

The Right One and the Other Ones: Notions of Love, Sex and Relationships Among Students at University of Limpopo, South Africa

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Introduction

This paper explores the gender-specific meanings of lover categories among students at University of Limpopo, South Africa. It analyses how these meanings are often based on differences in class and socio-economic status and how they form the conceptual basis for relations of sex and love.

The analysis, which draws on recent insights made in research on gender and sexuality in Africa, points to the intersection of gender and class as key concepts in an understanding of the meanings of love and sex, and to the social importance of material transactions for the understanding of both. It is argued that there are important contextual meanings of relationship dynamics that public health oriented studies have left out, and that in research and programmes alike issues of female agency have been downplayed.

The combined agency of both males and females are clearly evidenced by the extensive vocabularies used to describe the status and value of lovers and sexual partners and the transactions involved. For instance, 'cheese-boys' are well-off guys wearing expensive labels, who can take their numerous girl friends to the local mall, whereas 'course pushers' refer to a lover kept at University to cope with the sometimes stressful and sometimes boring campus life, and ministers are men who can provide specific kinds of subsistence support, money or assets to women.

Overall, though, students are aspiring to have what they dub the right one - someone who is respectable and thus potential marriage material. Through an elaborate analysis of these vocabularies this paper will attempt to unsettle some of the notions that have

become stabilised in the study of gender dynamics in South Africa.

The paper is based on the initial six months of an eleven month long ethnographic fieldwork focusing on questions of male dominance in relationships of love and sex among students at a university campus in the northern-most province of South Africa.¹ Interviews and participant-observation have been conducted in English (the medium of instruction at the university) with a special interest in concepts in Sepedi, which is the dominant language on campus apart from English. The field work strategy has been one of adopting a role as a (privileged) fellow student with the status of an older sibling due to age (I am five to ten years older than the regular students).

In order to position the study, the first paragraph of the paper touches on challenges in the study of love and sex in Africa. To better allow for an appreciation of the research setting, the subsequent section introduces historical and institutional context of the university setting. These insights are then carried through to the analysis of love and relationships among students at University of Limpopo in the final sections of the paper.

Challenges in research on love and sex in Africa

While classical structural-functionalist anthropology looked at African relationships as the mechanical exchange of women between kinship groups, current-day public health approaches tend to view African relationships as instrumental and loveless (Hunter 2005). Furthermore, little attention has been given to notions of love or affection in academia from a general point of view (Overing & Passes 2000), and even less so in specific research on Africa.

When it comes to an explicit focus on dynamics of love and emotion, anthropology has been faring much better in the Latin- and North-American region, where the concept of love has been engaged in numerous studies (see for example Santos-Granero 1991; Rebuhn 1999; Holland & Eisenhart 1990; and Eisenhart 1990). In Africa, however, the focus on social organisation and kinship systems seemed for a long time to come close to what Appadurai terms a gate-keeping concept (Appadurai 1986: 357); a concept that - like Caste in India - becomes an academic short-hand limiting anthropological theorizing and defines the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in a region.

¹ The research, which is part of a three year PhD-programme, is funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FFU). So far, twelve focus group discussions and 20 individual interviews (as well as full time participant observation on campus for nearly six months) have been conducted.

If an exoticising 'kinship gaze' on Africa can eventually be said to be evaporating these days, it is discouraging that it has (at least partly) been replaced by another act of exotication: Sexualities in Africa have now been brought to the forefront of global public attention, because studies undertaken in relation to the current HIV/AIDS pandemic have tended to promote a notion of a particular African sexuality that is substantially different from sexualities elsewhere.

This tendency has rightly been criticised by a number of scholars (see for instance Schoepf 1998: 233; Arnfred 2004b: 68-69; and Salo 2006: 3); and among those heavily criticized for producing such exoticising accounts of sexuality in Africa, the Australian demographers John and Pat Caldwell stand out as the most 'prominent' example (i.e. Caldwell et al. 1989). Some of the numerous articles produced by the Caldwells have been seen to reinvolve colonial 'othering' processes that tend to fix Africa as 'the dark continent' (Arnfred 2004a: 7) and depict Africans as strange, irrational and generally promiscuous (Salo 2006: 3). As noted by Schoepf, some Africanists sensitive to the history of racism surrounding the subject of sex research have therefore suggested that the study of 'the sexual life of natives' be abandoned altogether (Schoepf 1998: 236).

In spite of the many short-comings encountered in the study of sexuality in the global South, it is hardly recommendable to entirely shy away from studies into such an important field of human existence. One could then move on to ask whether abandonment would not be an act of deliberate ignorance. Rather, following Schoepf, the challenge must be to frame research questions within an adequate body of theory and methodology (ibid). Social science researchers thus need to rise to the challenge that "sex cannot be negated, neither be simplified to an un-dialectical focus" (Spronk 2005: 4). One way forward is outlined by Spronk, who views sex as a relational concept that has to be firmly situated in a social, economic and cultural context (op.cit.: 5).

