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## Decolonising Education on Adolescent Sexuality: Critiquing Human Rights Sex Education as a Continued Colonial Imposition in Africa

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### Abstract

Contemporary sexual ideologies that inform our knowledge about men's, women's, and queer sexuality in most parts of Africa are products of foreign imperial and missionary expansion across our continent. The cultural invasion of Africa resulted in the silencing of Africans' authentic identification and practices in various socio-cultural aspects, including their sexualities. Thus, the disposition of gender and sexuality education in contemporary African societies is a legacy of a colonial past that enforced the reconstruction of cultural values and knowledge systems on account of European standards and practices. Consequently, this created a society that is exposed to knowledge systems and practices such as gender and sexual ideologies that have limited exposure to

indigenous culture and practice. The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of dominant and normative ideologies on shaping sexuality in Africa, embedded within approaches such as comprehensive sexuality education and human rights framings. The paper is qualitative in nature which includes scoping literature for review based on key concepts informed by the purpose of the paper. In addition, the paper was guided by themes emerging in the literature reviewed. Content analysis was used to compare the quality of the discussion of literature in the various papers that formed part of this paper. Based on the findings, we suggest excavating some of the principles that have framed sexuality and educational practices that are part of indigenous African cultures.

**Keywords:** *Adolescent, Cultural silence, Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Decolonial education, Sexuality education*

## **Introduction**

The entrenchment of western colonization and christianity upon Africa changed “the culture, belief, and value” systems of African societies, simultaneously creating an education system that strips away the indigenous history, pride, and identity to make them subservient residents “for the economic benefit of Europe” (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019, p. 26). At the same time, suffering psychological colonisation, resulting in dismissing and denying the multi-complexities of gender and sexuality, amongst other identifying traits of African society, such as the realities of same-sex relations. The appearance of missionaries was a direct response to their “economic aspirations” (ibid.). Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) highlights the existence of a structured and familial system of education in Africa, pre-western invasion. Rodney (1972) confidently recognizes that “the colonizers did not introduce education into Africa; they introduced a new set of formal educational institutions which partly supplemented and partly replaced those which were there before” (p. 263). From an African scholarly point of view, Msibi (2014) argues that western theorization, particularly as it pertains to gender and sexuality in an African context, is totalizing the African experience, thus presenting African sexuality through a decontextualized and static prism. Msibi further highlights the complexities of African sexuality with the intention of encouraging comprehensive theorisation that captures and addresses the multi-facets of African gender and sexuality. The latter thus insinuates sexuality education that is socio-historical and place-based and is accepting of history void of standardized western hegemonic ideologies. Kendall’s

(1998) work highlights the disconnect between western and African understanding of sexuality. For instance, in her study of the Lesotho women who engaged in same-sex relations, she found that they did not relate their experiences to western understanding of sex and sexuality. She observed that same-sex relations were culturally sanctioned and did not require validation in a western sense.

Therefore, this paper examines the bearing of dominant and normative ideologies on shaping sexuality in Africa, as reflected in comprehensive sexuality education and human rights framings. Additionally, it discusses the underlying cultural dismissal and silencing effect of contemporary formal education (which is unfavourably based on standards of western instructions and morale) towards traditional African educational methods, dissemination strategies, and comprehension, particularly in the context of gender and sexuality edification.

## **Background**

Sexuality and gender are contested terrains (identities, practices, and governing mechanisms) that are framed through socio-cultural, political, and legal domains. In Africa, historically, sex and gender were organizing socio-political and economic constructs that structured reproduction, labour, and land. But colonization made it easy to ignore these social and political categories as they were lived and practised in Africa. It also brought strict gender and sexuality categories by imposing Victorian domesticity and religious systems and practices (McClintock, 1995). Colonisation introduced a set of legal frameworks within which to regulate sexuality through their moral and political standards of sexuality and gender. McClintock (1995) introduces the notion of Victorian domesticity, which became central to organizing and governing gender and sexuality in settlers' colonies. Sexuality and gender have always been linked in history because gender was and is needed to regulate, manage, and control the reproduction and dominant sexual relations through the lens of heterosexuality.

