern or liberal feminist one.

7.1 Of Shewe: The way to a man's heart…

One striking aspect of *Baking & Cooking* that I noticed when I first joined the group was the established use of the word *Shewe* (master) in reference to spouses. Curiously, no one seemed to object to it despite its patriarchal connotations. With time, I noticed that the word was being used as a nickname and gathered that in Shona culture, calling one's spouse *Shewe* is the ultimate form of respect a wife can confer to her husband and functions as a discursive performance of submission that signals deference to his authority. In his discussion of the significance of nicknames among Shona-speaking people, Mashiri (2004)[99] notes that the use

[98] *Shewe* is a derivative from the Shona noun phrase *Ishe iwe* (literally 'You chief'). *Ishe* means chief in Shona Mashiri (2004)

[99] Mashiri, P. (2004). "More than mere linguistics tricks: the Socio-Pragmatic functions of Shona nicknames used by Shona-speaking people." Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43090884_More_Than_Mere_Linguistics_Tricks_The_Socio-pragmatic_Functions_of_Shona_Nicknames_Used_by_Shona-Speaking_People_in_Harare Accessed 31/10/18.

of the word *Shewe* has pre-colonial roots and was traditionally deployed by aunts and mothers to socialise young women to address and respond to their spouses' summons in this manner. This practice, Mashiri argues, later found resonance in Western Christianity with many churches "perpetuat[ing] the patriarchal subordination of women by citing Old Testament relational models" (2004: 38). Particular reference is made here to the bible scripture that emphasises Sarah's obedience to Abraham as she called him her "lord" (1 Peter 3:6). It is therefore my submission that in as much as in this group *Shewe* might have been resignified playfully as a way of 'speaking back to power'; its continued use belies the seemingly liberal feminist discourse that seems to inform the group as I show below.

What became evident repeatedly in my data was how much the domestic activities, notably cooking, were regularly performed for the benefit of *Shewe*. Of the 14 posts selected for analysis, 7 of these mention *Shewe* either directly or indirectly, 2 relate to children specifically, another 2 address the issue of domestic workers, 1 relates to managing household finances and 2 are directly concerned with *Shewes* who participate in housework. Most posts present a photograph of a plate of food that was cooked for *Shewe* and request group members' opinions. The first post I refer to caused a great deal of controversy, with a total of 355 comments and 557 likes. What is striking about this post is how it quickly degenerates into a health and cleanliness discussion which thus invokes various technologies of self.

As commonly occurs, a group member posted a picture of the food she had prepared for her husband with the caption *Ndiro yashewe* (Husband's plate). In this particular picture, there is a plate consisting of toast, bacon, tomato and onion salad and eggs served with tea. A partial image of the husband sitting by the table is also captured. Notably, part of his belly and hands resting on the table ready to eat are visible. The four eggs in the plate become the key point of debate, whilst most agree that the food presentation was good, there are some sarcastic comments:

> *Four eggs!…eggs have got high cholesterol, an adult should eat at most 2 eggs per week.*
>
> *How can he not develop that pot belly with four eggs for sure.*
>
> *Is that not a serving platter?*

This is death by eggs kikikikikiki (laughing).

Thumbs up to cooking food that Shewe actually likes. But he's actually very patient waiting for you to take a photo before he starts eating.

Can we see his face and muscles so that we can judge if he really needs those 4 eggs.

You'll have to sleep with the windows open cos of those eggs…buy air freshener.

Let him eat his four eggs, that big tummy cannot be filled with one egg kkkkk (laughing).

This shewe is big look at the picture again. To give him one egg would be to starve him yet he works for his four eggs kkkkk (laughing).

These responses construct this *Shewe* as unhealthy; the implication is that he overeats and therefore has a potbelly. Such body shaming is common in health discourse through which some bodies, notably fat bodies, are expurgated and considered as sites of disease. Zimbabwe cannot be considered outside of the influence of popular culture emanating from the global North with its ideals of beauty and required practices of self-management towards achieving certain beauty standards. The dominant message that frequently permeates these popular cultural forms is that the ideal body is considered lean and healthy and a fat body is unhealthy. Yet in the African context an opposing discourse prevails too. Arguably, due to the ridicule from the comments on her post the wife of this *Shewe* is forced into a corner and attempts to justify her choices: "those are two eggs cut in half", even though this is disputed. She is made to feel responsible for promoting 'unhealthy' behaviour and it is precisely through these seemingly mundane conversations that health discourses construct certain neoliberal subjectivities whose values (such as self-care) are elements of contemporary consumer culture. Those unfamiliar with this position are discursively constructed as 'other', to shame them, and perhaps to force them to police themselves in particular ways that will certify them as healthy. Those who resist this discourse comment thus:

So let's say that's what hubby wants or loves on a Sunday should you not give him because Mrs whoever says cholesterol??? Best we focus on presentations and recipes and leave quantities for those who ask for advice on that.

Let's give constructive criticism.

Those making an issue about the eggs, do you mean to say that in your houses you cook with olive oil because cooking oil is not healthy? Do you make your own juice

with a blender because fizzy drinks are not healthy? There's no one who can eat everything that's healthy entirely so let's be reasonable ... those two extra eggs I'm sure won't change anything.

Those for healthy eating and portions you better start your own group.

These comments point to the demands of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, more so in the Zimbabwean context which is marked by poverty and inequality. It is not the aspiration of all to live the healthy lifestyle some prescribe as it requires certain dietary changes that are expensive and out of the reach of many. In other words, aspiring to what counts as a healthy lifestyle here is consistent with the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism with its ideals of personal responsibility, freedom and happiness – values which are supposedly associated with leading a healthy lifestyle. One comment emphasises the need for group members to educate themselves about healthy eating. She sarcastically suggests that the only inspiration for cooking seems to be the *Shewes* and therefore the group name should be changed to reflect that. Her indignation that most dishes are posted 'for Shewe' indicates her discomfort with this colluding patriarchal conduct:

> *I think we should learn more about healthy eating here. Especially for the shewes. Might also need to consider changing this group to Shewe's Diaries! Seems they are the only inspiration to cooking pano* [here], *I hope you feed everyone else?? Just saying.*

What is at issue here is the level of surveillance that the women exercise in relation to each other's otherwise 'innocent' posts which functions as disciplinary power. I am reminded here of Bentham's panopticon with its perpetual surveillance whose effect is self-control (Foucault 1977a). The subject's self-formation is therefore constrained by these incidences. Another example to illustrate this point suffices. In this post someone posted a picture of the lunch that she had prepared for her husband[100]. The meal consists of rice served with chicken stew and coleslaw salad. The post attracted 77 comments and 67 likes. Whilst her food is certified good:

> *I like it. This is a basic meal for most Zimbabweans. Something you expect most women to prepare given our busy schedules. I like it dear. The chicken stew looks yummy. This is what I usually cook at home. Starch, meat and a vegetable.*

[100] Shewe vafona zvikanzi ndapera nenzara kasira kubika ndrikuuya kumba kuzodya ndakutotiza kubasa and this is wat i made for him comentai makasununguka ndoda kudzidza iyo iplate yangu.

Some comments take issue with the green plastic cup used to serve the drink:

> *I hope hausi kuvadirira drink muplastic cup* (I hope you're not serving him the drink in a plastic cup).
>
> *Yah plastic cup and a plate with a crack kuna shewe haiite* (Yes a plastic cup and cracked plate for *Shewe* is not appropriate).
>
> *Magona asi nwiraiwoka mugirazi* (You've cooked well but please drink in a glass)
>
> *Well attempted dear. Vamwe vatorega house helper achibikira shewe. Zve presentation ndedzimwe. You cooked for your man. Sando kwauri* (Some people leave the house helper to cook for *Shewe*. Presentation is a different story...Big up to you).

These disapproving comments reiterate a traditional patriarchal discourse in which the man is always treated as superior. In this case it is therefore alarming (for some) that he is served with mediocre kitchenware "remember you're serving for your better half so do the best. *Shewe* must feel special in his house". This discourse is conserving of a respectability that is accompanied by judgementalism. Furthermore, in a traditional set up women are always encouraged to personally cook for their husbands and not leave that important 'wifely duty' to the house help. Due to these 'disciplining' comments, the owner of the post is forced to justify herself by saying that the drink is actually hers and she drinks in a plastic cup for safety reasons as she has an active 2 year old child who always wants to eat with her. Some people come to her defence stating that they also once in a while like drinking from plastic tumblers and eating in enamel plates "just for memories' sake" and so she does not have to explain her preferences to anyone. These are clearly constituted within a more liberal discourse. However, the level of disciplining takes a different turn with this comment that is summarily dismissed:

> *Simple and yummy meal. Like. Is that your hand holding tumbler, nzara idzo* (those nails) *doesn't look nice for a woman. Unless am mistaken it's a no no.*
>
> *That's not dirt; it's a black line in the centre of the nail that I was born with.*
>
> *Lack of education is bad, it's pigmentation gosh it's very natural and a lot of black people have this.*
>
> *Even if you fail at school, but at least you learn diplomacy, you should have gone to her inbox, what you said is very offensive, now I'm embarrassed on your behalf.*

The person who made the comment quickly apologises for the misjudgement but other comments are relentless in attacking her for her insensitivity which is said to be symptomatic

of a "lack of education". Whilst insensitive, her comment points to the pervasiveness of the cleanliness and health discourse as already established. My concern here is with the harsh judgemental comments that recur. Largely because this is a group where constructive criticism is welcome, some criticism clearly crosses the line. In seeking to advise and correct, they discipline and control according to a puritanical sense of respectability and inevitably hurt or insult each other.

Let us quickly juxtapose these two posts with one particular post which was hailed as the ideal with the simple caption "Lunch for hubby" which consists of Greek salad, a homemade burger, roasted corn and roasted drumsticks. In the compliments for this well prepared and presented dish, constructions of femininity seem to centre on the ability to cook well. Furthermore, I argue, the act of cooking for Zimbabwean women is constructed as symbolising an act of love which is in contrast with notions of kitchens as oppressive, a common critique during second wave feminism (see Baker 2012).

> *This daddy is loved! Nice.*
>
> *Proverbs woman chaiye shewe varikufara ava* (A real Proverbs woman, this *Shewe* is very happy).
>
> *Ndookuti food ya daddy kauku* (This is what we call daddy's food).
>
> *Your hubby is blessed.*
>
> *Munogona mama. God richly bless your marriage* (You are really good mother).
>
> *Well done…great presentation, balanced diet thank you got ideas.*
>
> *It's amazing how you made a good presentation knowing most men will just say thanks looking at the tele and mix everything into one big pile lol. What a wonderful powerful presentation #taking notes.*
>
> *Ndookuchengeta baba ka uku* (This is what we call taking good care of your husband).