This approach builds onto Caplan's observation that sexuality is part of identity and selfhood (Caplan 1983: 23) and may be defined both as a set of categories that order experience and make it meaningful, and as a set of relationships which are historically and culturally specific (op.cit.: 19). Furthermore, issues of lust and pleasure (as opposed to risk and danger) need to be given much more attention in academic analyses of how people live and experience their lives (Bolton 1998: 372; Arnfred 2004a: 20; Spronk 2005: 15). Finally, a focus on sex and love also necessitates a focus on bodies and bodily agency

(Connell 1995: 60; Hastrup 1995: 93) as well as a focus on power (Foucault 1981: 13), emotion (Lutz & White 1986) and embodiment (Csordas 1994).

Entering the World of Turfloop

According to the 'myth of creation', tribal leaders and dignitaries met in 1956 to decide on the establishment of a college to serve the then Northern Transvaal region. The meeting was held under a tree on the farm known as Turfloop, which was later to give the campus its name. The institution was established as a separate ethnic university in the service of the apartheid policy of the day (White 1997: 73) and the then Minister of Bantu Education, Dr Verwoerd, underscored that it was exactly because the apartheid government did not want white students to study side by side with black students - and let them 'feel that there is no difference between them and the natives' - that separate universities were established (ibid).

The ideology of separation was also a determining factor for locating the institution in a rural township 30 kilometers East of the urban metropole of Polokwane. The naming of the township itself was drawn from the three main ethnic groups of the area - Sotho, Venda and TsoNga - Sovenga - so as to underscore the ethnic foundation of the University College (op.cit.: 75). Eventually, the University College of the North was established under the trusteeship of the University of South Africa in 1959 with the specific aim of serving the black population (Maja, Gwabeni and Mokwele 2005: 24).

From 1970 and onwards it started operating independently as the University of the North, which remained the name of the university up until it was merged with the Medical University of South Africa in 2005 to become the University of Limpopo (UL). As the second-largest black university (second only to Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape, where Nelson Mandela was educated) the then University of the North had a proud history of student activism. It was here at the Turfloop Campus that the legendary black consciousness leader Steve Biko, among others, launched the South African Student Organisation (SASO) in 1969 aimed to promote a strong sense of identity amongst black students (Dawson 2006: 278). In many ways the student activism can be seen as a response to the ambivalent feelings that students were experiencing in a situation where they had to enroll in an institution designed as part of a system to oppress them.

Student activism is still the order of the day, but obviously for reasons that are not related to the struggle against apartheid (although it can certainly be argued that some of the dynamics being fought against clearly have something to do with the legacy of historical oppression). In brief, the post-apartheid tertiary sector has seen a difficult transition from the racially segregated system under the former regime to an open and free-market, competitive system since 1994.

The new system brought with it new and less favourable funding regimes and increased competition over students (Nkomo & Swartz 2006: 2-3), and in this setup the former black universities have been particularly prone to funding shortages and decreasing levels of students, since black students (and the best qualified black academics) have at long last been allowed entrance into the better-funded, former white universities in the urban metropolises of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria.

From a peak of almost 14,000 students enrolled at the University of the North in 1994, the corresponding number for 2001 was just below 6,000 students (Maja, Gwabeni and Mokwele 2006: 27). Given the funding shortages, University of Limpopo keeps increasing the tuition fees and costs related to on-campus accommodation, which means that students from poor backgrounds find themselves in jeopardy during the annual registration in January, while students of the black upper or middle-class will often have drifted to former white institutions.

The very location means that the University campus attracts students from the surrounding community, which is mostly characterised by poverty and unemployment. Apart from children of public servants or mine workers (who can be considered to be black middle class), most of the informants come from financially poor backgrounds. In spite of these challenges, they have performed well academically to make it to University in the first place.

Love and Sex in a Campus Setting

"I think you sorta learn by example. Like I've seen - some guys are just like - I don't understand how they do it. Like this one guy in my house, he's like a third year. He has sex with two girls every week. Like he gets so many girls and I'm like, "ummmm." I think he just knows how to deal with rejection because he'll hit on tons of girls and be rejected by them, but then there's one that, like says "yeah," or whatever... And then he's set. So maybe that's part of it... You gotta deal with rejection and then you're set." (Seamus)

This quote is taken from a recent essay dealing with 'romantic love on campus' - but in the US - not South Africa (Gilmartin 2007: 533). The author sets out to study why - to men - the value of romantic love apparently plunges when they reach high school (op.cit.: 531). Her finding is that the 'guys' use considerable energy to make romance unimportant and to separate romance from friendship and school work; that they can fall in love with girls before college, but that something interacts with the college environment, which makes falling in love seem increasingly dangerous (op.cit.: 539). In summary, "college guys were supposed to 'get girls' and 'expand on being a man,' even if that meant that they were 'dogs.' The emphasis that they placed on schoolwork and friendships and casual sexual relationships was an artifact of their conformity to local hegemonic masculine models, rather than indicative of greater freedom because they had more power."

In a way Gilmartin's essay build onto Holland and Eisenhart's work on romance in American high schools (1990), which was framed under the cognitive approach to cultural models in language and thought (Quinn & Holland 1987). Along the same line, but in a another piece from twenty years ago, Holland & Skinner provided an outline of what they dubbed 'important characteristics of gender-types' ranging from 'jock' over 'playboy' to 'wimp' and 'sweetheart' (Holland & Skinner 1987: 80-81). From a bird perspective these findings are strikingly similar to the situation that I have observed at Turfloop campus in Limpopo. This is probably an indication of some of the universal dynamics that can be expected to play out in a setting, where young people around 18 to 25 years live away from their families for the first time while shaping an identity through experimentation. At the same time, however, there is something very locally informed and culturally situated about the specific notions of personhood that are unfolded in these experiments (Salo 2006: 5).