As research on sexuality continued into the early 20th century, several western anthropologists continued the misrepresentation of African sexualities as racist and patronising (Tamale, 2011). African sexualities were not only misrepresented but misrecognised in indigenous knowledge systems that valued African gender and sexualities in particular ways. For example, gender in Africa has also had a long history

of mixed, different, and fluid practices that did not always confine people to their biological bodies nor Western social theory on sexuality and gender associations. Amadiume (1987) describes gender ideologies, sexual division of labour, and those governing the relations of reproduction in Nigeria to their myths of origin. Amadiume (1987) further explains that the 'gender ideology governing economic production was that of female industriousness as a gift inherited from the goddess. Thus, the existence of a dual-sex organizational principle is behind the structure of the economy. This is significant because it also affected land and inheritance practices, whereby men could call their daughters back home to work on the land, and inadvertently, these daughters were known as male-daughters. Similarly, the concept of a female husband was employed when a woman could purchase a wife in the same way that men purchased wives, so woman-to-woman marriage existed because it was financially viable to do so. Amadiume (1987) and Oyewumi (1997) argue that gender ideologies were complicated during the pre-colonial era, having a dual-sex organization principal as well as the coexistence of patriarchy and matriarchy systems. Amadiume's work is significant because it begins to situate the concept of queer and the troubling of heteronormativity in an African context. It disrupts the belief that queer identities and sexual diversity are a Western import. In the context of decolonising adolescent sexuality education, it is important to hold counter-normative gender and sexual discourses in tension with Indigenous practices on sexuality and sexuality education.

The continued misrecognition and the devaluing of indigenous knowledge systems provide a particular logic for the governance and management of sexuality and reproduction. The misrecognition extends to an erasure of indigenous systems that are meant to provide sexuality education to adolescents in a caring, supportive, and safe environment. In this paper, we argue that the misrecognition extends to uncritically importing human rights education and accompanying strategies such as comprehensive sexuality education into the African curriculum without affirming centuries of indigenous practices that provide the learning about sexuality for adolescents in a caring, supportive, and communal manner, albeit with the contested categorisation of gender and sexuality. We do not intend to romanticise indigenous knowledge systems (they too were patriarchal), yet we want to make visible the continued erasure that underpins human rights discourses that aim to empower and support sex education. African-gendered ideologies and educational practices must acknowledge the different practices, discourses, and

knowledge that support framing gender and sexuality in order to understand the complicated negotiation of colonial and decolonial approaches to education on gender and sexuality.

## **Methodology and Findings**

The paper is qualitative in nature. We conducted a scoping review of the literature by searching key concepts of debate related to the purpose of the paper on various online scholarly databases. We were also guided by themes emerging in the literature examined. Content analysis was used to compare the quality of the discussion of literature in the various papers that formed part of this paper.

The themes that emerged from the literature of included articles are as follows and will be discussed below: (1) formal and informal indigenous teaching on adolescent sexuality; (2) formal schooling in the traditional African context: initiation schools; (3) families and communities as enabling support for adolescent sexuality education; (4) regulating sexualities: governance, religion, and customary law; (5) formal schooling and the introduction of Comprehensive Sexuality Education; (6) Incorporating CSE into formal schooling educational programmes and contextualising resistance to Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

### ***Formal and Informal Indigenous Teaching on Adolescent Sexuality***

During the pre-colonial period in South Africa (i.e., before 1652), informal and formal teaching and learning existed among the Indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. Indigenous education aimed to fortify cultural continuity between one generation and the next, as well as ensure the intellectual and physical survival of people's minds, spirits, and health (Seroto, 2011). Indigenous education allows for children's holistic development. Indigenous education consisted of oral histories in Indigenous languages, stories of heroism and deceit, as well as survival skills that were incorporated into the everyday life of the Indigenous people (Seroto, 2011). During the early years of an individual's childhood, the child's education was done informally by the biological mother, whereas community members played an active teaching and supportive role during the stage of adolescence to deliver education that resembled the needs of society, and this is when formal education occurred to mark the passage to adulthood (Mosweunyane, 2013; Seroto,

2011). During this time, the adolescents learned by listening to and observing the elders in the communities of indigenous peoples (i.e., the Khoi and the San) (Mosweunyane, 2013; Seroto, 2011). By doing this, they honoured the African culture. Seroto (2011) contends that formal education consisted of initiation ceremonies and rituals that were events through which learning took place. Men and women had distinct roles during the pre-colonial period (Smith, 2014). For example, men would learn practical skills, whereas women would become mothers, give birth, and offer a nurturing approach.

