

Intersections of Sexuality, Power and e-Dating in the political Economy of Dystopian Artistic Writings: A post-Foucauldian Reading of *The History of Sexuality*

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Abstract: This paper was premised on the hypothesis that human sexuality is not a monolithic metanarrative that is self-contained; it is a social construction at multiple levels. After a review of the literature on radical feminism and with the aid of the critical version of hypertext theory, it came up with the proposition that to capture the full and living image of sexuality in intergenerational relationships, a post-Foucauldian reading of selected dystopian texts would yield a de-centered, inter-textual and anti-hierarchical network of its dynamics. Deploying insights from both oral and written works of art, it arrived at the conclusion that sexuality intersects with power, capitalism, knowledge and prospective networks in complex ways. Whether in pre-modern, modern or post-modern contexts, inter-generational relationships have existed and have taken extremely complex forms that were understood narrowly by radical feminists and Foucauldian scholars. A post-Foucauldian reading was able to overcome some of the limitations of these approaches and digital technology was shown to present with its own gaps when it came to evaluating the *grammatology* of the sexuality in context. This paper opens up new perspectives for evolving the study of sexuality as an undecidable, multi-focused and networked discourse.

Keywords: Sexuality, e-dating, power/knowledge, knowledge economy, dystopian art, post-Foucauldian dialectics.

INTRODUCTION

During a pedagogical seminar organized for ENS under graduating and graduating classes in University of Bamenda, Cameroon, a female student asked an important question that was clearly embarrassing for everyone but had far reaching critical implications for the pedagogy of sexuality in the current age of the knowledge economy. She asked: what should a girl student do if during a practical teaching session, a co-operating teacher were to get too hot and emotional and insisted on converting the pedagogical interactions with her into a romantic and sexual relationship? The question received a conservative answer with a call to maturity and self-control and, from the audience, there was general laughter of guilt and indignation based on the suggestion that in such a scenario, female students would be the morally good, sexually innocent, pure and immature victims, as against adult males, who are sexually bad, immoral, corrupt, powerful and predatory (Orpinas *et al.* 2013). But the question asked deserves not a deterministic but a dialectical answer because it opened up an interstitial pace based on the narrow assumption that human sexuality is a *structural*

metanarrative; therefore, this paper proposes to broaden out this metanarrative into *apost-structural* continuum where adult-child sexuality intersects with the knowledge economy of digital access and e-dating. It is premised on the hypothesis that inter-generational sexuality should not be understood in as an essentialist Freudian edifice of female sexuality as naïve, passive, and powerless and male adult sexuality as pervasive and voracious; but should be comprehended in a more sophisticated Latourian sense of sexuality as an autonomous, self-regulating and networking system (Hennion and Muecke 2016: 289-308, Buzelin 2005: 193-218) that intersects with a Foucauldian knowledge/power economy dynamics as well as with new networking grammatologist.

When Fishman wrote his history of childhood sexuality, he concluded by referencing the rise of a movement in the 1970s against child sexual repression with calls for childhood sexual liberation (Fishman 1982: 269-283). However, paradoxically, a monumental shift unexpectedly took place in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s that challenged this representation of victimhood in child sexuality as suggested in the student's question and to which her question eludes. With advent of the

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hegemonic discourse of child sexual abuse, radical feminists believed that they were out for an unprecedented 'discovery' and crusade against patriarchal sexuality, as Linda Gordon has noted (Gordon 1988: 56-64); but, by attempting to correct the historical 'amnesia' against what was portrayed as child sexual abuse, feminists were able to contest decades of conventional wisdom 'out of the closet' by re-interpreting the *meaning* of child sexual abuse in ways that were overtaken by new *signifiers* of adult-child sexual encounters. Feminists reversed the propensity to censure victimhood of child sexual molestation on patriarchal coercion by developing a new *signifier* of child sexuality in the light of male power and female child powerlessness. This new *signifier* was a derivative from the radical exegesis of rape that was redefined not in terms of sexual act but in the light of assertion of power materializing as act of violence (Barnard 2013: 19-29 ; Maxwell and Scott 2014: 40-54, Primorac 1999: 497-511). The principal argument was that although children appear to cooperate or to consent to sex with adults, they are actually incapable of consenting to sex with adults (Finkelhor 1979: 692-697). Finkelhor argued that in order for true consent to occur, two conditions must be met: the first one is that the person must know absolutely what s/he is consenting to; and second, the person must be free to say 'yes' or 'no' (Ibid). Based on informed consent, Finkelhor's idea suggested that sexual consent should be understood in terms of its meaning, social context, and consequences of his/her participation in sexual activity with adults.