In a way it is comforting to know that you can probably tease out gender typologies that are deeply intertwined with sexuality from any university campus around the globe. The particularity of the ethnographic material from University of Limpopo, therefore, lies not so much in the accounting for specific behaviours, as it lies in an understanding and analysis of particular meanings that inform behaviour, and how these meanings tie in with larger frames of socio-economic structures and cultural meanings.

Notions of Romantic Love

Issues of love and sex are continuously discussed at both great length and considerable detail among students at the campus of University of Limpopo. Many informants have defined love to me as an emotion of great intensity and underscored elements such as good communication, trust, care and mutual understanding as essential ingredients of love. This goes to show that the notion of individual, romantic love is present as an ideal and concept, which is not so surprising given the interconnectedness of a globalised world.

The 'mediatisation' of love and sex in Kenya noted by Frederiksen (quoted in Spronk 2005: 6) certainly also holds true for South Africa. Many of the Limpopo students spend their leisure time watching soap operas, listening to talk shows or reading popular magazines in which individual, romantic love is heavily emphasised. At the same time, as noted by Salo, the collective alliance of kinship also manifests itself in the love lives of young black South Africans (2006: 5). This split between - what we might trivially call - collective or individual orientation - is quite evident in the concepts that the students use to describe relationships.

On a number of occasions I have opened interviews or focus group discussions with the question: "What is love?". This question has led to rich discussions of different kinds of love and affection that people hold for kin, friends and partners. Not surprisingly, many describe love as a feeling:

"For me love is a feeling - a really great feeling that you establish something which can make you feel that you belong somewhere else you know - ya - I think that's what is love."

[19-year old female student of Management Sciences]

“It’s a feeling - when - it is when you feel safe when you’re with that person. It is when you feel that you can express yourself as freely - you can say whatever you want to say. That’s what love is.”

[19-year old male student of Education]

“Well, it’s kind of hard to explain what love is, but we know that we are in love. [...] You can get some butterflies in your stomach.”

[20-year old female student of Education]

Students would often make reference to good communication, trust, care and mutual understanding as important ingredients of love. In many ways it has therefore been the ideal and romantic version of love that was defined on the basis of the ultra brief question: *“What is love?”*. The answers go to show that romantic love is alive and kicking as an ideal and a concept. At the same time students demonstrate a clear sense of the likely discrepancy between ideal and practice, when they comment on the pitfalls and shortcomings of real life relations of love: the anxiety of being rejected, taken advantage of, abused or outperformed by others.

On campus there is a group of students who organise public meetings every Wednesday afternoon during the semester to specifically launch discussions on love, sex and relationships. On an average basis 30 participants turn up for these so-called Scamto-meetings (scamto = let’s talk in siZulu), which seem to be inspired by activities under the Government led Love-Life program. On the agenda of one of their meetings during October 2006 was the following topic:

Assurance in a relationship: How do I assure my partner that I’m here to stay? Does saying ‘I love you’ do it?

The discussions brought out a number of different ideas, and it was quite evident that the frame of reference was romantic and dedicated love, although many discussants highlighted hypocrisy in the appliance of the words: *I love you*:

“If you say I love you, you should love the person, you should sincerely say it and then do what you say; if you say you love someone - love them and don’t cheat on them, so it’s a combination of saying and doing. That’s my view”

[male Scamto participant]

"..first of all these three words 'I love you', to my own understanding - or should I say definition - they are actually meaningless. It's one of those things [.....] if I say I love you I want to get into bed with you..."

[male Scamto organiser]

"...what [I] think is that there's no assurance in a relationship, it's you live by the day. Whatever happens today- if it's good it's good - you stay in it. If it's bad you sort it out. Then 'I love you' - well - maybe it does it for others, but for me they are just story words and they are just being overused, that they are just using them to get into other peoples' pants..."

[female Scamto participant]

Some of the participants felt that the words 'I love you' have become so watered-down and meaningless that they claim they have started just saying 'I like you', when they propose to a girl. In this way, they say, they are not making grand promises that they don't intend to keep anyway. In focus group discussions with girls love has been much more tightly associated with marriage and having children in the future, while male students seem to be oriented towards here and now and the immediate surroundings on campus. On the other hand both sexes seem to agree that the very purpose of relationships is that one should feel comfortable, loved, valued and cared for.

Trying to Make Sense of Sex

To many of the students it is pretty straight-forward to link love and sexual intercourse:

"Well, what I know is that sex can bond [...] two people, OK. Like it is the time that you show your love to that person, and then now is the time to show him that you know how much I love him, not like maybe you have to do these things to anyone else, but with the person you think that this person I want to spend the rest of my life with. I think that it can create a bond between two people." [19-year female student of Management Sciences]

“Love - it’s just - it’s a natural thing, because it’s something that we are born with. We think that whenever we do sex - sex is related to love. If you don’t do sex, love cannot be good, you see.”

[21-year old male student of Education]

“Commonly [sex] is something to strengthen a relationship.”