According to Mosweunyane (2013), the colonial period consisted of the intrusion of western forces and knowledge systems into African societies, which erased the significance of African indigenous knowledge systems. The infiltration of Western knowledge systems redirected the development of education on the African continent into a reflection of Europe and North America (Mosweunyane, 2013). Western knowledge systems were reflected in the formal education system through the structure of school buildings with classrooms and lectures, and the introduction of western formal educational structures (Mosweunyane, 2013). Moolman and McMillan (2020) argue that the imposition of colonial education is a moment of violent disruption of indigenous systems and processes of learning and socialisation, and thus it is important to not re-enact colonising processes by imposing education systems into African curriculums. It is, therefore, necessary to revisit the introduction of human rights education systems into African curriculums. But before we do that, we'd like to look at how traditional cultures teach teens about sexuality in a formal setting.

### ***Formal schooling in a Traditional African context: Initiation Schools***

Traditional initiation schools are significant in educating and shaping adolescents' perspectives about their genders and sexualities. Munthali and Zulu (2008) examine the "nature of the information that is imparted to adolescents' initiation ceremonies in order to assess the extent to which such institutional socialization systems prepare adolescents for the challenges associated with their sexual development during puberty and later in life" (p. 2). The results from the study indicate that adolescents attend their respective initiation ceremonies due to respect for their culture and heritage and also because their parents expect it from them. Such rituals are also seen as an important part of the transition to

adulthood by the young (ibid). According to Erlank (2004), Jochelson (2001), and Gaitskell (1982), one of the primary purposes of traditional initiation schools was to educate adolescents about their roles as they transition into adulthood and provide instructions on sexual matters. Erlank (2004) comments that “Both girls and boys learnt about menstruation and the taboos associated with it, as well as permitted sexual activity” (p.78). According to Erlank (2004), Hunter (1961), Schapera (1940), Thema (1928), and Molema (1925), traditional schools introduced sex education to young girls in ways that were celebrated and empowering, as they were being prepared for womanhood and marriage. Traditional initiation schools are, in a way, a prerequisite to adulthood and a gateway to exploring sexuality, bestowed with a calibre of principles to guide them through their prescribed or self-identified genders. Traditional initiation schools are not the only form through which adolescent sexuality is taught. Some African customs include cultural practices that are permissive to sexual experimentation. For example, in South Africa, certain ethnic groups practice thigh sex (Ukumetsha) or non-penetrative sex, “which was a common activity amongst black youth because it allowed sexual play without the possibility of pregnancy” (Erlank, 2004, p. 78). Some African societies practice rituals that encourage premarital sex as a rite of passage to womanhood, such as the ritual of cleansing the dust (Kusasa fumbi) or sexual cleansing as identified in the literature in Malawi, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Angola, Ivory Coast, Congo, and Kenya (This is Africa, 2019; Ayikukwei et al., 2007). However, there is a protest against sexual cleansing in Malawi as it threatens women’s and young girls’ sexual reproductive health. The ritual is performed when a young girl starts her menstrual cycle as well as in cases where a woman is widowed. The vulgarity of the ritual is observed when young girls are forced to have intercourse with men who pay for sex, called "hyenas" (This is Africa, 2019). Young boys in Malawi are recruited into a secret cult as part of their initiation process through intimidation. In conclusion, after the initiation, adolescent boys are encouraged to have sex to confirm their adulthood. Regarding confirmation sex, both adolescent girls and boys are advised to take certain safety precautionary measures, such as advising young men to use condoms to avoid unwanted pregnancies and diseases; young women are advised to urinate immediately after intercourse to prevent pregnancy (ibid). Nevertheless, it requires keen investigation to conclude the effectiveness of the advice given to adolescent girls. These cultural customs are not without concerns,

particularly when "force" is used to compel adolescents to engage in any sexual practices that might be harmful and unsafe. The point we want to make here is that both formal education, such as traditional initiation schools, and informal practices such as ukumetsha, are both forms of education but also space to learn about adolescent sexuality in Africa. Before colonisation, adolescents did learn about sexuality and were socialised to it. Simply put, it was essentially destroyed during colonisation.