There is admiration from everyone who comments on this post and the result is a conflation of preparing and serving good food with love for the husband. In other words, cooking becomes considered as an integral part of a married woman's identity. Consequently, the husband is declared "blessed" and more blessings are wished on them from God in their marriage because she is a "Proverbs woman". Being a Proverbs 31 woman is discursively proposed as an ideal for Christian women because this verse is thought to embody all the

characteristics of a good woman (wife): a faithful and industrious woman who serves her husband well and provides food for her family (among other characteristics). In essence she is a homemaker. As established already, Christianity is the dominant religion in Zimbabwe and Zimbabwean women by virtue of their constitution as Christian subjects are 'disciplined' to perform as ideal Christian wives. It is through everyday conversations such as these that women are constituted as particular willing subjects of the two powerful discourses of patriarchy and Christianity that interpellate them. Moreover, two particular comments connect the issue of cooking well with ensuring their partners' fidelity:

> *Wonzwa umwe achiti varume ngavaunzwe pano pagroup, tingasapera kurambwa vaona izvi?? Zvakanaka izvi amai, well done* (Then you hear someone saying we should allow men on this group, we'll be dumped left, right and centre when they see this. This is beautiful mother, well done).
>
> *Kuti angazofunga kukusiya here wadai…apa wasparka* (Would he ever think of leaving you when you've done this…you've outdone yourself).

A particularly oppressive patriarchal discourse informs the stereotype that "to win a man's heart is to be creative [with food]" as another comment states.

On a different note however, there are comments that are arguably indicative of working women's anxiety about how to balance their work and home life, since women are required to perform domesticity regardless. One comment queries *"lovely…just when do you get the time though?"* This is consistent with the anxieties of postfeminist subjects for whom the 'work-life balance' lexicon is discursively deployed as common sense. It is particularly pertinent for modern Zimbabwe in which many women have full time jobs, but constantly face the pressure associated with traditional expectations of taking care of all the housework. This comment therefore, in its brevity conveys the anxiety that is presented by the subjectivities proposed by traditional conformity and modernity because, at any one point, women have to enact each, and often both simultaneously.

7.2 The politics of sadza[101]

As women straddle these worlds, there are certain roles that they have to perform consistent with the discourse that underpins those spaces. What repeatedly came up in my data was how the issue of *sadza* seems to be controversial. One post addressed this issue asking other group members' opinion about women who "hate *sadza* with a passion and even hate cooking/preparing it daily yet the husband would prefer it served daily"[102]. The poster goes on to state that she had observed some men going to their neighbours in the hope of getting a plate of *sadza* because the wife says "let's eat 'English' food". She therefore encourages women to "use those cooking sticks [and] stir [that] *sadza* girls". The post attracted 94 comments and 52 likes.

Despite the fact that some others dispute its accuracy and for not basing 'findings' on research; the post raises interesting debates. It is argued that *Shewe* should not be forced to eat what he does not like all in the name of 'Englishness', "a person must cook what is loved by her *Shewe*". It is suggested that the wife must "prepare a small pot of *sadza* for him by the side" because *sadza* is "our staple food, we cannot stop eating it now". Furthermore, eating *sadza* is not a sign of *chibhoyi* (blackness/backwardness) "it's also a meal with its own vitamins."

In this brief exchange, which I quote at length, there are interesting feminine subjectivities that are proposed:

> *Nyaya iripo apa haisi yesadza* (the real issue here is not about *sadza*). *Inyaya yekugarisana mumba* (it's about peace in the home) *and there is more to the wife not wanting to cook a meal for him. If you have time and listen to this lady, you will get to understand the root of her challenges. This man can cook his own sadza if he wants it that desperately instead of 'squatting'.*
>
> *Everyday vachingomona sadza sure* (Everyday hubby cooking *sadza* really!).
>
> *Nyaya yesadza chaiyo* (it really is about sadza) *and wives not wanting to make it. Haasi one chete wena* (It's not just one person imagine). *It's several women saying*

[101] Sadza is a Shona word that refers to stiff porridge made with mealie (maize) meal and water. It is known as *isitshwala* in Ndebele and popularly known as *pap* in South Africa.

[102] Hello ladies. I am a very faithful follower and am in regular standing pachirongwa pano though I hardly write\comment. Munotii semadzimai about women who hate sadza with a passion and even hate cooking\preparing it apa husband would prefer it served daily? I have seen several men vozonokwata kumaraini because wifey akati ndakamona rakakwana ngatidyeiwo zvechirungu. Apa hubby anoda hake sadza rake. Have you seen\heard anything like this in your community madzimai or in your own homes? Migoti ngairohwe mudzimba umu. Bondai sadza asikana.

vanhu ngavafambirane nenguva tidyewo zvechirungu haikona kutinetsa nesadza rataibonda tiri vana now that we can afford other luxuries (...people must get with the times so that we eat 'English' food not to be bothered with stirring sadza like we used to when growing up…).

I guess madzibaba ngavafambe nenguva then or votofarirana nepoto mukitchen (*Shewe* must get with the times then or else he must get acquainted with the pots in the kitchen). *That doesn't hurt either because everyone is happy.*

Ndinorimona sadza iroro daily without even complaining or whining. Ndinganetseke ne sadza remudiwa wangu ini? I find it joyful to serve his delicacy daily even chero riri sadza (I cook that *sadza* daily...How can I be bothered by cooking *sadza* for my sweetheart).

Isu tinobika hatiregi sure murume abva kubasa woti mona kasadza kako, that's being disrespectful (Some of us cook we don't tire, imagine hubby coming home from work and you tell him to cook his own *sadza*…).

Kutorimona makuseni chaiwo tisati taenda kubasa!! (Some of us actually even cook it in the morning before we go to work!!) *He appreciates it better than serving him a full English breakfast…team SRB!!* (Strong Rural Background).

If daddy wants sadza let it be cooked. Sadza remunhu one rinotora (sadza for one person takes) *less than 20 minutes. Communication is very important, am sure everyone will appreciate variety once in a while.*

What will happen to him if he cooks his own sadza? I have an uncle who married an American who never learned how to cook sadza. My uncle has been making his own sadza for the last 25 years. It just goes to show what he values and loves more between sadza and his wife!

In this age of globalisation we are all to experience everything from around the world in all areas of life… with food and music being part of the rich culture. Why should I have sadza day in and day out, I want to experience Vietnam, China, Mexico, Britain, Nigeria etc. through a plate of food. My own country thrown in as well (sadza is not the only cuisine in Zim) … might never get to visit some places but I will surely enjoy the food from where I am.

The types of femininities proposed in this debate are variously informed by both traditional patriarchy and a modern rights-based discourse. The strong defence of tradition is provoked by the suggestion that *Shewe* should cook his own *sadza* when other family members are eating something else. This is construed as "disrespectful" and stripping him of the position he commands as head of the family. The women constituted as willing subjects of this patriarchal discourse construct themselves as proud to cook, thereby catering for their husbands' needs and in the process fulfilling their wifely duties. Once again, Christianity is used to legitimate this conformity as shown in these comments:

> *It's a lot of work, it's not always easy to make two meals but with planning and God's grace and love you can do it.*
>
> *It depends kuti urimudzimai werudzii…kana uchida hako kuita mudzimai wemuna Proverbs kubikira sadza hubby even the rest vachida zvimwe is not even an issue…iwo mazuvano ekuti mvura inoita in a few minutes mu kettle iwe mone kasadza kemunhu one arikurida…its just too easy, and not even worth arguing na hubby for…ko hanty kitchen ndeyangu saka ndobikazve.* (It depends what kind of a woman you are. If you aspire to be the Proverbs woman then cooking *sadza* for your hubby even when the rest want something else is not even an issue. It's even easier nowadays where you boil water for a few minutes in an electric kettle, quickly cook *sadza* for the one person who wants it...The kitchen is mine after all, so I cook then).

It is suggested in the last comment that one can harness this technology for good to make their job in the kitchen easier "it's just too easy". The purchasing of gadgets, not least that it is indicative of modernity and capitalism, has been critiqued by radical feminists as giving women the utopian idea that they are no longer oppressed. Furthermore, the kitchen, within this traditional discourse, is considered as a woman's dominion ("the kitchen is mine") so it is unthinkable that a man should 'intrude' into this space. If the kitchen 'belongs' to the woman it therefore means that she cooks without complaining.

In contrast, the rights-bearing modern citizens construct themselves as cosmopolitan global subjects, as expressed in their desires to experience different parts of the world through food. In addition, they consider the kitchen as a space that can be occupied by men and women. I discuss this in more detail in the next section which directly deals with men who cook.

What needs to be emphasised as I conclude this section, is the discourse which constitutes the centrality of men in the contemporary Zimbabwean home (as represented on *Baking & Cooking*), that is notably heterosexual. This home is hinged on the asymmetrical relations of power between men and women, that is, this relationship is contingent upon men's dominance and women's subordinate position and an acceptance of puritanical respectability and conformity. Not surprisingly, as we saw earlier, women are encouraged to cook *sadza* for their husbands so that they do not stray just because of *sadza*. This is a residue of traditional cultural discourse. However, as Foucault argues, there is no discourse that exists without another running counter to it; the modern rights-based discourse exists in contestation with this traditional patriarchal one. Tension therefore arises as subjects attempt to negotiate the modern and the traditional, and *sadza* in this case, as a signifier of *chibhoyi* (blackness/backwardness) becomes a significant aspect of the contestation of identities with

its class-based elements. In several other *sadza* posts some people try to discourage the eating of *sadza*, noting, for instance, that it has high calories, and that it has cancer causing properties. Some posts celebrate the number of days people have gone without eating it[103]. However, there are traditionalists who refuse to sacrifice *sadza*, who want it almost on a daily basis, and not in fancy shapes to retain its authenticity. Normally, *sadza* is served as a round mound but creative people have developed other fancy shapes such as hearts and pumpkins among others[104].

This contestation over *sadza* is reflective of the negotiation of identity particularly as some Zimbabweans in the diaspora have encountered different cultures and food. On one hand, the diasporic citizen might start to look down on specific aspects of their culture as backward (Fanon 2008), while on the other hand they can feel reconnected to their roots through the very act of eating food from their home country. Inevitably this also has to do with class. However, it does not follow that this rejection of *sadza* is characteristic of diasporic citizens per se, but it does indicate that as some attain upward social mobility, they choose to distinguish themselves from those poorer than themselves. It is in such contexts that identity is constantly negotiated and renegotiated.