[19-year old male student of Education]

While focus group discussions worked quite well to open up the discussions on love and sex, it has been communication during social gatherings (the method of participant observation) that shut the doors wide open to the field of sexuality. Many of the male informants have been very explicit concerning sexual matters, and one day I had two guys - whom I had never met before - entering my office. One of them said:

“So are you having some chicks here on campus? You must fuck them. You must keep up the statistics.”

Obviously, I was quite bemused at this sudden and explicit sexual imperative thrown to me by a stranger, but it was not such a rare incidence after all. During Scamto-meetings the spotlight person of the day was made the target of thorough scrutiny in terms of his or her sexual history and current relationship status. Often, it seemed, there was no choice for the spotlight person - the Scamto gathering simply had a ‘right’ to know, and if the spotlight person was not having a partner (or a partner nearby) members of the audience would ask. *“How do you defy nature?”*.

The enthusiasm with which Scamto participants indulged in discussions of their own and others’ love and sex life resonates with Posel’s argument that in post-apartheid South Africa sex has been ‘brought’ into new discourses - and often with imageries of sex as freedom, style, consumption and upward mobility (Posel 2004). At one of the Scamto-meetings I myself became the target of sudden questions, because the participants had never seen me with a lover at a party or on campus in general. Participants were not convinced by my wedding ring and the explanation of commitment that went with it. Furthermore, the references I made to research ethics in trying to explain my sexual abstinence didn’t go down well (due to a demand from my department the ethics paragraph of my research proposal reads that I am not going to engage in sex with informants).

In a way I think that I didn't really appreciate just how mandatory is sexual performance for adult men until a professor at the School of Social Sciences - in a meeting of seven staff members - challenged me and said that I had to have a *course pusher* (campus-based lover) irrespective of which ever obligations I had at home. These incidents have been used as opportunities to probe into why it is so imperative to engage in such relations, and the explanations that are given run along the following lines: An adult man, who has "tasted" sex, can't go "hungry" for months on.² In case that person possess resources of various kinds (money, a car, brand clothes, cell phone and social skills), it is practically unthinkable that this status is not transformed into relationships of sex and love.

It is furthermore an implicit understanding that it is harmful to a man's physical and mental health, if he is not having sex. In SiSotho he becomes a *bari*; a fool, a dumb person; a weakling; someone who cannot stand on his own feet. In essence he is not an adult. An absence of sexual activity is also seen to potentially limit a person's intellectual capacities, and if an individual has had a late sexual debut, this may have derailed his mental development. As explained by Sithole, a third level student:

"People believe that if you don't have sex at a young age, you will become a sugar daddy later in life. Instead, your sperms will run to your head and you will go mad".

This whole reading seems to point to a paradox - how does one reconcile the notion of romantic and ideal love with these highly specific notions of a hydraulic sexuality that needs space to unfold? But when the concepts and categories that are used to differentiate between different kinds of lovers are taken into account, these seemingly contradictory notions make more sense.

Lover Typologies

In 2002 Selikow, Zulu and Cedras published an article on lover categories in township lingo (the "the ingagara, the regte and the cherry") based on focus group discussions and individual interviews in Alexandra, Johannesburg. Many of the same lover categories apply to the University of Limpopo context, although there are a number of differences and additions than can be attributed to the educational environment of a university campus. In

² It's interesting how well this resonates with the Western folk model of Freud's libido theory (Caplan 1987: 6).

both settings the ideal partner is known as the *regte*, which is Afrikaans for the right one. Informants translate it into a steady boy or girl friend in English.

You may keep a *regte* in your home area, while at the same time engaging in more or less steady relationships on campus. The less steady relations are known under a variety of concepts and metaphors of which the main ones are: course pushers; cherries / roll-ons (makhwapheni); taste-and-pass; take-aways; side-kicks; cheese-boys/cheese-girls; ministers and chickens.

The different partner concepts are in no way mutually exclusive and the status of relations are - needless to say - fluid and vary over time. It should be emphasised, however, that there also students who don't engage in relationships of one nor the other category, as well as some who just have one steady partner. Each of the sections that follow deal with the meanings of these different lover typologies, but also touches on the theme of abstinence.

The Regte

Compared to the romantic western notion of 'the one and only', the *regte* is not necessarily an exclusive category, but can be the one at the top of a hierarchy of a whole series of relationship categories. In brief, the *regte* is marriage potential; a person deserving of respect, care and love; in essence a person that the extended family would accept and bless as part of the family. In some accounts the *regte* possess almost other-worldly virtues, and many male informants have expressed that since the *regte* is so perfect and virtuous you can't share your worries with her, since she is supposed to be happy and not worry.

To many male students it is salient and positive to have sexual partners over and above the 'regte', because it reflects positively on our sense of self vis-à-vis other men. Thus, you may keep a 'regte' in your home area, while at the same time engaging in more or less steady relationships on campus. Among the identified benefits is the idea that you can share almost every worry you may have with your casual lover, since "*she is not going to bother too much and make it a problem later on*". In real life, though, the dynamics of having two concurrent partners can be slightly more intricate than this ideal separation of the *regte* and the lover.