Drawing from radical feminist scholarship, Finkelhor argued that children do not possess the freedom to say 'yes' or 'no' because adults have material resources that children need and are stronger physically. Finkelhor added that even among adults, these two conditions are not met in sexual relationships between boss/secretary, client/prostitute and even in some husband/wife relationships because coercion is implicitly present (e.g wife battery) in most sexual encounters. But he reported, very importantly as well, that although 'ignorance' is often present in adult relationships, adults have accessibility to knowledge *whenever they really want it*. Finkelhor finally concluded that what distinguishes adult-adult sexuality from adult-child sexuality is that the first category is marked by subtle degrees of coercion and the second, by subtle degrees of power/knowledge. Therefore, the dynamics of power/powerlessness lies at the heart of objections to adult-child sexuality. The question of the female student during the seminar clearly drew inspiration from the climate of the 1970s in which it was claimed that adults possess knowledge and power, children lacked knowledge and power and this power differential, was an asymmetrical recipe for victimhood among children by adults.

Power/ powerlessness is the underlying logic that sat on the surface of radical feminist discourse on

adult child sexuality abuse. Child powerlessness and their inability to give informed consent were the discourses that structured all forms of adult/child sexuality conversations and shaped influential discussions on its problematization in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. This power differential and the asymmetry of control and consent were the the matics that underpinned landmark writings like Florence Rush's *The Best Kept Secret*, that referred to 'male abuse of sexual power' (Rush 1980, Herman and Hirschman 1977: 735-756) who spoke of 'utter helplessness' for incest victims, confronted with the abuse of power of the father. They even went to the extent of analogizing adult-child sexuality to the master-slave metanarrative. It was also axiomatic to the writings of Jones (1999: 827), Wilson and Scholes (2013: 123), Searles (2018) argued that consent is precluded in the sexual encounters between child and adult. Thus, for these radical feminist writers, by virtue of being an adult, one achieves dominance, biopsychosocial authority and maturity, and by virtue of being a child, one can only become a coerced victim, subordinated and helpless (Summit 2013: 125-147). By shifting the balance from a Freudian emphasis on *physical* sexuality to a Foucauldian question of sexual *power/knowledge*, radical feminists of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s succeeded ingeniously to counter the adult-child sexual metanarrative as just a matter of physical willingness, participation, consent, coercion, domination, subordination, etc, to integrate power as subtlety, inventiveness, interest, exclusion, persuasion, desire, etc, and knowledge. This new positionality of radical feminists expanded the continuum from a narrow Freudian *adult/child sexuality* to an *adult/child sexuality* metanarrative susceptible to *power/knowledge*.

Although this radicalist feminist discourse of these years was very persuasive, it raised certain objections about knowledge. For example, the discourse failed to specify what they meant by 'child'; in this model, a child of four is hardly distinguishable from a child of seventeen. Yet, all cases of adult/child sexuality were qualified indiscriminately as 'abuse' and 'forceful consent' without allowing for intellectual possibilities of active engagement and assertiveness on the part of the 'child' herself (Giordano, Manning, and Longmore 2006, Gunter 2013). Even as an advanced model that is more insightful than the Freud-focused model based only on physical romance, the feminist interpretation of sexuality was also problematically Foucauldian, in the sense that it represented power/knowledge as juridical and sovereign. Foucauldian dialectics envisioned power/knowledge reductively as an 'object' that adults can only 'possess' and children can only 'lack'. It re-placed the adult/child sexual relationship in a 'steel cage' model wherein the child was envisaged as a prisoner or slave category condemned to live in a site of bondage outside the hermetically foreclosed site of adults marked by

sovereign power /knowledge as suggested by the ENS student's question. This radicalist discourse of feminist normativity that positioned child sexuality chiefly in terms of a Slavoj Zizekian *lack*: a lack of power, lack of knowledge in contradistinction to the absolute possessions of the adult, was unacceptable because it objectified the child as sexless, asexual, desireless and incapable of taking initiatives. The further presumption here was that, for adult-child sexuality to be acceptable, it must be based on 'equality'. But as James Kinkaid has observed in various writings, all forms of human contact involve some form of unequal power equations (Kinkaid 2019: 593-614; Kinkaid 1977): 241. Even in adult-adult and parent-child relationships, females and children are not completely disarticulated from power but exercise it in subtle and myriad ways that cannot be compared (Muhomah 2004).