7.3 When Shewe cooks

One of the most controversial posts of the year according to the responses it attracted consisted of a record 532 comments and 1256 likes. This post (quoted below) is accompanied by a picture of the husband clearly cooking in front of the stove with a baby firmly tied to his back.

> *Back post by permission.*
> *As I had posted earlier that was sleeping zvangu working nights daddy vakati* (said) *let me help out in the kitchen isei mwana kumusana then monei sadza* (put baby on his

[103] How many times a week do people eat sadza? Pano maybe once a month. There are so many other things to replace sadza; you have to be willing to try maybe twice a week? What are your views?

Yolo!! Diet mangwana. Sadza days are the best ❤❤❤

[104] Hie ladies.how do you prefer your sadza served (i mean the shape) and why? as for me what ever comes to mind is what i do.

> back then started preparing sadza). *Relevance to baking and cooking is that daddy can multitask, cook and look after baby as well. I am indeed blessed.*

There were mixed feelings regarding this post. They included praise and admiration: "you are blessed dear", "treasure that hubby my dear he's such a blessing, praise God forever", "it suits him", "sweet", "cool hubby and dad", "role model husband", "rare species", "heaven sent"; distaste: "*akadyiswa* last degree" (he was given a potent love potion), "[it's a] turn off"; and indifference: "I'm not sure why you posted it or reposted it? Lots of husbands look after their babies so it's not out of this world that yours does it. Just saying dear", "why repost? It seems as if you're now looking for unnecessary attention", "I'm now finding it annoying or you now sound boastful, I don't know". This post clearly touched a nerve – from indignation to feelings of injustice, others comment thus:

> *My fear is does hubby know that he has been a topic of discussion pa* (on a) *ladies group? Does he know that you humiliated him on Facebook? My hubby can assist the same duties as yours but kuzomuisa pafacebook* [to put (read expose) him on Facebook] *is a totally different story.*

> *As cute and sweet as it is I feel like it's something he would only do in private and it's not fair putting it pa [on] social network, what happens to his man pride???*
> *I love a man who helps but I cannot allow him to go to an extent of carrying our baby on his back especially with a blanket that one for real is something that I* (mentions name) *cannot be proud of. As much as even when he is not around he cannot allow me to dig or cut down trees. He can do whatever in the house but baby on his back with a blanket, it's a big noooo FOR ME… and turn off.*

In these comments, the concern about the privacy, or lack thereof, on social media is apparent. More pertinent, however, is the suggestion that men engaging in housework should be a private issue that happens only within the private sphere of the home. It is not an issue that should be 'exposed' to the whole world as it is a direct attack on his "man pride". The implicit suggestion here is that the man is effectively being abused as emphasised in several other comments that caution this particular woman not to abuse her husband's benevolence – presumably by making him perform these 'unmanly' duties every day. In the traditional gender order, housework and taking care of children is designated as the exclusive domain of women while men are designated the role of provider. So pervasive is this discourse that those constituted within it are horrified and "turn[ed] off" when it is turned on its head. An effeminate masculinity is considered subversive of gender norms as captured in the

comments of these women whose subjectivities, in this instance, effectively underpin patriarchal discourse. Demonstrating a challenge to this discourse, some women comment with a hint of sarcasm:

> *Do your children know they've been topics here when we post them and food? What of our plates? What of our food? I'm sure she knows her husband, after all she married him.*
>
> *He is helping his wife and looking after his child so manpride inopinda papi* [where does manpride come in].
>
> *Man pride. Musn't men be shown cooking, do they eat manna from heaven?*
>
> *So you tell me that he loses his ego by doing something nice for his family? Sometimes I feel civilisation still needs to knock at our doors.*
>
> *Post more frequently so that the envious ones can see that times are changing. Men do cook too.*
>
> *Those who are jealous get over yourselves, men are changing these days and they help around the house and enjoy bonding with their kids.*

Constructing themselves as modern 'civilised' subjects as suggested by the fourth comment above, these women embody a particular feminine emancipated subjectivity juxtaposed with a traditional, 'backward' and constraining femininity that aggressively resists alternative forms of femininities and masculinities. Constituted within the parameters of this modern discourse that is accepting of changing times and the consequent changing gender order, they launch a scathing attack, replete with metaphors, on the women who embody values of traditional femininity: "you're used to being abused", "being house girls", "being treated like doormats", "being treated like tissue that is only thought about during critical time, you don't know the other side of love." These insults are intended to belittle. The views they espouse are consistent with the concerns of second wave feminism in which housework is recognised as drudgery (Baker 2012). In contrast, modern feminine subjects are constructed as naturally loved:

> *For those who don't have partners who help around the house let's pray that our men show us love in this way.*
>
> *There's nothing more manly than a man who can take care of his kids. This woman who posted this is blessed because her husband obviously has a Godly love for his wife, he cares for her and his baby. It's beautiful to see.*

Don't know what to do to have that kind of man.

Having a man cook for you is romantic.

God bless that man who loves his woman this much.

Further, they spurn those traditional masculinities in which "men expect wives to do everything as if they are in a coma themselves", even expecting the wife to tend him when she is unwell. In this process, desirable and undesirable masculinities are vividly articulated, particularly in this somewhat lengthy comment:

> *What's sad about all this is men who are committed to their families, help with chores so their wives can rest, love their kids in our culture kupusa kana kudyiswa* [are described as being stupid or given a love potion]. *Those families that have small houses, talk down to their wives, devalue their wives with relatives, spend no time with their families, prefer to see their women sweating with chores while they down a beer, yell and beat their women our culture says ndiye murume iyeye* [that is a real man]. *Lol when you sit back and think about it, it's just beyond sickening and sad. Women, we really need to emancipate ourselves from this 'culture' that suppresses us. Submisssion is NOT passiveness!! Wake up!!!!*

The idiomatic expression "wake up" punctuated by four exclamation marks works as an urgent call to "emancipate ourselves from this culture that suppresses us". This resonates with liberal feminist discourse in its emphasis on women's emancipation. The particular emphasis on women also needing rest is consistent with a modern liberal feminine subject position where women are not confined by the constraints of housework and can engage in other leisure activities. To this end, someone else also posts her own picture of her white husband's debut in cooking *sadza* while she's "relaxing", followed by another who also posts a picture of her friend's husband cooking while she and her friend are "relaxing". Several other women also declare how helpful their husbands are at home and therefore they get a chance to rest. Not surprisingly, this "loving husband" is a gift from God; "I really thank God…It can only be God…Am so blessed to have a hubby who understands when I'm tired…what else can you wish for", "this is my definition of love. A loving husband is a perfect gift from God". The implication here is that as long as one has a personal relationship with God, he will reward them with a loving husband who helps them around the house.

Notably, this thread was active for at least three days with people debating back and forth. In an attempt to joke about it a few days later, someone posted in jest asking what she could add to the coleslaw salad she was preparing whilst her husband was carrying their baby on his back[105]. The joke was missed by some who took it personally considering that the issue was still fresh, thus demonstrating the tension between traditional and modern femininities in this comment and corresponding response:

> *I hope you are not abusing your husband; we know some of you ladies treat your husbands like kids! Some of these roles are not meant for them you know, as for me that pic is disgusting, do that behind closed doors!*

Identifying herself as "a traditional woman" juxtaposed with "*vechirungu*", a colloquial term literally meaning 'those of English ways' which equates with modernity, this woman is constituted as a willing subject of the traditional patriarchal discourse. Indeed, the metaphorical reference to "treat[ing] your husbands like kids!" punctuated with an exclamation mark to express horror at the "abuse" is quite telling and underlies the "disgust" she feels looking at that picture because, after all, "some of these roles are not meant for them you know". If disgust is political and therefore symptomatic of wider social relations of power (Tyler 2013), then in this instance, it speaks to the asymmetrical power inherent in the gendered constructions attributed to men and women. By stating that men cannot perform some of these decidedly feminine roles, this declaration effectively forecloses other possibilities and attributes the nurturing role and housework to women. Indeed, it is in everyday talk that "we discursively construct realities that justify and sustain gendered, racialised and class-based inequalities" (Miller & Fox 2004: 48). Furthermore, the woman who expresses the sentiment of disgust argues that because they come from different backgrounds it is inevitable that they therefore "see things differently". Through ethotic argument she projects herself as morally upright and (proudly) submissive which is why she has been "married for 20 years...these rights spell doom in your houses [remember] you are Africans not whites." This is informed by the colonial discourse which serves to construct whites as natural rights-bearing citizens. In other words, the discourse of equality is identified as a primarily white discourse that subverts African tradition.

[105] Maswera seiko? Ndini zvangu ndiri kugadzira coleslaw baba vakabereka mwana. Pane chashota here ndisati ndaisa mayonnaise?

She further emphasises through a strong modal argument that "in our culture *murume habereki mwana* [a man does not carry a baby on his back] … am just following what the bible says, I don't need my hubby to put the baby on his back to show me love". When a member comments "move on with the times ladies" because in the context of "the changing economic situation we both go to work so it stands to reason that we help each other with household chores", this particular woman retorts that if things are changing then men should stop paying bride price so that equal rights "apply uniformly not where it suits us". She declares vehemently in this verbal command:

> *Don't let men do your duties for you…Women submit to your husbands, I didn't say that, it's in the Bible and I respect God's word more than manmade equal rights. The truth always hurts… I will submit until I die.*

The issue of submission is always a contested topic; on one hand there is the assumption that women have no agency and men are the decision makers, whilst on the other hand is the assumption that women have agentic possibilities and the men should make sacrifices on their part:

> *We should read further cos it says men love your wives like Christ loved the church. What did Christ do? He dies for the church. So the husband should go far and beyond and 'die' for his wife. Sacrifice. Make her happy. Help her etc. Put her first above any tradition and make her happy.*

Putting her first "above any tradition" indicates the salient proselytising character of the Christianity discourse which requires that one renounces their culture to convert to Christianity (as discussed in chapter 5), clearly demonstrating the tension that exists between the two discourses. As Foucault (1981) reminds us, discourses rarely exist without being challenged; hence, this patriarchal discourse is challenged on several fronts:

> *Which roles are meant for man or woman only enlighten us pliz. Why behind closed doors when he's doing it for his family? People must wake up we are not in the Cecil John Rhodes era, nowadays men are loving they are doing all housework in their homes assisting their partners there's nothing wrong here.*

> *No wonder men can't be found in the kitchen helping us if us women laugh about it, it's cos of our attitudes towards men who are proud husbands and fathers.*

Through the juxtaposition of the "Cecil John Rhodes" era and "nowadays" we are reminded of the radical discontinuities or ruptures that occur from one historical era to another when new discourses materialise to replace previously established ones (Foucault 1972).