Vusi's challenge:³

Vusi is 26 year old BA student, who is originally from a neighbouring province. After his matric exam he worked for a couple of years at a local chain store in his home community. Eventually, his father urged him to continue his studies and thus Vusi chose to go to University of Limpopo. Vusi has two girl friends: one on campus (Lerato) and one who is still living in his home province (Janice) with whom he has got a two-year old child. According to Vusi, Janice, who is five years younger than him, must be considered 'the regte', because she and the daughter are recognised and partly supported by his parents, which means that one day he will have to marry her. At the same time, Vusi has been involved in a long term relationship on campus with Lerato, who is his own age, but comes from a better resourced family background than him, which means that she is able to support his campus life materially. He loves both girls and they - as well as his parents - have been aware of the dual model for some time and have agreed to the idea as long as there is no trespassing from one sphere to the other. Unfortunately, life proved not to be that simple. Once when I accompanied Vusi back to his home province, Janice, who had just passed her matric exam, stated that she was now planning to come and study at University of Limpopo. Probably imagining the likely clashes this could bring about, Vusi got very upset and told her that he would advise her on where to go from here. Somehow, the tension kept hanging in the air. Two weeks later and back at campus when a third girl happened to answer Vusi's phone, Janice decided to involve Vusi's parents and siblings in a campaign to make him more committed to their relationship and more responsible vis-à-vis their child. Apparently, every family member was calling Vusi, whose phone was therefore ringing endlessly. This was at the time of my departure (February 2007) and Vusi decided to swop to another SIM-card until things had calmed down. When asked about the likely penalties to be incurred from his father, Vusi answered with confidence that things would be sorted out: "Isn't it that my father himself has a life-long lover and a second family?"

As previously mentioned, Vusi's story resonates with Salo's observation that many young South Africans live their lives through two somewhat contradictory, contemporary notions

³ All names of persons and places have been changed to hide the specific identity of individuals.

of personhood that are based on collective and individual alliance respectively (Salo 2006: 5). Salo draws on Fortes' concept of personhood "as a means to unlock the moral values and meanings that inform social life, the norms and behaviours that are associated with particular social statuses or roles in the lifecycle and that individuals expected to adhere to and the extent to which they can exercise agency their world. The term refers to the type of person that people in one's community expects one to be, in relation to one's gender, generation and one's position within the set of social relationships in which we are embedded" (ibid).

It seems quite evident that through the recognition of their child in his broader family set-up, Vusi is in a way bound by collective alliance to continue his relation with Janice up to the point of marriage. Even if it started off as an individual love story time has reversed the poles, so that vis-à-vis Vusi's relation with Lerato this relation is the one that he is bound to in terms of kinship. Vusi and other male students with concurrent relationships have pointed to traditional polygamy in trying to convince their girlfriends that it is OK for them to have both one at home and one at campus and for it to be known.

This resonates with findings on distinctions made between partners for reproduction and partners for sexual pleasure made by ethnographers among Sotho and Xhosa communities during the first half of the 20th century (see Russell 2003 and Delius and Glaser n.d. in their readings of Mayer and Mayer and other classic ethnographic studies). In these historical ethnographic accounts male labour migration seemed to be the major trickier in terms of establishing a second family away from home. In a sense, something similar could be said to happen to students who move from far-off areas to the university campus. They only get a chance to see their regte once or twice a year, and hence they decide to get involved in second relationship on campus. Meanwhile, they do not see this as necessarily having consequences for their original relationships. As indicated by Vusi's statement about his father's second family, having two girlfriends is not seen as a break-away from tradition, but rather the way things naturally are.

Course Pushers

The concept of a 'course pusher' refers specifically to the university context in which the study takes place. Opportunities for leisure time activities on campus are minimal, and many students claim that campus life is so boring that you need to have a course pusher to

be able to cope. At first I understood the concept exclusively as a relationship between a first-entering female student and a second or third level male student, who could show her around on campus and help her out with academic assignments and preparations for exams. This is often the case, but others have later broadened my understanding to include that of relations between any kind of students who are together for the main purpose of providing comfort to each other.

This implies that the emphasis is on satisfying each other's emotional and physical needs, while trying to move ahead with the studies (in fact, it was this category the professor referred to, when he said I needed a lover). The fluidity of the different categories can be illustrated by Justin's experience of moving from one to the other category:

Justin's experience:

Justin is a 21-year old third level student from Limpopo. He has been a peer educator for two years and he sings in the university choir. Justin has a regte at home where he grew up, but when he came to Turfloop he also became involved with a girl on campus (Pamela). According to Justin, Pamela was sexually inexperienced, when they started out, so he had to restrict himself to kissing her for the first couple of months and not push for sex. Instead they would spend a lot of time together, cooking for each other and studying together (since they were studying for the same degree). Eventually, they started having sex, which was not too difficult logistics-wise, because Justin was staying in a single room, where Pamela was allowed to stay over. Justin says that he must be considered to be Pamela's course-pusher - "She was pushing a course with me. I was good in my degree and my courses and she was not that much good - so I would assist her. For me it was a mixture of a number of things. I knew she was a cheese girl. I wouldn't say I was gold-digging her and again - for me it was not that kind of thing - of saying - she's the regte. I wouldn't say that. It was just - we will see what happens."