Therefore, if we are to assess the validity of adult-child relationships in terms of feminist obsession with the precondition of absence/presence of power/knowledge, then it can also be argued that even adult-adult relationships are absolutely invalid and unacceptable in those terms (Nyamnjoh 2009, Bratter and King 2008). In this way, ethical relationships and justifications are much more complex than radical feminist discourse wanted us to believe. If we accept that adult-adult relationships are marked by inequality of power/knowledge access, then we have to apply that same logic to intergenerational sexual relationships as normativity than as unacceptable exception. Today, children have access to news sophisticated means of knowledge production and power than children did in the past thanks to the advent of Internet, ICTs and the digital technology of e-dating websites. Consequently, this paper is anchored on certain research questions: how does sexuality intersect with knowledge/power and e-dating in this age of the knowledge economy? What are the implications of online dating on radicalist thinking about romantic adult-child relationships? Are the reading and interpretation of conventional texts (like sexuality) passive or participatory?

Theoretical framework

In order to answer these research questions, this paper applies hypertext theory to current understandings of the critical continuum on adult-child sexuality; in particular, it re-positions hypertext concepts like *de-centering*, *intertextuality* and *anti-hierarchical* into new understandings in the *historical continuities* of the knowledge economy. This re-positioning of hypertext theory is intended to foster critical thinking, by centering on the idea that any educated intelligence perceives a particular phenomenon like sexuality as potentially *multi-determined* and subject to *multi-causation* rather than as a deterministic value existing in a vacuum. Through the re-presentation of knowledge /power systems, the hypertext theory is enabled in its Latourian networking system through the digital and the literary

(Yankelovich, George, Landow and Cody 1987: 12-25, Tredinnick 2007). This paper proposes to create a linked corpus of material that includes not just text, but also the knowledge /power ideology and the e-dating dialectics of the digital technology (Ibid: 1). Unlike with a hyper-text document system that allows authors to link together only information blocks created with a single application, it investigates linking capabilities between heterogeneous blocks of text, ideology and the digital (Yankelovich, Norman, Meyrowitz and van Dam 1985: 15-30).

A number of theoretical writings have helped to shape the critical paradigm of the hypertext (Landow 2006, Modir 2014; Graziadei 2014. de Siecle 1994). But very significantly, Ackerly and Clipper (1984) and Bolter (1993) suggested that a poststructuralist and deconstructive approach to deal with hypertext would be a ground-breaking method. In poststructuralist theory, the idea of textual *order* is challenged and *structure* is minimized. The French structuralist critic Roland Barthes and the philosopher Jacques Derrida were two of the most innovative scholars in literary theory and criticism in the 1960s and early 1970s (De Man 1990, Barthes 2007. Derrida 1978. Derrida 2016. Culler 2007). According to Barthes, the author (and by implication, the concept of 'sexuality' as author) is dead (Barthes 2001, Arrojo 1997). He also maintained that texts are either *lisible* (readerly) or *scriptible* (writerly) and can be analysed and interpreted as such. 'Readerly' means that an independent relationship exists between a text and a passive reader; in other words, s/he accepts and can easily comprehend the meaning of a text without much intellectual effort, given that a real world with real characters and events is presented. A 'writerly' text establishes a two-pronged or even many-sided relationship between text and reader, that is to say, the text necessitates an active and attentive reader who has to learn about its multiple meanings in context. Barthes's theory is important for the distinction of traditional text and hypertext. The traditional text has an indirect communicative function: the author communicates with the readers but they cannot communicate with the author. The hypertext introduces a mutual or direct process of communication which means that readers are allowed to make changes and contributions to the text. They are therefore engaged in the *production* of a document and become 'authors' themselves. The idea of deconstruction, which is a concept of poststructuralism, was introduced by Jacques Derrida. He maintained that a text has not just one but numerous meanings, and should be seen as an endless stream of signifiers, with words only pointing to other words and without any final note of meaning. As Landow has rightly pointed out, the hypertext has similar characteristics because it may fulfill certain claims of poststructuralist criticism and can provide a rich means of testing them, especially when it comes to Barthes's ideas about the readerly and the writerly text (Ibid). Landow compared the hypertext with the