Accordingly, the 'modern' man is constructed as a loving, proud husband and father who assists their partner with housework. This modern man is binarily opposed to the cold-hearted, dishonourable 'traditional' man who does not help his partner with housework. In this productive tension between these two contesting discourses, new masculine and feminine subjectivities are presented as alternative ways of being that make sense within the confines of these two discursive realms. As the two discourses jostle for dominance, they attempt to 'fix' their versions of reality and in the process exercise power through its subjects who:

> … articulat[e] meaning in ways that legitimate their particular views as 'natural' and 'inevitable', link the actions and preferences of other [social] actors to the achievement of their interests, and make particular socially constructed structures take on a neutral and objective appearance (Hardy & Phillips 2004: 307).

To conclude this section, I want to briefly highlight how differing points of view are sometimes put across rather aggressively which has, in certain instances, resulted in some women either exiting the group voluntarily or sometimes others being removed by the group administrators for making unsavoury comments. The woman who posted the picture of her husband cooking with their baby on his back particularly stands her ground and declares "Ladies I'm not leaving this group, I refuse to be bullied by your comments" even in the face of people who had "already sent screenshots to [her] hubby". She goes on to post the screenshots and states rather sarcastically how she and "hubby [were] laughing and actually glad that something positive was going viral". This particular incidence is an example of the effect of the 'new visibility' (Thompson 2005), which has been enabled by new media. It has allowed not only political leaders (with whom Thompson was concerned) but also ordinary individuals to be more visible and more scrutinised whilst minimising their power to control what circulates on the media (social media in our case). In as much as the picture was posted on social media with a particular intention, once circulated it acquired a life of its own as it became subject to scrutiny and moral judgements from social actors with their own understandings of social life. In other words, it catalysed discursive action that troubled established gender norms.

In the next section, I show how these established gender norms operate in seemingly mundane ways by considering the actual work that women engage in, in constructing the image of family and highlighting the kind of femininities these practices prescribe.

7.4 The discursive construction of family

The discursive realm of family is primarily gendered and classed; women are regarded as the primary caregivers in a heterosexual family set up, and are also obliged to make the day to day decisions on how to feed the family within its economic means (DeVault 1991). It is notable that on *Baking & Cooking*, the family is indeed premised on this heterosexual model. This is evident through the discussions that more often prioritise, broadly speaking, the centrality of the father as the head of the house and the mother as nurturer. Furthermore, conversations pertaining to what women decide to cook for their families are telling of their underlying class positions. I focus on the pivotal figure of the mother as nurturer, the various roles she performs as she runs the household and how she understands her place within it which culminates in what has been referred to as 'foodwork'.

Foodwork refers to "all the tasks associated with planning, purchasing, storing, cooking and preparing food, as well as related tasks such as washing up and clearing away" (Meah 2013: 672). In a particular post enquiring about budget issues, several issues pertaining to foodwork are raised. The straightforward post "hello ladies, roughly how much do you spend for your monthly groceries and how big is your family?" attracts 119 comments and 47 likes. It is indeed overwhelmingly the woman's job to plan, purchase, store, cook and prepare the food, as Meah suggests above, judging by the responses to this post. As the women who respond to this post comment on their different budgets, some people question each other's budgets:

> *How is that possible with the kind of cooking you do on this group ladies…is the bacon for weekends only? And cheese, beans, eggs and all those toppings are they for every day of the week?*
>
> *What is basic varies from house to house; some add fruits as basics.*
>
> *Some buy according to brands or types of food, for example almond milk vs normal dairy milk.*
>
> *It also depends on where you buy your groceries; Shoprite vs Woolworths.*

Here issues of class are raised as critical to budgeting. Those that live a middle-class lifestyle also have a budget for "eating out" and insist that there is "money used on weekly shopping visits" which should be included in the overall budget. This comment alone introduces differences in economic status. It is not common for women from poorer households to engage in weekly shopping visits and even budget for eating out with the family. The first comment quoted above expresses anxiety at the elaborate meals that are posted on the group

which she thought represent typical meals. Some respond to say that they only post the best of their food and they also spread out low budget and high budget meals during the week or have bacon and elaborate toppings only on weekends. The resulting discussion consists of women giving each other practical tips on how to save depending on one's income. Some suggest that grocery clubs and bulk buying are the best way to save.

The talk of saving results in self-policing practices that are brought about by feelings of guilt; "I don't know how I use that much money" and "so I'm wasteful then, I buy in bulk but the money just disappears…can I come for lessons in saving". This guilt residue operates as a disciplinary practice that women are often burdened with as they battle with coordinating housework and comparing themselves to other women. The amount of thought and care that goes into foodwork is part of the invisible work which often goes unnoticed and contributes significantly to the inequality which persists in these domestic spaces (DeVault 1991; Cairns et al. 2010). Women are emotionally invested in providing food for their families and this work is obscured when the food is presented as expected on a daily basis; "I study my family's eating habits so that I budget accordingly and know exactly what to buy for them."

As guardians of their families, some women take on what they see as an important role – shaping children's food choices and socialising them into adults. Two posts come to mind, the first one already discussed in the section regarding the politics of *sadza* and the second one in which there is a discussion of whether teenage sons should do household chores. I quote the discussion relating to the first post briefly:

> *Guys someone spoke about what is loved by hubby and then children have their own things they love; do we really have to cook what's liked by the kids or it's us who teach kids what to like. The choices or preferences of the head of the house must take priority; kids will do what they like when they are grown. I remember us when we were growing up my mother would tell us this is not a hotel. So if hubby wants sadza cook it for him, kids eat what they are given, not hubby getting into the programme for kids.*
>
> *In my house I consider every member of the family when it comes to meals. To be honest I think the whole baba* [father] *gets his way and his opinion is all that matters is a bit outdated. Just because our mothers did it doesn't mean it was good or right.*
>
> *I guess the old fashioned methods kept our mothers longer in marriages than our generation cos the instruction of leaving your mother and father when getting married does not include kids, what is important is for our kids to stay healthy and learn that every lifestyle is worked for.*

Every member of the family needs to be considered when planning a meal.

There are two discursive positions inherent in this brief excerpt. In the first comment the woman articulates dominant traditional patriarchal discourse in which the ideal family "is built on women's service for men… and caring is typically done in ways that reinforce men's entitlement and women's subservience" (DeVault 1991: 18). Thus, men should be given the "respect that they deserve as head of the house" and it is recognisably "these old fashioned methods [that] kept our mothers longer in marriages than our generation". This is one of the instances in which patriarchal discourse establishes itself as true and this is inevitably intertwined with power. This power, argues Prinsloo (2009a: 207), "works in such a way that it produces particular kinds of subjects who identify with this positioning. It achieves its status as truth through a range of strategies that legitimate it". This woman therefore as a willing patriarchal subject, embodies the values of traditional marriage in which children's needs are secondary to the husband's, because after all, marriage vows "[do] not include kids". This is consistent with Cairns et al. (2010)'s observation that food plays an important role in social reproduction in which women's focus is on providing children with good food and cultivating their appreciation for it as echoed in the statement "it's us who teach our kids what to like".

The second discursive position aspires to a more egalitarian family set up in which children's needs are also considered. This position is decidedly modern in dismissing men's presumed entitlement inherent in traditional patriarchy as "outdated", and emphasised by the remark "just because our mothers did it doesn't mean we should too". Instead, the argument further states that if we do not teach kids other options they can fall into wayward ways in the quest for tasting good food. This arguably serves to link food with social reproduction; it is not just about providing healthy food for the family but also about instilling values which could protect children from making grave mistakes in the future.

I illustrate this point by making reference to a post that demonstrates the active social reproduction of children's behaviour: "Survey - ladies do you expect your teenage sons to cook and clean?". With 239 responses and 79 likes there is an overwhelming 'yes' response citing that boys must learn to be self-sufficient so that "he does not trouble his future wife". This is a somewhat puzzling position as some women in the posts discussed below considered husbands who cook and clean as an affront. In this particular post there is no one

who opposes the integration of sons into housework. In fact, it is justified by the fact that there are male children who cook on Junior MasterChef, indicating the influence of popular culture on family practices. I argue that these women enact the traditional feminine identity of submissive wives in their own spaces while positioning themselves as progressive modern women who negotiate the prevailing gender structures by treating their sons differently so as to rebalance the gender order in the future. It emerges from the comments on this post that the only resistance that mothers face when they teach their boys to cook and clean is either from the fathers or the grandmothers who inevitably embody a traditional patriarchal subjectivity that valorises men's entitlement. Women's femininities are produced within these contradictory discourses.

I conclude this section by looking at the significance of domestic helpers (commonly referred to as 'maids' in Zimbabwe) in the discursive construction of family. The first post I refer to is as follows:

> *I have seen controversial posts before about whether a maid is part of the family or should be treated like family, even the name itself is controversial. A lady or two could learn something here, this is how I do meal times at my home, I cook all meals and serve too. Tonight, the three plates are for the adults in the house, baba vemba, Mai vemba, Musikana and our 5 year old hakuna plate ya baba ne plate ya maid.* (father of the house, mother of the house, 'housegirl' and our 5 year old, there's no plate for daddy and plate for the maid).

This post is accompanied by a photograph of three identical plates for adults with similar portions and one smaller plate for the child. Inevitably, this post sparks heated debate and attracts a total of 368 comments and 658 likes. I argue that cultural discourses intersect in interesting ways with feminist and modern discourses concerning the relationship between domestic helpers, mothers and their spouses. Certain femininities are prescribed for different spaces.

First, there is an issue of naming and referencing with arguments about the fact that calling someone a maid "degrades and disempowers" them. It is suggested that the way 'whites' refer to maids as home help or baby sitter is more dignified, whilst others suggest that calling them "*tete* (aunty) is also dignified as they are not 'othered' but rather become part of the family, which leads us to the second point. There seems to be a general consensus that domestic helpers should be treated like family, but this is disputed by some:

Yeah I always hear people complaining or vanobata (they handle) *maid rough. We had a maid who stayed with my fam before I was born until I was 12. We are still close she is always kumba* (at home) *we count on her she's like family. Treat them well and see how well they will take care of your household*

Are there still people who abuse maids? I thought that way of serving was standard practice??