At some point the regte in the home area decided to dump Justin, because she realised that he was not paying much attention to her. Apparently the fact that Justin was dumped by his regte at home destabilised the relationship between him and Pamela. Being dumped did not affect Justin a lot, so Pamela started to wonder why Justin was not responding emotionally to the situation, and Justin started questioning their relation. At this point

Pamela was herself having a boyfriend outside of campus, who was working and earning money, and suddenly Justin saw things in a new light: "For me - I got to realise that I am a course pusher, because she was having a boyfriend who was working and I was here. So, I was playing Minister of Education (...) and that man was playing Minister of Finance."

Justin was disappointed and felt that the relationship had to end, because he feared that Pamela was using him to get her degree after which she would "go and live with her man". So they broke up and Justin developed a relationship with another girl. Although he hopes that it will last, he is not too sure about it. She has just begun her studies and Justin will soon be off-campus working, so he reckons that he will meet nice ladies outside of campus, whereas she will be needing a course pusher on campus.

There is something in Justin's story that points to love and relationships as intertwined processes as opposed to fixed entities. Justin actually did express continued love for Pamela during our interview session, but the way things developed he could not reconcile his love for her with his fears of what kind of person the relationship was about to make of him. As I understand it, Justin was comfortable with the notion of them being each other's mutual course-pushers, which was probably all that he could ask for given his own insistence on keeping the regime from his home area. When that relationship came to an end, he then had to re-evaluate the status of his and Pamela's relationship and what it made of him.

His interpretation of the fact that by then she had another boyfriend outside of campus was that she was using both of them for her educational and financial ends. Once again this points back to the concept of personhood: it was not by virtue of the substance of the love between them, but because he emerged as a person that he did not want to be (Minister of Education). Actually, Justin claims to still love Pamela and he is also adamant that for her to be without him "is killing her". But the love story did not make him what he aspired to be, so it had to stop.

The Cherry and Metaphors of Consumption

Among metaphors used for mistresses and temporary lovers, the category of a 'cherry' takes centre stage. It obviously refers to the berry and is sometimes also known under the Nguni word *makhwapheni* meaning 'roll-on' as in deodorant (Selikow et.al. 2002).

According to Wikipedia, however, cherry in slang is actually a term for the hymen, where 'popping the cherry' refers to a person (usually a woman) losing her virginity. This runs parallel with comments made by some male students that "*one of the greatest achievements would be to hammer one of the first-entering virgins*" (first-year female students). In conversations, informants have often demonstrated the 'roll-on' idea by hiding a hand in the armpit, which means that it is a lover that can't be seen (like the deodorant). The 'cherry' is not meant to be seen or known by the 'regte', but in real life this is often the case as we have seen in the cases of Vusi and Justin.

'Taste-and-pass', 'take-aways' and 'side-kicks' are all pretty straight forward metaphors describing one-night affairs. The initial two metaphors relate to the levelling of eating and having sex - and the connotations that it carries with it of taste, hunger, being full, sweets, starter, main course, dessert etc. In an interview, a 23-year old law student commented:

"I think that one of taste and pass - I think that one is to sleep with a girl - then you just taste as to whether - is she good for you and if she's not your type then you pass to the other one and you leave her."

I think a take away - a take away is a take away. I think for example if I'm at the bar lounge so my girlfriend is not there, then there are ladies whom we call them take aways, because they are very good for everyone, and today I come and take her to my home and tomorrow there comes another house, and then continuously they come give you... (....) ... you are not going to pay anything, you are just going to have sex and then take her home.."

The fact that references are made to fast food lead us on to metaphors of consumption and material possession, which is very clear when partners are described as car or phone models to identify their status (see Wood et al. 1996). These metaphors of food or consumption are the most clear-cut sexual categories in which little reference is made to romantic love or long-term commitments. The usage of these metaphors help position the speaker as a streetwise and sexually experienced 'buddy' or a real man, which makes it an important part of any successful boasting strategy. Without implying that these metaphors do not have an impact, I think it is safe to say that there is probably a discrepancy between the presentation of such sexual relations and the reality hiding underneath. Among the male students I know, one stands out as a classic Don Juan-figure:

Arthur's way:

Arthur is a 22-year old BA-student who grew up with his grandfather in a village not so far off campus. His mother was killed in pre-election violence in Gauteng in 1993, and his father lives in Soweto with his second family and takes only minimal interest in Arthur. Arthur is a gifted student who performs well academically, although he has always faced enormous difficulties in meeting the costs of tuition fees. Furthermore, he is very vocal and in trying to deal with a rough upbringing he writes poetry and short stories. When I first met Arthur, one of the first things he said was that 'sex is a way of life'. For the last two years Arthur has had a steady girlfriend ('regte') from a neighbouring township area, who is a bit younger than him and who has a child with a former boyfriend. At the same time, he says, campus life has changed him from being a 'gentleman' to 'someone naughty'. At first Arthur found campus life stressful, because it was difficult to manage the social life amidst booze, hash and party life. As a first year male student it was apparently difficult to be successful with the girls, who tended to go with their mentors or even lecturers, "so you have nothing to do except for reading your books." In his third year on campus this has changed considerably. Arthur is now very successful with women and takes great pleasure in flirting with almost every girl he meets. Perhaps due to his wits and charismatic personality, he seems to be able to seduce new girls quite often. He is never late in using his reputation of being successful with ladies to lament the less active sexual record of some of his closest peers. One of his boasting strategies is to ask his peers to declare their interest in a girl before he makes an attempt at 'conquest', so as to indicate that he can nobly leave them 'a fair share' of the girls. Given Arthur's mastering of language, he excels in the use of metaphors and analogies to describe the different girls he admires and to whom he is attracted. To describe himself, he uses the image of an axe that can be used on any tree in the woods.