traditional text and came to the conclusion that it is necessary to give up conceptual systems that are founded upon ideas of *center/ margin, hierarchy and linearity* and replace them with ones of *multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks*. In this respect, four meanings of the term network were to be taken into consideration. First, the text takes the form of blocks and nodes which are linked together in a network. Second, the collection of these blocks and nodes by a single author or by multiple ones forms a network. Third, the term network is related to the notion of an electronic system including computers, cables, and connections. The fourth meaning alludes to the usage of the term in critical theory in which all writing is referred to as a network. He added that the hypertext is to be read in a non-sequential or non-linear mode. The traditional text, however, can also have a nonlinear structure (Jonassen, D. H., Carr, C. and Yueh 1998, Joyce, 1988, 1996, 2001). For example, footnotes form part of the structure because they interrupt the linear order of texts. Nonlinear writing is the most complex textual instance because traditional concepts such as unity, structure, beginning and end, etc, of a text are abandoned. Nonlinear narratives (e.g. James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Graham Swift's *Waterland*, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*) are texts that can be easily converted into hypertext form by preserving the linear structure but by also making additions like commentaries, glossaries, or links to other related texts. Such additions changed the textuality of the metanarrative, which is now part of a network of documents and sources. The hypertext, just like the traditional literary text, is in an intertextual relationship to many other pieces of 'writings'. Barthes maintained that any text is an intertext in the sense that all other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms as well as the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. The text is a galaxy of signifiers and not simply a *structure* of signifieds because it has no absolute beginning or end; it is reversible and can be accessed via many entrances, with none of them having an exclusive authority as the main one.

The hypertext is like a 'sexuality narrative'; it has no 'centering' structure; so, it enables users of it to create their own 're-centres' by reading particular contextual documents, parts of a contextual document, and by prioritizing particular ways or even marginal parts of it, so that they may become re-centred or post-centred. The hypertext system has two basic structures, with the first one closely dependent upon that of the linear book and the second one aimed at achieving the dispersed, multiply-centered network organization that is evident in electronic links. The hypertext offers the option of a reader-centred way of dealing with a text because the reader chooses the material they want to use within the context of a large network. The hypertext

system is a library, which is consistent with Landow's idea of bidirectional links and efficient navigational devices that any user can contribute material to by drawing from poststructuralists' concepts of intertextuality, multivocality, decentering, multilinearity, disorientation, and interactivity (Modir 2014).

Findings

In the introductory section of this paper supported by the theoretical framework, a hypothesis is premised on the assumption that Freudian adult-child sexuality has an interlinkage with narratives of Foucauldian power/ knowledge; but, it also adds that beyond the embeddedness of sexuality and power/knowledge, there are new narratives of the knowledge economy that are absolutely empowering and not disempowering for children in adult child sexuality relations. This phenomenal reality has existed not only in the contemporaneous epoch but also in past ages. In Jane Austen's (1993:27) classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*, the authoress observes that: *It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife.* "This statement articulates the fact that what is pejoratively referred to today as adult-child (in relation to adult-adult) sexual relationships existed since time immemorial and was regulated by incentive (or good fortune) power. During the past epochs in Africa, as in Jane Austen's epoch, child dates were involved in sexual relations as in Joseph Ngong'ong's (2016) *Taboo Love*, Shadrach Ambanasom's (2010) *Homage and Courtship. Romantic Stirrings of a Young Man*, George Atanga's (1985) *The Last of the Virgins*, and Talla Ngarka's (1988) *The Herbalist*. But whether in western or indigenous African societies, and contra radical feminist positions, adults as well as child dates had opportunities to deploy knowledge as a resource to exercise power on adults and to assert their own wishes and desires. In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to demonstrate how in the past and the present, knowledge was available everywhere for all and is still being used by child dates to exercise power on adults.