### ***Families and Communities as Enabling Support for Adolescent Sexuality Education***

Traditional education in Africa relied extensively on "community effort" (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Since sexuality contributes to social cohesion, communities create "rules and norms" about the expression of sexuality as well as the mechanisms of socialisation for controlling sexual behaviour amongst adolescents (Prah, 2013). In order to communicate these "rules", initiation ceremonies were held. For example, in Kenya, rituals associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood, which included sex, were pervasive (Prah, 2013). In the past, the traditions and cultural values of the communities were passed on from one generation to the next through initiation and rituals. An example of this is the "Abagusii", which is a specific tribe in Kenya that hosts initiation ceremonies conducted in society and ceremonies organized based on "risaga," which is a party for everyone in the community while at the same time involving genital operations as boys undergo circumcision and girls are subjected to the act of clitoridectomy (Akuma, 2015, p. 85). Pre-colonial families had to ensure that children participated in initiation processes sanctioned by the culture. This meant that the extended family as well as the community participated in the adolescents' gender and sexuality education. For example, in some Sub-Saharan countries, "the extended family, including grandparents and aunts, was instrumental in imparting the necessary knowledge and skills relevant for sexual relationships" (Bastien et al., 2011, p.2). Colonisation changed this historical set of relations. Colonization, as indicated earlier, separated individuals, families, and communities. Gender and sexuality become the locus of the individual and the family within a private context. Primary gender and sexual socialisation became the responsibility of the family in consent with European mores and practices. This meant that adolescent sexuality was mainly guided by a set of religious principles that were



enforced by families as a private affair. In post-colonial African communities, an extension of colonial templates exists as practice. Contemporary sexuality education now calls for families and communities to be more involved.

### **Regulating Sexualities: Governance, Religion, and Customary Law**

The three legal regimes, namely, Christianity, African tradition, and Western political thought construct African sexuality through a moralising discourse that symbolises aspects of "sin, taboo and criminalisation" (Tamale, 2014). Everyday practices of sexuality are regulated through these modes of governance. This moral construction functions to regulate and govern modes of sexuality as discourse, practice, and identity. Kaoma (2016) defines the three realms that govern African sexualities in contemporary Africa, namely: "the Christian conception of sex as taught by missionaries; the traditional African perspective on which sexuality was communally understood; the legal view left behind by colonial authorities; and finally, the more secular "romantic love" promoted by contemporary global cultures" (p.56). At least three realms or forms of government and regulation on sexuality and gender thus operate simultaneously but to varying degrees in different African cultures and are structured through a hierarchy and the dominance of a legal, democratic approach. As previously discussed, religion, particularly Christianity, was introduced through the missionaries into colonial Africa. The Christian missionaries served several purposes, the first being to indoctrinate natives to subdue their will to resist colonial authority (ibid.) and the second being to instil a European morality as superior to African morality. The introduction of European morality meant an erasure of existing African traditional customs and fostered a spiritual investment in Christianity as the basis for a moral humanity (being a good or bad person). Colonial discourse presented religion as a saviour of African peoples from a heathen lifestyle. Christianity has constricted the openness of the practices and expressions of African sexuality, limiting the expression of African sexuality to aspects that relate to and can be configured according to Christian principles and values. This meant that sexuality was framed through a heterosexual binary, and all forms of fluid and multiple sexual identities and practices were erased. The use of Christianity as a colonial tool has plagued traditional sexuality teaching methods and rituals, with a disregard for the significance of such practices in their cultural context,

subsequently representing them as immoral and imposing a reconfiguration of sexuality education amongst African black youths. People think that traditional ways of teaching are useless and debasing, and in the Christian religion, they think that they are not spiritual.