That is really great, I am really appalled by some of the references I have seen pertaining to "maids". I have lived in the U.S for 20 years and I nannied while I was in college. That changed my perspective drastically. I was like family. Some people treat the person who takes care of their children, cooks and cleans for them like they are superhuman, no set hours and measly pay.

With maids you cannot be sure dzimwe nguva ukava treater (sometimes when you treat them) *like family they take advantage and think anokwanisa kuita zvaanoda dzimwe anotopedzisira atuma iwewe* (they can do whatever they like).

Some get into your family business.

I treat them like family until they go.

She would do what she wants, be rough to relatives, when you get home and find her crossing her legs by the sofa on the phone you'd think she was the madam of the house.

I treat my maid like part of the family. I live in a country where maids eat alone in the kitchen but I told my maid in my house you sit with us. She was uncomfortable at first but she's used to it now.

There is no doubt from these comments that domestic helpers are often mistreated, but this is arguably a colonial residue of how many black women were treated from colonial times. In the current postcolonial era, many black women, having attained upward social mobility, now employ domestic workers as they have moved into paid labour. Having domestic help is constructed as a marker of middle class living. Third, and most interesting, is the issue relating to acceptable portions of food for everyone which is the main point of conflict in this post:

Before we preach gospel of let's eat same food zvime zvine circumstance (some things depend on circumstances).

I'm not saying it should apply to everyone; I'm just contributing to the discourse of fair treatment of humanity.

Maids, just like relationships, avana formula. Ini kwedu ndiro yababa ndeyababa and it comes with different pieces and tray yavo ndeyavo no one uses it…then isu the kids ma plates anofanana the maid falls ku kids category. (Maids...have no formula. In our

home daddy's plate is daddy's plate...and his tray is his alone no one uses it...then us the kids the plates are the same, the maid falls in the kids category).

Ini ndichikura kumba kwedu kwaitova nemabasin or ndiro yababa. Kana neni nditori netray, cup, plate yababa isina anobata chero muenzi akaita sei? (When I was growing up in our house there were basins or plate for my father. I also now have a tray, cup, plate for my husband that is not touched by anyone, not even visitors).

Ndiro yababa haingaenzaniswe neya Aunty it doesn't come out right..You treat her well asi ndiro yababa ngaionekwe. Ini you come kwedu kune maplates asingadyirwi ne tray isingashandiswi chero zvadii zvinemuridzi, then tikauraya one chicken kune 2 pieces dzingadyiwe na anyone dzinemuridzi. Kana amadrumsticks chete mudhara ane number yake different from everyone. Ndiro yashewe ngaionekwe..ya aunty neyangu azvina musiyano (Daddy's plate cannot be the same as that of Aunty's. You treat her well but can daddy's plate be distinctive. if you come to our home there are plates no one eats from and tray no one uses no matter what, they belong to someone [daddy]. Then if we prepare a full chicken there are two pieces that are not eaten by anyone, they belong to someone. Even if it's just drumsticks, daddy has his number of pieces different from anyone. *Shewe*'s plate must be distinctive...aunty's and mine are no different.

Plate yababa kwangu inenge ine half yenyama irimupoto…ndokweduwo (My husband's plate consists of half the meat in the pot).

These women articulate traditional femininities associated with ideals of selflessness and domesticity. They valorise the needs of their husbands (including distinguishing their cutlery) above their own. The expression "us the kids" in the first comment shows that this woman accepts the parameters of the traditional gender order which constructs women as childlike. As a willing subject of this discourse, she embodies its prescriptions of a childlike identity and submits accordingly. Another similar comment also disputes the similarity of plates "not only of the house help, even me the mother of the house, I refuse".

In the second comment quoted above, the woman declares that she is carrying on the observations and teachings from her mother's house. This is consistent with the observation that "women's memories of their mothers often serve as reference points for their own dinner practices" (Cairns et al. 2010: 593). To emphasise this point, another person comments thus, "my mum gave me a good lesson that everything comes to the table and my dad dishes his share then comes my mum right up to the last person and there's always enough for everyone, this business of mothers dishing for everyone is overrated".

The third comment is interesting in that the woman actually details not just the cutlery, but the kind of meat and quantities that should be served to *Shewe,* which is arguably in service

of the entitlement inherent in the traditional patriarchal discourse. The original poster responds disputing these women's observations:

> *Kikikiki pano so* (laughing, this place [is interesting]! *Hubby is not fussy about meat parts he says his daddy never was, and as for daddy's plate my dad has it but I don't like it, and he spoiled me as a child I used to eat from his plate. It's just an unfair thing that we give people who do the physical job in the home crumbs whilst daddies who spend the whole day drinking we give them all the protein enough for the whole family and the children get kwashiorkor.*

In this response coloured with hyperbole (in the kwashiorkor reference), this woman challenges the rigidity of relationships between fathers and their children, possibly because of her own socialisation in which she would share a plate with her father, something considered distasteful in some African cultures. She insists that she is not prescribing how people should behave in their houses but instead she is "contributing to the discourse of the fair treatment of humanity" which positions her as someone who embodies liberal ideals of equality and empathy. To emphasise this point, another person comments adding that "fathers should know that they are also parents, they are not the only ones who are special". However, those who do not subscribe to this discourse insist that a man *must* be made to feel important so that he does not turn around and cheat with the domestic worker:

> *He needs to feel more special and appreciated…It's those small things that matter to him. That's when you find him coming back to the maid when you are at work because she makes him a special stir fry just for him to enjoy at 11am…*

This position emanates from the deep-seated belief (implicit even in the original post), that women should cook for their partners in order that they do not stray. This discourse is often repeated and reaffirms the notion that women should not leave the domestic helper to cook and serve her husband as she would be encouraging a romantic relationship between them. Cooking for one's partner then, is considered as an important identity of wifehood in the traditional gender order. I argue that this is a disciplining discourse that keeps patriarchal relations intact, as women engage in self-policing practices which see them bending over backwards performing activities that purportedly keep their men from straying. The effect is that they remain in relations of inequality and fail to question such asymmetrical gender relations.

This discourse does not go unchallenged, however, as someone retorts that a man's cheating has nothing to do with how he is treated at home, but rather, it is because of his wayward

character because "people called men are unpredictable". This is symptomatic of a liberal discourse in which women are agentic and embody a modern subjectivity, whose ideals stand in contrast to those of tradition as captured in these comments:

> *So in this day and age of plenty plates and plenty casserole dishes and food warmers, how do you choose kuti this one is for daddy, unless it's* those decker kango [old fashioned enamel plates] *ones which are yellow, blue and green kikikiki* (laughing).
>
> *How do you know amongst all those plates in a set, do you write the name underneath?*
>
> *Maids spend the day eating from the plates you say she must not use. Besides, the way food is so cheap nowadays why ration.*
>
> *Ah loosen up with those husbands!*
>
> *Well with most men who were socialised the African way...what you think doesn't matter actually might matter to him. Just know the type of man you married.*

The original poster concludes this debate with this amused comment:

> *I didn't know there would be so much controversy kikikikiki from quantity to quality to losing my husband to maid, to disrespecting him nekusaita ndiro yababa gegegege* (for not having special plate for daddy) *I love this group.*

To conclude, I briefly highlight the different responses to this post and another one pertaining to domestic helpers[106]. The post is well received considering that it does not spark controversy as indicated in the following excerpt:

> *Comment 1: Bless you; you have such a good heart*
>
> *Poster: We're such good buddies*
>
> *Comment 2: I love how the way you call her your helper and how you honour her many of us think just because she's a nanny she is less than us, I salute you*
>
> *Poster: Aww thanks she has my back at all times and treats my lil gal as her own. We just can't do without her*
>
> *Comment 3: You're a great employer. May God bless you for it*

[106] Today I made this breakfast for my helper and myself, but ndazoseka when she said "Mai Carmy regai ndidye chingwa nemagarine first then ndozoseredzera nezvechirungu last " and that's exactly what she did 😂😂😂 been with her for almost 4years now and everyday I push myself to do better for her.
The toast I made had:
Egg, onion, watercress, baby spinach, rocket, green & red pepper, topped with cheddar and mozzarella cheese. She loves beef, but I had mine with liver. #loveHealthyEating.

Comment 4: I don't normally comment but the sentiment behind this post was just too lovely. Please keep up the nice treatment of your helper. Too many people treat them like second rate citizens. You are one of a kind

Poster: We treat her like a third parent for our little one.

It would appear that there is consensus that domestic helpers should be treated like family but at the same time there should be set boundaries between domestic helpers and *Shewes*.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted the range of conversations that women have on this group and how these conversations are reflective of their different discursive positionings. In performing wifehood, women who are constituted within the patriarchal gender order place the needs of the husbands above all else. They forego their own needs (by relegating themselves to the level of children and helpers) and defend the kitchen as their domain and not a space for male bodies. On the other hand, I have highlighted more liberal, rights based femininities constituted within modern discourses that valorise equality, not only gender based but among people in general (there should be no distinction between fathers, mothers, children and helpers). These advocate for an egalitarian domestic space where all bodies are free to move and operate in all spaces in the home, including the kitchen. They advocate for fluid rather than rigid masculinities that recognise marriage as a "partnership".

I have argued that women's identities are constituted at the intersection of these two discursive positions as they try to push the boundaries of each. Inevitably, there are ambiguities that emanate from this tension as observed in the way they react differently to similar situations (as in the last example of domestic helpers). Notably, it is in these seemingly mundane everyday discussions that established discourses are challenged and reconstituted, resulting in a play of power as discourses struggle for dominance and/or recognition. If indeed truth is a thing of this world (Foucault 1977b) we can see how different regimes of truth are established in society as particular versions of reality are made to function as true (Hall 1997). Accordingly, power is therefore produced within the very struggle over it (Miller & Fox 2004).

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

> What the [researcher] is faced with - is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he [*sic*] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render (Geertz 1973: 10).