According to what Arthur says about himself, he really does enjoy the pleasure of sex tremendously ("it's a way of life"). From reading his poetry I get the impression that he is yearning for love and recognition, and although I might run the risk of practising pseudo-psychology here, this could be related to the fact that he was to a large extent brought up without his parents. Arthur's success with women and his academic endeavours have earned him popular recognition and a high status among his peers, and he usually prefers

to focus on and give advice to his friends on those specific topics. If - on the one hand - he could be seen to over-communicate his sexual and academic record, on the other hand he heavily under-communicates most things that relate to family matters or kinship.

Empirically, accounts from both Eastern and Southern Africa indicate that where men's position and identity are challenged, some may turn to multipartnered sexual relationships for assertion of their manliness (Silberschmidt 2004: 234). In some ways Arthur's case can be seen to fit the model of status-seeking Zulu men described by Hunter (2004). He shows how contemporary Zulu men, amidst poverty and unemployment, celebrate multiple partnership to achieve *isoka*, which is a Zulu concept of masculinity. Analysing the same concept, Varga has noted that: "...themes intimately linked with *isoka* status included being highly active sexually and having multiple partners. Men were believed to have a natural or biological need for sex that made it acceptable for them to expect sexual acquiescence in a relationship and to have multiple partners" (2003: 164).

From a theoretical point of view, Arthur's case also speaks to what Bourdieu has called the 'impossible' ideal of male virility that become the source of immense vulnerability leading to investment in visible signs of masculinity (Bourdieu 2001: 50-51) or to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). The greater impact of Arthur's ways, though, lies in peer pressure. Since men tend to measure their masculinity in comparison with others, peer pressure may become a vehicle for practices that go against gender equality (Wood & Jewkes 2001). While his peers complained about his scornful remarks about their sexual records, they still made an effort to perform 'better' according to the standard he had set - or at least to be seen as doing so. Still, within his group of peers, Arthur is a minority.

Of Cheese-Boys, Cheese-Girls, Ministers and chickens

The concept of a *cheese-boy* has continuously been used by informants of both sexes. It refers to young men from well-resourced backgrounds (who can literally afford to eat cheese for breakfast). On an almost daily basis has a cheese-boy been described to me as a well-dressed man wearing white Carvela shoes (expensive shoe brand sold at a luxury chain shoe shop), Levi's jeans, a Gues shirt and smart sun glasses and carries an expensive cell phone. A *cheese-boy* has several *cherries* but no *regte*. In his relations there will be a clear emphasis on transactions, since he can afford to take his 'chicks' to the local mall and

spoil them at cafés and at the cinema. On campus a *cheese-boy* can take on a more moderate form as someone who has got everything in his room - a pc, a tv, a stereo and endless amounts of airtime vouchers.

In most descriptions *cheese-boys* sound like awful and superficial characters spending their resources in ways that will provide access to sex and added status, while they would seldom be honest and thus not worth showing any trust. Nonetheless, many guys talk of the image and opportunities of *cheese-boys* with envy in their voices, and even more complain that their poor socio-economic status makes it difficult for them to get a girlfriend, because the girls have become so materially demanding. Statements made by informants of both sexes go to show just how important is consumption and material possession for a young man, who wants to make it on the love scene.

Not everybody agrees that there is such a person as a *cheese-girl*, but to some guys a girl, who is better off in socio-economic terms, automatically becomes a *cheese-girl* in a relationship of love. According to a somewhat stereotypical account of a *cheese-girl*, she does not live up to prevailing standards of beauty and has become slightly marginal in social terms (since girls are supposed to be normal and subservient, while guys must have status and take prominence).

It is potentially emasculating for a guy to be dating a *cheese-girl*, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is a bad thing after all. Three of the male students that I have interviewed say that they have been dating *cheese-girls* and have enjoyed all the opportunities that came with it. Furthermore, they claim that their male peers have fully understood and accepted their whereabouts due to visible material gains they have made out of it. Similarly, in one of the individual interviews a male student told me of his dilemma in his encounter with a well-ressourced girl:

Sithole's dilemma:

Sithole is a 21 year old student in his third year of study at University of Limpopo. He grew up in Limpopo with his mother and step-father, but spent the last couple of years before entering University with his grandparents. He receives no moral nor financial support from home, so mobilising the funds to cover tuition fees has always been a huge challenge. Against the will of his family, Sithole recently joined the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC), which is an important religious and social movement in South Africa that has its