As previously mentioned, religion, culture, and law play a huge role in constructing and regulating sexuality in our societies. Additionally, religious laws (i.e., Christianity and Islam) have been implemented in several African countries. This resulted in the introduction of customary laws in Africa that give preference to the patriarchal construction of gender that prioritises masculinity as superior to femininity. An example is revealed in a 2008 Nigerian bill that regulated women's dress code by not wearing trousers and skimpy clothes (Tamale, 2013). Based on these three systems of government, hetero-patriarchal ideas shape and mould the sexuality of African women. Religion played a huge role in supplanting African cultural values in the labelling of same-sex relationships as deviant, "unnatural" and "un-African" that were imported from Western societies (Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009). The church scrutinizes what traditional initiation schools teach young boys and girls about their sexuality education. The church imposes its principles in matters of traditional authority and discourse in order to monitor and regulate what is practised and taught to young initiates in efforts to uphold colonial objectives and ethics (Erlank, 2004). In efforts to enforce church principles amongst African traditional educational prospects, the churches recognised the ineffectiveness of trying to remove the custom; rather, they began to Christianise circumcision schools (Erlank, 2004). With the church's interference in traditional initiation practices, "the provision of useful sexual information was on the decrease" (ibid: p.79). The decrease in the provision of sexuality information has been reported for both the Xhosa and Tswana initiation schools post-mid-twentieth century (Schapera, 1948). In hindsight, religion was a way that sexuality education got into the formal schooling system for everyone.

Religious dogmatic stakeholders in Malawi have expressed concerns with traditional initiation ceremonies. They insist that such rituals encourage pre-mature sexual engagement among adolescents. They also highlight the explicit and suggestive traditional ceremonies informing strategies. Therefore, Christian groups in Malawi have operationalised their initiation ceremonies meant to teach young people behavioural expectations as they transition into adulthood in a western and Christian system (Munthali & Zulu, 2008). In Mozambique, "religious affiliations

and education levels are increasing the knowledge of HIV transmission and prevention among youth in rural Mozambique but have limited influence on their HIV-related sexual behaviours” (Noden et al., 2010, p.1291). The link between the two bodies of knowledge on HIV transmission occurs when a young person reaches the end of primary school. From the beginning of secondary school, youth within a religious affiliation that attends formal schools have been shown to be exposed to HIV information from teachers trained in the Mozambique education system, which specifically addresses HIV-related issues (ibid). The African penal codes had a list of sexual laws that forbade or regulated different kinds of sexual relationships (Bennett & Tamale, 2017; Tamale, 2013). An example of this is the previous President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, who described LGBTIQ+ people as 'worse than dogs and pigs' and associated it with Western imperialism (Tamale, 2013). This dehumanisation of African sexual identities is not specific only to Zimbabwe but across the African continent, such as Uganda, where there are multiple forms of dehumanisation for LGBTIQ+ people. LGBTIQ+ people are dehumanized when they are banned and put in jail when the media ignores them, and when they are hurt physically. In recent years in Africa, some countries, such as Mozambique, South Africa, and Botswana, have decriminalised same-sex relations (Sida, 2014). However, this has not prevented the violence of homo and trans-phobia from continuing.

The regulation of sexuality education through these authorising discourses of religion and law creates a complicated cultural and social context. Challenging and deviating from these norms places individuals and institutions at risk of exposure to public and political condemnation. A person wanting to deviate can also face discrimination, stigma, and exclusion in personal and social circumstances. We have inherited colonial religious and legal practices that still govern the expression, identities, and practices of gender and sexuality, including adolescent sexuality education. Modernity as a system of governance and societal structures and modern identities are all centrally structured through coloniality. Maldonado-Torres argues that “coloniality is a mode of power that structures 'modernity'." Lugones (2010) argues that “Unlike colonization, the coloniality of gender is still with us; it lies in the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power” (p.746). We argue that human rights education in the form of comprehensive sexuality education is a continuation of

colonialism because it keeps erasing the learning and education systems about sexuality that come from indigenous cultures.

### ***Formal Schooling and the Introduction of Comprehensive Sexuality Education***

Francis (2013) indicates that there was early resistance to a changing value system with regard to sexuality education. In an age where human rights are openly advocated for and celebrated, education methods have transcended the conventional conservative scope of what should be disseminated in the classroom or even out of school to address modern challenges pertaining to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) faced by adolescents. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a holistic, human rights-based approach to sexuality education. It is particularly founded on the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development's (ICPD) programme of action, which called on governments to consider and act on the well-being of adolescents by providing education that touches on issues of gender and sexuality (Haberland & Rogow, 2015). CSE is a program that instructs young people about "attitudes towards sexuality, sexual roles, gender relations, and the social pressures to be sexually active" (Boonstra, 2011). It also gives them information about sexual and reproductive health services. It provides training in communication as well as positively influences the youth's decision-making skills regarding their sexuality, reproductive health, and social development (IPPF, 2018).