During the Seventeenth century, newspapers offered the possibility of personal advertisements in the west. The first personal *ad* appeared amidst controversy in a European society that was still living under puritanistic values and influence. It was actually in the early Eighteenth century that its popularity really increased as a way of arranging for matrimonial relationships. Consequently, when Helen Morrison's first placement of a personal *ad* appeared in the *Manchester Weekly Journal*, it was thought that she was mentally deranged and was sent to a sanctuary for four weeks by the state (Piskorski, Halaburda and Smith 2008). However, in the Eighteenth century, social attitudes changed and personal *ads* became a 'normal' way of meeting with potential mates. Personal *ads* were now deployed not only to search for a partner but also

to find friendship, pen pals, etc. There were concerns over the morality of these personal ads for various reasons: use of homosexuality coded words, promotion of divorce by unhappily married people, imposturing, scamming, etc.

Michel Foucault was a critical thinker, historian, epistemologist and philosopher who trained in the prestigious Collège de France and died in 1984 at the age of fifty seven. At the time he died, he was already working on the fourth volume of his *History of Sexuality* by deploying what is now generally acknowledged and referred to as the discursive methodology. He applied this methodology to write his *The Archeology of Knowledge, the Order of Things, Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *Discipline and Punish* (1972). He incorporated Nietzsche's concept of genealogy into his discursive method as a way of 'discovering' the origins of things by not neglecting as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history but rather cultivating the details and accidents that accompany the beginning. The discursive and genealogical method was not about prescription of lessons or dreams, but about open-endedness. As a celebrated post-structuralist theorist, Foucault used his *The History of Sexuality* Volume 1, to deconstruct longstanding sexual morals and traditions by uncovering them as societal constructs. According to Foucault, these anonymous but entirely invasive sources of power mould and continue to form sexual culture as well as individual beliefs about sexuality. In Ngongwikuo's *Taboo Love*, sexuality is constructed as a moral tradition that is age-bounded and accessible only to people of a certain elderly biological age. Consequently, Jam, who is Iyafi's boyfriend, is banned from having sexual intercourse with the later because he still faced several years 'to ripen for qualification to eat bearded meat' (52); hence, the title of the novel *Taboo Love*. The *foyn* of Mukomangoc is biologically qualified in terms of age and he has the economic resources and political power as chief to bring Iyafi, who is about 16 years old to his bed as one of his many wives. In Ngarka's *The Herbalist* and in Atanga's *The Last of the Virgins*, the moral tradition is the insistence on sexual abstinence until marriage. Beri and Evelyn Ndangeh in the respective texts are pretty teenagers reared in strict Christian homes, with vows to preserve their flowering sexuality until they get married. In this way, virginity is erected as a Foucauldian power system to control the sexuality of the girl child and predispose her eventually to dating by the adult male.

But, contra the positionality of radical feminists about victimhood, these dystopian works of art show that the power metanarrative collapses because the communities of Misaka (*The Herbalist*) and Mankon (*The Last of the Virgins*) respectively rely excessively on the Foucauldian fixation with the rhetorical power on sexual abstinence in three very specific ways. First, Foucault shows indifference to the

female sexual experience. While in *Our Lady of Lourdes* College Mankon, Evelyn is approached by both Lesley Njapa, a student in the Cameroon Protestant College Bali, and another guy (with his age unspecified) in CCAST Bambili, but this looks like the scenario evoked in the ENS student's question. Evelyn's sexual experience, which she narrates at length, is that she turns Lesley's love advances down and goes with those of the CCAST Bambili guy. But she only finds later on that she cannot bring herself to stay away from Lesley whom she discovers she truly has romantic feelings for. Evelyn begins to make frantic efforts to seduce Lesley but on meeting him, it looks like her moves are too late although she gets closer to his heart. At this moment, Lesley is involved in a motor car accident and Evelyn arrives at the Bamenda general hospital with a wail for her lover as she sits beside Lesley to soothe his feelings and shows him love as he agonizes. Anxiety builds up to a climatic level in Evelyn as a medical team is mobilized in the hospital to save Lesley's life. The radicalist feminist ideology is not confirmed in this narrative. Similarly, in Ngarka's *The Herbalist*, Beri's sexual experience consists in her being disfigured by a transport officer, an adult, who takes her to his house when he finds her stranded at night in an agency station. The warmth that Beri gets from the encounter with the adult officer in his home completely disarms her defence against his advances and sets her up to lose her virginity as a result. There is not suggestion of rape in the narrative, but there is evidence that she was overtaken by her biological need for sex in an materially inviting environment. Clearly, in this story, Foucauldian power dialectics works on Beri. She steps out of her very disciplinarian home where her mother reigns supreme with rules, regulations and taboos and then discovers what she calls 'a blow of fresh air' through sexual liberty in an environment of material comfort compared with the motor park premises where she was to spend the night. Initially, she resists the adult transporter's advances but is disempowered by the choice she has to make. Radicalist feminists raised the issue of choice and from this light, one can state that Beri is 'victimised' by the power of the material environment represented by the adult transport officer. However, one has to read the sexuality text right to the end of the novel to discover that, contrary to predictions of radical feminists, Beri transforms herself into an assertive child and opts for abortion to eliminate what she sees as an evil encounter with the adult transport officer that fateful night. In order to appear consistent with the Christian script of sexual purity rammed into her head by her single mother, he makes a decision to dispose of her fetus. Although this is morally reprehensible act that no girl worth her salt should commit in today's age of the knowledge economy, one can understand the position where she is coming from. Beri represents a post-Foucauldian narrative who is confronted with three formidable forces: first, a Freudian desire to experiment sex for the first time after being repressed by a strict Christian home; second, an