8. Introduction

My first encounter with *Makhox Women's League* was in 'private whispers', primarily pointing to the explicit sexual discussions that characterised the group, so when I joined the group it was partly in anticipation of this 'mystery'. Coming from a conservative background I was intrigued by the openness on the group, not only relating to sex and relationships, but other traditional practices I was not aware of. Subsequently, I became more interested in what other conversations women were having; hence I came across *Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries*, *Her Zimbabwe*[107] and *Women* (*and men*) *of Zimbabwe Arise* (*WOZA*)[108]. I was intrigued by the online presence of groups that were exclusively for Zimbabwean women, and so began my quest to interrogate the range of discourses women were engaging in online, and how these were constructing different forms of femininities and subjectivities which had the potential to shape the way women understand themselves and the world they live in. Unfortunately, during the course of my research I had to drop *Her Zimbabwe* and *WOZA* in the end as these spaces attracted little active engagement from the audiences that they targeted. The comments on posts were few and far between. In other words, I was more interested in what the women themselves were saying rather than what was being said about them. However, this does not detract from the importance of those spaces that are explicitly

[107] *Her Zimbabwe* is a feminist blogging website whose commitment to illuminating and amplifying Zimbabwean women's voices is reflected in its very title. Considered as a pioneer in a technological setting which has been dominated by males (Mpofu 2016), *Her Zimbabwe* was established in 2012 by Fungai Machirori in order to challenge the silencing and delegitimising of women's voices in the mainstream public sphere as well as to encourage young women's digital activism. The website had the aim of harnessing "the potential of digital media to share and tell Zimbabwean women's stories, as well as nurture young women's digital activism" as stated on their website. The organisation has since disbanded.

[108] *WOZA* is a non-governmental organisation whose primary mandate is to "provide women with a united voice to speak out on issues affecting their day to day lives," and to stand up for their rights and freedoms. The acronym *WOZA* is significant, as a Ndebele word it loosely translates to 'come' in English and serves as an invitation to come together. The organisation was founded in 2003 and three years later the men's group was formed. The organisation is renowned for organising peaceful protests and members have been arrested around the country countless times for protesting over issues like the water crisis, unlawful arrest and abuse of their members at the hands of the police for demanding social justice, equality and political tolerance during election time.

political and informative. Recognising that there is no sustained political engagement with the public issues of the day on *Makhox* and *Baking & Cooking*, I argue that the vibrant discussions pertaining to the private sphere of family renders these sites political. After all, the personal is indeed political.

The task to unravel the multiplicity of complex conceptual structures woven into one another as Geertz suggests in the opening quote above, is indeed a daunting task. Inspired by Foucault, I have attempted an analysis in the spirit of his notion of genealogy in that it locates contemporary social practices in history. Therefore, I began by tracing the colonial and postcolonial socio-cultural context of the Zimbabwean nation and identified Zimbabwe as defined primarily by its crisis. The resulting massive human displacements over the years have necessitated the formation of the Zimbabwean diaspora and, in turn, the existence of these forums where people who identify strongly as Zimbabweans meet to discuss issues that affect them. The result has been a shift in the gender order. To this end, informed by Mamdani's (1996) conceptualisation of how power was organised in colonial Africa between citizens and subjects, and how this consequently shaped African subjectivities in particular ways; I consider postcolonial Zimbabwe as a bifurcated state which is established along the binary lines of the modern and the customary. In the colonial era, white people were considered as modern rights-bearing citizens as opposed to black Africans whose domain was that of the subject within customary law. Broadly speaking, this organisation of power has been accompanied by a dual gender order. The modern gender order, while still patriarchal, has incorporated and has, over time, recognised rights and equality on one hand; the gender order informed by a conservative customary discourse presumes women's subordination on the other hand. This formulation is not as neat as that might suggest however, because, in as much as the narratives on these Zimbabwean women's groups often enact subjectivities that are produced consistent with either one of these discourses, what emerges is that they sometimes straddle a space in between and across these discourses. These discourses, in turn, frequently intersect with other larger societal discourses, such as religion and neoliberalism, to create a productive tension. There is a dearth of research in relation to women online in the global South, and Zimbabwe with its particularly complex set of circumstances provides a unique and rich research site. The internet sites that I interrogate offer a constellation of subject positions that hail women in different circumstances and therefore deserve to be

unpacked in their own right as instantiations of cultural practices that influence the formation of feminine identities as I have done in this qualitative inquiry.

I begin this task of 'grasping' and 'rendering' the feminine formations by attending to the particular performances of womanhood evident on both *Makhox* and *Baking & Cooking*. This attests to my primary aim to probe the nature of engagement on these two platforms and the form that gendered identities take. Because discourses do not exist in isolation, I then consider the immanent dialogues of resistance. I am concerned with the discourses that are validated and othered and the agonistic possibilities offered by these two spaces. In response to the nature of the postings, I also consider Zimbabwean women's postfeminist sensibilities and the intersection of these with neoliberalism. Finally, I consider what this means for Zimbabwean women's identities in this era.

8.1 Performing womanhood on Makhox and Baking & Cooking sites

If gender is not intrinsic in one's being but rather understood as an act, a performance (Butler 1990), then it is possible to consider the women on both Facebook groups as 'doing' gender. In doing gender the women are constituted as particular discursive subjects of the different discourses that interpellate them and in this regard, they redo and can also subvert traditional gender norms. They navigate these discursive realms in making sense of the situations they come across on a daily basis and these discourses that they tap into are historically contingent.

My analysis indicates that the women on *Makhox* and *Baking & Cooking* uphold marriage as the core defining identity of adult womanhood. They patrol patriarchy par excellence, and the notion of the heterosexual family unit where women primarily labour in the home is upheld. The analysis however, also identifies differences in the way that various women consider marriage as underlined by certain gender ideals and thus impacting on their own gendered identities. As such, discussions on *Makhox* are overwhelmingly about marriage relationships (both customary and civil marriage) and those who are unmarried are always encouraged to formalise their relationships to minimise relationship problems. However, single women are regarded with particular suspicion as they are cast as villains (*omakhwapheni*/mistresses) who are out to destroy marriages. What I found fascinating is that in performing wifehood in this scenario, women are called upon as guardians of their homes to engage in technologies of self

to keep their marriages intact through various strategies such as 'strengthening' their homes (either through traditional medicine or steadfast prayer) to make sure that their husbands do not stray. Men are constructed as hypersexual beings that are on a constant quest for sexual fulfilment outside the home and should never be trusted. They should therefore be controlled (read manipulated) whenever possible since they are unable to control themselves – paradoxically – and as suggested by some women on *Baking & Cooking*, cooking does the trick! Toward this end, subjects constructed within the customary discourses often advocate the use of traditional medicine to 'protect' their marriages.

The modern subjects who are supposedly more 'enlightened' and constituted as Christian subjects, understand marriage to be ordained by God and therefore prayer is upheld as the only way to ensure God's protection within this discourse. However, there is also existence of an identity position that some women inhabit that incorporates a cross pollination of the two: these are women who perform Christianity and also engage in traditional practices at the same time, believing that the two should work together. A Christian subjectivity, however, is underlined by a proselytising force, by embracing this discourse; one should completely abandon traditional practices. This accounts for why the Christianity they privilege is judgemental and intolerant in most cases. The tension between these two subjectivities is often a cause of sustained debate.

An important point to emphasise is that both customary and modern subjectivities presume acceptance of patriarchy in relation to marriage. The woman is called upon to be a good wife (subservient, respectful and unquestioning) but prayerful. She is expected to also 'perform' good sex and this is evident from the conversations that encourage good personal hygiene or the practice of vaginal tightening exercises. The practice of vaginal tightening practices remains controversial as it seems to cut across both tradition and Christianity, there is no clear demarcation as to who can practice these. However, there are some women who speak against '*amatshuni*' who seem to speak from an enlightened position or rather one that is more informed by medical science. These women cite cancer problems as a result of inserting different concoctions in the vagina, but they do encourage bathing with cold water to ensure that elasticity is retained. It is my submission that these technologies of self, such as *amatshuni* and labia elongation are rarely for the benefit of women's pleasure but are often performed for the benefit of men. In this instance therefore, they reinstate the stereotypical

ideal that sexual pleasure is the male domain. The underlying reason for engaging in the practices is in the service of patriarchy and women frequently put these points across quite vehemently by passing nasty comments about those who do not defer to this discourse.

Similarly, my findings indicate that discussions on *Baking & Cooking* place immense importance on the marriage relationship, heterosexual of course. This is evidenced in the way in which women are always overwhelmingly cooking *for* their husbands. The women constituted within this traditional discourse are devout, respectful, happily cook and serve their husbands, and are always looking for new and interesting ways to please *Shewe*, their 'lords' (and families to a lesser extent), in the form of new recipes or novel ways of serving food. Within my period of study, there was no open dispute about religion in this group; Christianity seems to be the dominant religion. Indeed, as guardians of the home they are expected to keep peace in the home by negotiating all the intra household relationships and also notably, there is an expedient use of selected bible passages to legitimate this discourse.

In this heterosexual family arrangement, the woman is expected to cook for her husband and children, inculcate good values in her children and encourage good health, make sure that the children are socialised into the ideals of society, and importantly make sure that domestic helpers do not end up sleeping with their husbands because of their personal inadequacies. A consequent expectation frequently articulated is that the woman should personally cook and serve her husband, and wash and iron his clothes. My analysis thus makes visible how willing subjects of patriarchy are disciplined consistent with this traditional discourse; if a woman does not perform these duties, she should not be surprised when her husband leaves her as her conduct constitutes a 'failed' femininity (see Meah 2013). A woman constantly has to negotiate this position by engaging in technologies of self accompanied by a ceaseless anxiety about being deserted. These women are therefore called upon to be good wives, good mothers, good employers (in the case of domestic helpers) and good cooks. Crucially, far from experiencing a sense of oppression, she 'freely' inhabits this space of domestic bliss without complaint, accepting the roles as natural, maybe even fortunate.

In contrast, the findings indicate that some of the women who post are constituted within a modern rights-based discourse on *Makhox* regard marriage as a matter of choice and not an imperative. Individual agency is emphasised although these views are not evenly debated. To this end, they often express a strong sense of independence by encouraging each other to

leave abusive partners and find employment. On *Baking & Cooking* there was no explicit challenge to marriage during my period of study, save for a few reminders here and there that there are also single women present on the platform. I concluded that most women on the group are married (or at least living with their partners), given their constant construction as homemakers on the group.