According to Browne (2015), CSE is a program that reflects on gender and power; enforces participatory learning, youth advocacy, and community engagement; and cultural appropriateness for suitable service delivery and messaging. The essential components of CSE are Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and HIV, Sexual Rights and Sexual Citizenship (SRSC), Pleasure, Violence, Diversity, and Relationships. Insinuating the programme as youth-friendly and empowering (Leung et al., 2019). CSE is supported by international discourse and evidence-based research as well as sexual reproductive health rights proponents such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). A UNESCO (2013) definition of CSE defines it as, "an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sex and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information", henceforth the importance of evidence-based research on the implementation and monitoring of CSE. Evidence-

based research has yielded positive outcomes concerning the impact CSE has on adolescent SRH. Evidence shows positive behavioural changes “such as increased condom use, girls' empowerment, and delayed sexual debut (UN Population Fund, 2016). This is achieved through increasing knowledge and changing attitudes”(Browne, 2015, p. 2). CSE is thus aimed at the holistic education of adolescents. On some level, these definitions of CSE are quite universal and perhaps do not emphasise enough the importance of the particularity of CSE in relation to historical, socio-economic and geo-political contexts Francis (2013) calls for the importance of values as central to understanding the resistance and hesitation from teachers to teach CSE, he misses an opportunity to unpack the ‘universal’ values upon which CSE is established. However, Miedema et al. (2020:749), begin to interrogate the ‘normative and theoretical underpinnings of CSE’.

### ***Incorporating Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) Into Formal Schooling Educational Programmes and Contextualising Resistance to CSE***

In different contexts, political and socio-cultural factors are indicative of which components of CSE are acceptable and applicable as they assert degrees of comprehensiveness. Formal schools have programmes that promote sexuality education to varying degrees. These school-based programmes are either selective (abstinence-only and less considerate of non-conforming genders and sexualities) or holistic (comprehensive) in articulating matters of sexuality education (including addressing sexual and gender diversity) to the learners. The school context for delivering particular brands of CSE is dependent on the broader societal context in which the school functions, including the religious and cultural culture of the school; the school climate; the management and leadership of the school; the capacity of the teachers; and the participation of the parents. The two groups, teachers and families, are identified as the stakeholders with a significant investment in the rollout, introduction, and implementation of CSE. In Francis’ (2013, 2016) analysis of teachers’ participation in sexuality education, the author articulated that teachers teach sections of sexuality education they are most comfortable with, and that do not conflict with their inner peace. In Helleve et al.'s (2009) study, teachers felt that they were put in a situation that expected them to convey material that challenged their convictions in the name of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). This presented some personal

distress for the teachers, as they had mixed feelings. Therefore, when it comes to teachers discussing sexuality issues in school, it causes a level of discomfort, as they fear being the ones corrupting their learners' innocence through sexuality education (De Hass & Hutter, 2019; Khau, 2012). It is however not only about personal levels of discomfort but also about normative gender and sexual scripts that are continuously reproduced. Francis (2018) alerts us to the fact that counter-normative sexualities are ignored, dismissed, and omitted, even when schools adopt CSE. He goes on to argue when gender and sexual diversity are spoken about, there is a reproduction of queer youth as hypersexual, immoral, sinful and/or naïve. There is an interesting correlation between the representation of African as other and queer as other. However, these similarities are not explored in work on sexuality education in South Africa.

Similarly, families, and particularly mothers, were uncomfortable communicating sexuality with their children. Discussing matters of sexuality with adolescents at home was seen as taboo because parents found it difficult to address the matter (Nduna et al., 2001). A study by Mudhovozi et al. (2010) shows that mothers from the Vha-Venda ethnic group in South Africa were concerned about the community's critical view of mothers that engage in sexuality discussions with their daughters. This kind of attitude is significantly influenced by their religious backgrounds (popularly Christian). Due to this factor, mothers found it difficult to appropriately give advice or guidance to their daughters on safe sex practices. They are most comfortable with communicating abstinence to their daughters, above all. This research focuses on sexuality education in the context of heteronormative assumptions.