headquarters only a few kilometers from Turfloop. The ZCC is a dedicated church community advocating rules of living that resemble those of other saved Christian communities (like abstinence from alcohol, smoking and sex out of wedlock). Furthermore, to build a better position from which to negotiate reduced fees, Sithole has become a student mentor and a peer group educator. In 2006 one of his female mentees (Faith) fell in love with him and kept coming to his room to make proposals and kept sending text messages on the cell phone. Eventually, Sithole went to his supervisors to inform them about the problem and they assigned the girl to another mentor, which reduced her activity level in terms of love proposal making. Shortly before the exams, however, Faith came back for help and Sithole gave in and assisted her in her academic work. Once again Faith put forward her proposal, but this time she added pressure by reminding him that due to her well-ressourced family background she would be able to assist him in paying the tuition fees "if he could love her". Although tempted by this deal, Sithole decided that he could not do it, since he would probably end up hurting her. Although Faith has recently moved to Johannesburg, she still used the opportunity of the annual registration in January to re-forward her proposal, but with no luck. Sithole has explained how his sexual abstinence has also led to peer pressure in that the other guys call him 'bari' (stupid/fool). They ask girls to come to his room or they will leave hundreds of condoms at his door. Sithole says that he has experienced exclusion from the group, but that he has been fortunate to persuade the campus administration to give him a room of his own, so that he can focus more on his ZCC friends. At the time of my departure Sithole was busy selling religious books and herbal products in trying to meet the fees for registration.

In a way Sithole's story bears testimony to the norms of gendered behaviour on campus, because of the ways that he has been penalised for failing to conform with ideals of sexually active masculinity. He does, however, belong to a large group of students who are very wrapped up in spiritual matters and who continuously campaign for alternative norms based on faith and respect. While Sithole feels that his financial situation makes him vulnerable, it is interesting that he does not interpret Faith's proposal as an attempt to take advantage of him. Quite to the contrary, he is afraid that he is going to hurt her, because he is not in love with her. This might, of course, be due to Sithole's pleasant

personality, but it might also reveal something about the ways that the transaction of material and pecuniary resources intersect with love and relationships.

There is definitely some currency in the argument, posed by some researchers, that transactional sex is furthered by poverty and the high level of inequality in Southern Africa (Walker et al 2004: 23; Hunter 2004: 124; Tersbøl 2001: 93). Under western eyes transactional love or sex is often understood as prostitution, but this is not the case in many parts of Southern Africa.⁴ As pointed out by Arnfred (quoting Bloch's findings from Madagascar), giving presents of money or goods after sexual intercourse is the right thing to do (Arnfred 2004b: 72). Thus, the exchange must be understood not as an indication of a lack of emotional commitment, but rather as an act of sincere appreciation. In the same way, if Faith truly loves Sithole there is no reason why she should not offer to help him out with the tuition fees. To some extent this destabilises the stereotypical understanding of how gender, sex and materiality intersect. It does, however, give a hint about the positive evaluation that the exchange of materiality and affection may be given in Limpopo, and the existence of substantial female agency.⁵

Coming from a different angle these trends of financial and material transactions in relations of sex and love are most vividly confirmed by the allegories used by female students about male providers. The most common concept is that of a Minister: Minister of Transport (often a taxi-driver or somebody with a car); Minister of Telecommunications (the one who buys airtime for the cell); Minister of Finance (the one who dishes out cash); Minister of Education (the one who - like Justin - assists with academic work or a boyfriend who is your lecturer).

During one of the focus group discussions a 24-year old woman described how to manage having more than four or five different ministers without getting into trouble. *"You tell each and every one of them that you have one 'regte' [which is acceptable] and which ever Minister calls, you always claim that it is the regte"*. Another widely used metaphor is that of a *chicken*, which refers to men who can supply food or other daily necessities. In the literature this is summed up in the three C's; the need to have three boyfriends for each of the following items: Car, Cash and Cell phone (Walker et al. 2004: 45).

⁴ This does not mean that there is no such concept as prostitution. In Sepedi a prostitute is called *magosha*.

⁵ It would be interesting to see more focused research on such dynamics in the West: Do we really separate affection and materiality?

Conclusion: From transactional sex to the reciprocity of love and sex

In writing this essay I have implicitly been very inspired by the work done on transactional sex in Kwa-Zulu Natal by Hunter (2002) and Leclerc-Madlala (2003). To me, their in-depth studies of the social construction of meanings and values of particular sexual expressions constitute a thorough investigation of the understandings that underpin sexual relations in a particular time and place. Like the material from Kwa-Zulu Natal, the Limpopo material has brought out evidence on what is often called transactional sex.

While Hunter and Leclerc-Madlala has gone to great lengths in showing that transactional sex does not equal prostitution, I think that the concept still has a number of connotations that are quite negatively laden. I would like to advocate for an approach that focuses on the reciprocity of love and sex. Firstly, a focus on reciprocity and exchange will allow us to view love and sex as phenomena that are always in process. Secondly, the concept of reciprocity opens up to the exchange of everything from care and comfort, kisses and body fluids, presents and money, SMS'es and love letters to academic support and sexual pleasure. If we really want to see relationships of love and sex in context there needs to be acknowledgement of both material and immaterial factors.

In this paper I have tried to show how cultural meanings and socio-economic conditions shape the numerous ways that male students approach the field of love and sex at Turfloop Campus. While some aspire to different notions of personhood in handling two concurrent relationships of love; others 'eat by the day' and gain prestige among their peers; some engage in relations that benefits them materially; and some choose to abstain even if they are the targets of female love proposal making; they all talk about romantic love and the idea of a regte. The mere variance presented through the case material suggests that there is no such thing as a particular African sexuality. If anything is particular in this account, it is how the reciprocity of love and sex unfolds in an educational, but resource-poor setting.

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