Some women clearly embody both a traditional subjectivity and a modern subjectivity depending on the different situations they come across in their lives, whether be it within social spaces, formal work spaces or negotiating family and/or in-law spaces. There is a particular tension inherent between the discourse of tradition and Christianity. While most women acknowledge their traditional customs, such as *lobola* for instance, the use of traditional medicine is completely jettisoned within the Christianity discourse as mentioned earlier. What the analysis makes visible is the contradictions that women have to negotiate on an ongoing basis. It is interesting and perhaps not surprising then, that some women follow syncretic religions that combine aspects of these two powerful discourses in order to make sense of their lives. It is notable that Christian discourse is pervasive on both platforms and it is productive of particular heterosexual, monogamous God-fearing subjects whose views appear more dominant on these internet sites. The ideal woman within this discourse is indeed seemingly the one who can merge the teachings of tradition and Christianity into a coherent moral code (Christiansen 2007). Regrettably, none of these women recognise that what they count as tradition has been moulded by colonialism and imperialism which disrupted a range of indigenous practices. In fact, Christiansen argues elsewhere that an ideal African marriage is constructed within a patriarchal set of norms that connect in complex ways with ideals of Christianity that work to frame the marriage institution as a 'traditional' domain (Christiansen 2013). I view these as the residues of the discursive processes that manifest in the present as most women perform the femininities that were normalised for and by their mothers. My analysis has therefore made me deeply aware that while we live in a supposedly enlightened period – we certainly have more rights than our mothers had – we are still hailed to perform a 'traditional' femininity in many spaces. In performing this femininity, women encounter several difficulties that they are meant to endure in the name of protecting their marriages. What I found particularly disturbing are the accounts of extreme abuse and witchcraft that are manifest in the posts on *Makhox*, partly because a woman is taught that perseverance in marriage is integral to its success and maintaining the status of

respectability (Christiansen 2007; 2013). The last thing most of these women seem to consider is leaving the abusive relationship; they would rather resort to witchcraft or traditional medicine that is often signified as simply sending back (the misfortune) to the original sender. Alongside this, aspects of these violent masculinities can be understood within the colonial encounter which, due to its violent and authoritarian nature, rendered African men as creatures of colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). It is only when we locate discourses in their historical context that we begin to make sense of the subjectivities that they enable.

8.2 Dialogues of resistance

As Foucault argues, discourses do not exist in isolation but, likened to "tactical blocks" (1981: 102), they run counter or parallel to others; the forms of femininities discussed thus far rarely go unchallenged on these sites. The discursive constitution of femininity in Zimbabwe, as constructed on these sites, appears to be a contested terrain that has been shaped by wider dimensions of the social order. Arguably, it is possible to identify this contested terrain beyond these sites and it is reasonable to assume that it has wider currency than merely online. Borrowing McRobbie's (2004) phrase that feminism has been 'taken into account' (in the sense that it has been forced to make its relevance known in contemporary society), I argue that the discursive realms of marriage and religion are taken into account on these two platforms. This manifests in direct challenge to the marriage institution as displayed on *Makhox,* particularly in declarations that constantly question why the survival of a marriage rests squarely on a woman's shoulders, why a woman should persevere when in an abusive relationship, why a woman needs a man to validate her, and why a woman should always improve herself for the benefit a man. This liberal feminist position espoused by these women places emphasis on freedom from prejudice and the bonds of custom as well as equal rights. The puritanical or evangelical Christianity discourse on its part is challenged as to why it is the dominant religion when traditional ancestor worship or *prophets* sometimes offer alternative avenues that work just as well, sometimes even better. It is notable that the range of positions does not include atheism or agnosticism; they do not presume the possibility of neither Christianity nor ancestor worship.

On *Baking & Cooking,* particular tenets of patriarchal privilege are 'taken into account' in challenging why men should not be allowed to cook and clean, why they cannot multitask in

the kitchen (by carrying a baby on their back while cooking for the family), why they should be given preferential treatment over their children and why in general they cannot perform all tasks related to food work. My findings identify their concern with why women should live on the edge for fear of their husbands deserting them. These challenges serve to unsettle traditional gender roles and in small ways the gender order can be ruptured, possible precursors to radical ruptures that occur when new discourses in effect replace existing ones (to invoke Foucault's approach in his studies of historical change). These shifts and ruptures have the potential of achieving social justice. For instance, while the traditionally oriented women on *Baking & Cooking* generally find satisfaction in performing food work for their families, depicting it as a 'natural' part of their gendered selves and so perform these tasks with a combination of duty and pride (DeVault 1991); indication from the data is that they are teaching their sons differently, incorporating them into performing household chores at an early age with a futuristic hope that they will be "better husbands". This typically displays a moment when discursive subjects "operate within available discourses to produce unanticipated and atypical orientations to practical issues" (Miller & Fox 2004: 44).

These spaces then, function as agonistic spheres in which several aspects of social life which are particularly identity defining are taken into account. The seeming 'naturalness' of gender roles is questioned in the process of 'doing' and 'redoing' gender on these platforms, as demonstrated in the power plays between different discourses. This redoing of gender necessarily involves subverting conventional gender scripts and suggesting new ways of being in this productive tension. As Foucault usefully reminds us, power is not merely negative but he emphasises its productive nature, and in this instance, it is productive of new femininities, femininities that have been transformed in some instances by the diasporic condition of Zimbabwean women which has shaped the constellation and elasticity of femininities in the current context. My analysis in this instance links with postcolonial feminist theory's preoccupation with making visible the different concerns that non-western forms of feminism take in contrast to western feminism, by emphasising the different historical and social contexts that inform their formations (Connell 2011).

For instance, on *Baking & Cooking*, men who do housework are often argued to be men that are based in the diaspora, therefore implying that they have adopted diasporic culture(s); the implication is that men who take on part of the domestic chores are few and far between in

Zimbabwe. This means that within the traditional discourse in Zimbabwe, the domestic space is still considered as a predominantly female space. In as much as male bodies can be allowed into this space, it is only to the degree that they are not emasculated by such allowances; he must still be *jongwe* (the cock), *indoda sibili* (a *real man*), thus evoking a macho masculinity. As women challenge each other's positions and views, dispute certain previously established 'truths' and create new ones in the process, they are performing discursive work that ultimately constitutes others and themselves as particular subjects who make those 'truths' function as true. Allowing however, that this agonistic sphere operates as a space of conflict and contestation; in most instances it is still conserving of patriarchy, as already established.

To this end therefore, I conceptualise both *Makhox* and *Baking & Cooking* as disciplining and 'schooling' spaces which govern conduct through surveillance techniques embodied in the advice that women give each other on a daily basis. *Makhox*, in particular, operates as a capillary network of agony aunts who represent various fragmented identities that constitute this agonistic body or space. *Baking & Cooking*, for its part, operates as a 'how to' manual, a guide that prescribes performances in the domestic sphere. Notably, both sites have women that constantly put each other down by passing snide remarks, although this too is under surveillance and disciplined, particularly by the group administrators who have the power to admonish and expel group members. The nature of these groups, then, demands that women are on a journey of constant renewal, constant self-improvement and constant honing of various skills in a quest for the ever elusive title of perfect woman or perfect wife. Ultimately however, these spaces do offer a sense of community, a space to relax, laugh and potentially forge new friendships.

8.3 'Post-ing' Zimbabwean women's femininities

As already established, the discursive construction of Zimbabwean women's femininities is necessarily a weaving of different discourses that tap into wider social formations and intersect in powerful ways. Their constitution ranges from traditional, liberal feminist to postfeminist. A newer postfeminist position that emphasises the power associated with access to money and power over men is discernible on these platforms. This postfeminist discourse intersects with ideals of neoliberalism and consumer culture to produce a particular kind of neoliberal postfeminist subjectivity that embodies values of 'choice', 'freedom' and personal responsibility.

Women on both platforms aspire for upward social mobility as espoused in the desire for 'freedom' from men (particularly on *Makhox*), constantly expressed in the desire for employment which enables buying "beautiful clothes". This is accompanied by a sense of sexual freedom; such subjects embody a subjectivity that acknowledges their agency and gives them permission, so to speak, to sleep with many partners before marriage, leave a cheating and/or abusive partner and to decide whether she wants to get married or not in the first place. This sexual agency is also expressed in the emphasis on 'bathing' which is linked to sexual desirability, enhanced by buying appropriate cosmetics and clothes in order to embody this postfeminist persona. Beauty, glamour and sexual agency are the earmarks of postfeminism (Sullivan & Delaney 2017).

On *Baking & Cooking*, the quest for good food and general attention to the aesthetic necessitates that women participate in consumer culture. It tends to manifest in the disciplining of women in the use of crockery, glassware and food presentation. There is also an emphasis on individual responsibility and choice regarding taking care of one's family "each to their own", which cuts across issues to do with what to eat, food portions and the nature of intra household relationships in general. Showcasing their skills on this group can be construed as an acknowledgement of talent, resourcefulness and hard work but which at the same time demands that the subject self governs and aspires to be a better self (Sullivan & Delaney 2016).

The desire for 'better clothes' and 'better food' (better partners even), is indicative of how the symbolic construction of race and class are embedded in the construction of a postfeminist (consumerist) subjectivity. It concerns the underlying discourse of 'white is better' frequently expressed in references to white men as better partners because of their wealth (particularly on *Makhox*) and references to *chibhoyi* (blackness/backwardness) in relation to food choices on *Baking & Cooking*. Within this discursive realm, aspiring to 'whiteness' (sometimes termed Englishness) in this manner means that one has to participate in consumer culture as a willing subject of that discourse. Allowing that living in the diaspora currently enables better access to resources, a point that is repeated frequently, it is difficult in a struggling economy like Zimbabwe to maintain this lifestyle especially by urban working class populations struggling to make ends meet. The analysis identifies a tension on the part of women who live in Zimbabwe and those who live in the diaspora as represented in the groups. On *Makhox*

this tension is particularly telling in response to the performance of a 'having it all' persona on the part of *injiva*. Language, as a floating signifier (Hall 1996), becomes the vehicle for embodying the performance of this new identity as signified by speaking *isi*Zulu, consuming branded food, wearing branded clothing and owning expensive gadgets, all signalling affluence. This masquerade signifies their 'becoming', a discursive separation from their homeland and insertion into their 'new' home. Settling in the new home however, also comes with its challenges of negotiating the discourses of 'otherness', which in part, explains why *injiva* strive to fit into the South African society, performing South African-ness in the way they speak and behave. The embodiment of this distinct 'South African' subjectivity is considered as a masquerade by those who live and work in Zimbabwe, hence the unresolved tension.

Aspiring for a better life is presented as a matter of 'choice' for individuals and so deciding to leave Zimbabwe in search for greener pastures is constituted as a matter of personal choice. There is an overwhelming sense of individualised responsibility for the choices we make in life. While reasons for emigrating are numerous, they are validated here in ways that are notably commensurate with the ideals of neoliberal capitalism which Rose has termed "government through freedom" (Rose 1999: xxiii).