Researchers have identified a cultural resistance to the incorporation of comprehensive sexuality education. The resistance is typically motivated by religious conservatism within schools, homes, and communal settings. The main argument against CSE is that it “encourages young people to have sex earlier and to engage in sexual activity” (ibid., p. 2). In the context of religion, the report by Chitando and Moyo-Bango (2016, p.18) deliberated on issues that discourage religious leaders from participating in CSE for children—which the study dubbed “the puritanical strand”. This phenomenon involves the contention that “children were ‘pure’ and had to be protected from ideologies and teachings that could excite them to experiment sexually” (ibid: 19). The other contention is that “religious leaders were framed as 'holy' and hence could not be seen ‘contaminating’ themselves with issues

relating to sex and sexuality” (ibid: 19). Interestingly the arguments to resistance to sexuality education, are remarkably like arguments against gender and sexual diversity in classrooms too. We argue that resistance is multi-layered. Resistance is not only about the content of CSE but also about the process. The resistance to education and communication of CSE must also be understood within the colonial context of gender and sexuality. Victorian domesticity, which was the organisation frame of gender and sexuality, valued a ‘respectability’ on gender and sexuality, which confined gender and sexuality to being dealt with within the privacy of the family (McKlintock, 1993). Respectability was established through religious texts, discourse, and practice. The respectability tradition is thus a colonial, Western tradition and not a result of a ‘backward, primitive African humanity.’ Considering the historical erasure of indigenous adolescent sexuality and the continued coloniality of adolescent sexuality education, teachers, parents, and religious leaders, in many circumstances, are acting as if they have been "taught" by the early missionaries that brought civilisation to Africa. For example, teachers fear discussing sexuality outside of the heteronormative boundary because it is considered outside of their ethical code. So, they do not want to be seen as people who approve of or distort sexuality talk in their classrooms (De Hass & Hutter, 2019; Khau, 2012). Pre-colonial literature on African sexuality education has indicated that sex was celebrated by diverse cultures and was even emphasised through initiation ceremonies when adolescents had come of age, with the information provided on safe ways to engage in sex.

### ***Decolonising Sexuality Education (Incorporating Multiple Approaches to Sexuality Education)***

Decoloniality is about a revisioning and reclamation of Indigenous knowledge systems and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into future imaginings of African adolescent sexualities. We use the term decoloniality as defined by authors such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "... decoloniality is concerned with how a ‘dismembered’ people should re-launch themselves into the world (that is, be re-membered) (Ngugi waThiong’o, 2009a). Decolonial authors, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) and Maldonado-Torres (2018), argue that decoloniality is a liberatory approach that uses important concepts of coloniality, namely, coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being, as a framework to understand the continued colonization and rhetoric of

modernity. Similarly, Zavala (2016) argues that decolonial thought makes “visible that which is concealed by modernity, namely, the cultural logic of colonialism (and capitalism as an extension of colonialism).” The coloniality of education remains invisible in the South African context because education is framed through the lens of modernity (read development and progress) and specifically embedded within the constitution as a basic human right. In this paper, we have traced the historical context in which adolescent sexual socialization and education were practised. Against this historical backdrop, we argue for a revision of the current approach to comprehensive sexuality education. We argue for a decolonial lens to adolescent sexuality education in schools and outside of schools. With a decolonial lens, we embrace historical processes of sexual education through the affirmation and integration of social support processes and systems. It means bringing families and communities as experts into the conversation on adolescent sexuality. It would mean that we identify sites of learning that are outside and different to a colonial classroom – as in historical Indigenous communities in Africa, separate sites were allocated for adolescents and used as learning and support spaces. How do we begin to use these historical formats when the content of education must respond to the current moment of sexuality and gendered practices?

In thinking about the colonial imposition of knowledge of gender and sexuality as described earlier in the chapter, Europeans dismembered African communities from their knowledge and cultural practices and imposed European standards and mores of sexuality as the authoritative and, by extension, the moral version of which we must aspire. Zavala (2016) encourages three methodologies that help think about education as decolonial: “In decolonial education, projects include counter-/storytelling/remembering, healing, and reclaiming.” Counter-/storytelling involves the practices of naming and remembering. We argue that by employing counter-storytelling politics, we can unearth the context in which adolescent sexuality was taught, allowing for a process of remembering and honouring the importance of elders and community in the process of “socialization” and education of adolescent sexuality. It will recognize the importance of broad social support that is necessary for this developmental phase of transition from child to adult.

Currently, the CSE approach to sexuality focuses largely on the importance of parents and teachers (as learned adults) in the education of adolescents and ignores the broader community. Applying Zavala's (2016) methodologies and recognising that healing is an important stage



of decolonial education, provides South Africans with a space to acknowledge the violence of Eurocentrism, upon which formal education was established. CSE does not do this. CSE does not recognise the violence of imposition. Already, it can be argued that CSE is a violent process because it has erased and ignored the longstanding history of indigenous communities' learning systems on adolescent sexuality. It has failed to acknowledge the colonial history within which it is embedded, and because it does not recognise and make visible its own history, it reproduces that history. In addition, CSE's foundation is based on western theorising of sexualities. Hence, for decolonisation in its approach, it is required that it encapsulate the complexities of sexualities in an African context by reconfiguring the psychology of the education system, which is broadly afflicted by colonial authorities. Applying Zavala's (2016) methodologies and recognising that healing is an important stage of decolonial education, provides South Africans with a space to acknowledge the violence of Eurocentrism, upon which formal education was established. CSE does not do this. CSE does not recognise the violence of imposition. Already, it can be argued that CSE is a violent process because it has erased and ignored the longstanding history of indigenous communities' learning systems on adolescent sexuality. It has failed to acknowledge the colonial history within which it is embedded, and because it does not recognise and make visible its own history, it reproduces that history. In addition, CSE's foundation is based on western theorising of sexualities. Hence, for decolonisation in its approach, it is required that it encapsulates the complexities of sexuality in an African context.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, sexuality in all its manifestations depends on several different components that interact with one another in a particular environment. In that regard, transferring sexuality education frameworks from one social authority to another for the purpose of standardization and controlled experiences could prove challenging. As a result, while theorizing sexuality and education in an African context, the multiplicity of cultural customs and norms should be acknowledged, rather than taking Western views as the moral compass for modelling proper sexuality instruction. Even though many of the current socialization norms and educational platforms are heavily impacted by western authority, the lived experiences (particularly in terms of gender identities

and sexualities) of many African communities do not account for the moral foundations established by those limitations. In an African context, sexuality is defined, celebrated, and oddly controlled within dynamic indigenous groups with diverse community and familial socialization processes, language and cultural beliefs, traditional and government-mandated schooling systems, administrative law, and contemporary religious doctrine. CSE needs to pay special attention to language and meaning in their varied contexts, with due consideration to the reality that certain labels drawn from western theorizing do not exist in a variety of African localities.

In a post-colonial African society, many role players reject CSE as a legitimate school-based curriculum because its behavioural aspects contradict their culture and religious prerogative, which are consciously rooted in a colonial past that dismissed their predecessor's identity and indigenous politics of knowledge, thus reimagining the "truth" they live by now. Emerging narratives position Africans as backward and primitive for not allowing CSE into the school curriculum at the 'drop of a hat'. Hence, the same colonial narratives used at the end of the 1800s remain with us today, such as claiming that Africans are ignorant and primitive and resist 'progress'. Sexuality education (including human rights education) becomes yet another imposition by the West (including the progressive international aid agencies), hence the resistance and caution to its relevance and applicability to African school contexts. Even, South African queer researchers and scholars that argue for inclusive sexuality education, adopt a western-centric approach to advocating for counter-normative sexualities. We argue that CSE silences indigenous and cultural learning and education systems on adolescent gender and sexuality. We have traced the history of sexual socialization in this paper to demonstrate that adolescents have historically received sexual education within a nurturing and caring context, primarily facilitated by the elderly but supported by families and the larger cultural community. In efforts to achieve comprehensive sexuality education in decolonial space, Miedema et al (2020: 758) argue that "greater epistemic modesty is required on the part of international development actors, and a greater willingness to explore the shortcomings of secular, liberal conceptions of sexual rights, consensus, and emancipation." We acknowledge that there have been rapid shifts in education on sexuality and the necessity for the inclusion of multiple sexualities and gendered practices. Learning about sexuality in the contemporary moment includes responding to gender and sexual violence. It includes a broad

understanding of sexual and reproductive health as well as an interrogation of social justice and inequalities. We know that this is very different to the historical context and requires us to be brave and bold in what and how it gets taught. We argue that ushering CSE into schools is more nuanced and complex, and if imposed, the process will reflect colonial tendencies of injustice. We advocate not only for the importance of remembering but also for the inclusion and development of a space for multiple narratives on adolescent sexuality education.

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