This 'government through freedom' however, is not as much about being duped in the ideological sense of being powerless, but about women inhabiting an agonistic space in which the enunciative strategies of discourse manifest in different forms and hail them as subjects of different discourses. This accounts, in part, for the ambiguities that abide in postfeminist discourse, because at the same time that women are called upon to be agentic neoliberal subjects, they are also called upon to be particular patriarchal subjects. In the Zimbabwean context, this is closely tied to the complex knotting of Christianity and tradition whereby some biblical 'truths' are represented as tradition and vice versa, which serves to legitimate these discourses as true and unquestionable in most instances.

8.4 Femininities in limbo

This leads me to my conclusion that Zimbabwean femininities as performed on these sites are therefore 'in limbo', in a state of uncertainty and unresolved tension, straddling the space between the traditional and the modern. In making sense of this world, women necessarily

move from one discursive realm to another, each with its own discourses bestowing upon us its own subject positions (Talbot 2010; Prinsloo 2009a). Zimbabwean femininities do not speak with one voice; they are as diverse as the women themselves.

Within this state of unresolved tension; the discursive constitution of femininities in Zimbabwe speaks of femininities that are simultaneously plastic. This is compounded by the Zimbabwean woman's diasporic condition. As she keeps moving, coming into contact with different cultures, different discourses with their own strategies of enunciation, 'Zimbabwean-ness' necessarily moves beyond borders, it becomes under construction as new discourses compel it to engage with new parameters particularly in this internet age, to adjust, to contest and even adapt thus rendering existing identities under erasure. Far from trivial, women's everyday negotiations on these sites are significant and nuanced, they simultaneously combine fulfilment, contestation and compliance in complex but interesting ways and one is left to wonder, evoking Friedan's musings all those decades ago, if 'the problem' now has a name.

8.5 Limitations and prospects for further research

My research responds to calls for organic African cultural studies that investigate situated practices of African cultures (Wright 2016). Investigating these sites as representative of an African public sphere that has an emancipatory potential, has the potential to illuminate the various subjectivities that constitute modern African gendered subjectivities. Although my findings are limited to these two Facebook groups, I submit that in these spaces, Africans, and more specifically African women, define a sense of self amidst the effects of empire and contest its totalising effect. My findings could be reasonably generalised to a larger population but further interrogation of women and how they understand themselves could also be offered by in-depth individual interviews of selected women, given that there are so many spaces that Africans have created online to build a sense of community, spaces that foster a form of sisterhood like *Makhox* and *Baking & Cooking* do, despite the differences in opinion that often occur. For instance, on *Makhox* there are annual gatherings where these women meet and socialise in an offline setting. Further, *Makhox* has also set itself up as a community organisation that runs community upliftment programmes from time to time. These had not been active during the year in which I conducted my research, hence their exclusion from my data. Similarly, *Baking & Cooking* has fostered relationships outside the

online setting over the years in which women teach other baking and cooking skills in workshops across the country. These could potentially enhance the meaning of these groups beyond the scope of the findings in my study.

Over the period of my research, a number of newer Zimbabwean groups have been formed that represent the ever changing interests and identities that characterise a neoliberal world order. My research would have been more insightful had I been able to engage with these emerging spaces as well, as they cater for a range of more topics including beauty and make up, home improvement, entrepreneurship amongst a range of others. The neoliberal orientation of these sites might potentially enable an investigation into how gendered subjects' consumption practices produce subjectivities that are commensurate with neoliberal capitalism and its gendered assumptions. These spaces need to be investigated in their own right as significant cultural practices that offer solutions on how to navigate an ever changing economic and cultural landscape, not only in Zimbabwe but across the world. By using Facebook, a capitalist and exploitative initiative, women continue to use the 'master's tools' to speak back at patriarchy and at global matrices of power, constantly pushing from the margins, hence further research in this direction would be productive.

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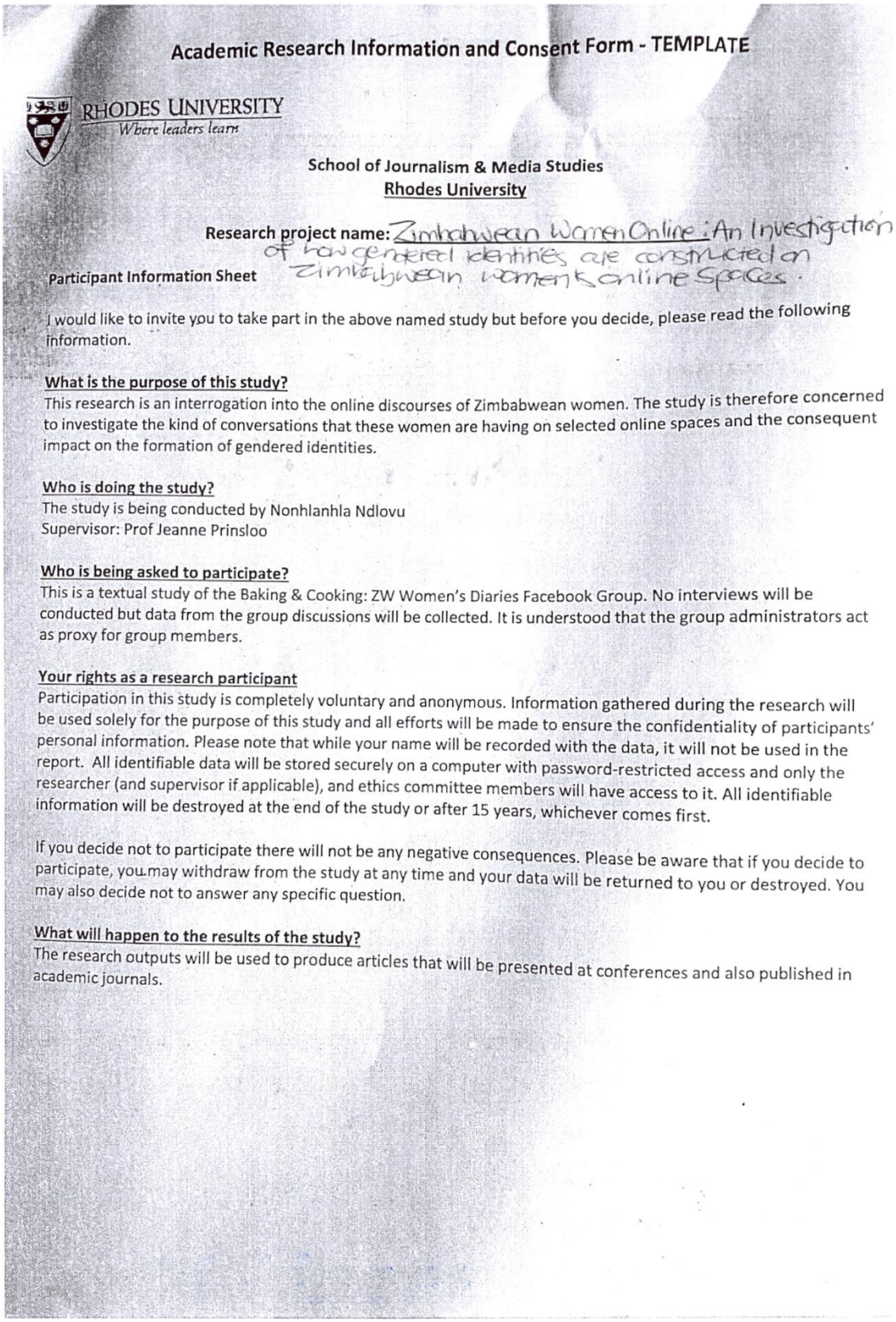
Appendix 1: Letter of consent



Academic Research Information and Consent Form - TEMPLATE

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

School of Journalism & Media Studies
Rhodes University

Research project name: Zimbabwean Women Online: An Investigation of how gendered identities are constructed on Zimbabwean women's online spaces.

Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to take part in the above named study but before you decide, please read the following information.

What is the purpose of this study?
This research is an interrogation into the online discourses of Zimbabwean women. The study is therefore concerned to investigate the kind of conversations that these women are having on selected online spaces and the consequent impact on the formation of gendered identities.

Who is doing the study?
The study is being conducted by Nonhlanhla Ndlovu
Supervisor: Prof Jeanne Prinsloo

Who is being asked to participate?
This is a textual study of the Baking & Cooking: ZW Women's Diaries Facebook Group. No interviews will be conducted but data from the group discussions will be collected. It is understood that the group administrators act as proxy for group members.

Your rights as a research participant
Participation in this study is completely voluntary and anonymous. Information gathered during the research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and all efforts will be made to ensure the confidentiality of participants' personal information. Please note that while your name will be recorded with the data, it will not be used in the report. All identifiable data will be stored securely on a computer with password-restricted access and only the researcher (and supervisor if applicable), and ethics committee members will have access to it. All identifiable information will be destroyed at the end of the study or after 15 years, whichever comes first.

If you decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time and your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You may also decide not to answer any specific question.

What will happen to the results of the study?
The research outputs will be used to produce articles that will be presented at conferences and also published in academic journals.

Academic Research Information and Consent Form - TEMPLATE

Informed Consent Sheet
**** To be signed in duplicate – one copy to be returned to the researcher and one copy to be retained by the participant.**

Thank you for your participation. By submitting this form you are indicating that you have read the description of the study, are over the age of 18, and that you agree to the terms as described in the short questionnaire that follows:

I have read this form and received a copy of it. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalty or consequences. **I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction.**

Yes ■
No ☐

I agree to take part in this study and I hereby grant permission for the data generated from this research to be used in the researcher's publications on this topic.

Yes ■
No ☐

I grant permission under the following conditions:

The researcher gets the required permission from individuals for any data concerning their privacy. The researcher understands and adheres to Facebook policies.

I grant permission for the research to be recorded and saved for purpose of review by the researcher, supervisor / principal investigator, and ethics committee.

Yes ■
No ☐

I grant permission for the research recordings to be used in presentations or documentation of this study.

Yes ■
No ☐

Participant's names and signature _Ednah Zvinavashe Zvinavashe
Date_19 – 12- 2018_

Researcher names and signature Nonkosinathi Ndlovu
Date 19/12/2018

Contact
If you have any questions at any time about this study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher on +263 782116974 or email nonodewa@gmail.com

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.