environment that is inhospitable and strange in Misaka town but to which she must adapt to pursue her studies. And third, the prospect of being exposed to a post-Freudian gaze of society that is very unforgiving when a girl child violates its principles. These three forces compel Beri to decide for abortion, and from this light represent her as a very strong date rather than a weak victim as feminists would claim. Her death at the end of the novel is not as a result of her subjectivity, that is, her decision, but as a result of the inadequacies of her unsanitized environment. The traditional healer administering the abortion portion becomes the post-Foucauldian context that meddles tragically with her Foucauldian attempt to overcome power. No radical feminist had predicted nor theorized the subtleties of such an outcome that falls outside the registers of choice in the movement's grammatology of victimization.

Foucault's power dialectics undermines individual agency. Although the Mukomangoc *foyn* in *Taboo Love* uses power to win over the love of the teenager Iyafi, and from this light, radical feminists are partially right in their claims of victimhood; Iyafi later outwits the *foyn* by making love with her boyfriend Jam prior to his mortification by the masquerades. Again the reader of this novel has to reach its end to come to the realization that the feminist movement has been doing a narrow reading of adult childhood sexuality. She recounts how she would arrange to meet with Jam in a secret hut during a rainy day and it is only at the end of the text that the reader learns that Iyafi bears the child of Jam in spite of her ritualized betrothal to and marital status with the adult chief. Radical feminism did not develop theory to explain how power can nevertheless lead to exercise of choice by the girl child who was portrayed as being structurally passive, ignorant, naive and incapable of consenting sexuality. The discourse of reproductive choice that takes everyone, including the reader, by surprise, at the end of the text and the soliloquy at its beginning depict a very different picture of adult child sexuality. And this is child sexuality (Iyafi is about 16 years old) at a pre-colonial epoch when my guess is that radical feminists would bet on her incapacity to take sexual decisions.

Third, Foucault undermines the innate desire for love and family. In Ambanasom's (2010) *Homage and Courtship. Romantic Stirrings of a Young Man*, the protagonist is an adolescent yearning for love and family and consumed by the 'romantic stirrings' that are assumed to be the preserved domain of adults only. This is consistent with the Freudian view that sexuality starts not with adults as radical feminists claim but with childhood (Sauerteig 2012: 156-183; Wolf 1995. Egan, Danielle and Hawkes 2008: 355-367; Freud 1955. 175-204; Freud 2017). The soliloquy of the fifteen or so years old Iyafi yearning for love and family in *Taboo Love* (3) and the frantic efforts of the sixteen years old Evelyn ready to die for Lesley (57) in *The Last of the*

Virgins, contradict these radicalist feminist claims of inability to love. For ages, maternity and motherhood for girls in most African and Islamic societies, started at fourteen and fifteen. The question of delivery conditions and baby fatalities issuing therefrom is a challenge that has to do with the capitalist development of society that Foucauldian analytics dwells on rather than with strictly Freudian discourse of sexual desire. It is important that post-radicalist feminists should make this delineation rather than to conflate the two and call it scientific analysis (Storer 2017). These examples of dystopian literature contribute to critique Foucault's theory of sexuality as narrow. Dystopian literature, which has often been paired with modern cultural criticism, including psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, acts as critique of the permeating effects of societal control at a community and individual level; however, it also leaves some room for individual agency and explores the innate desires for idiosyncratic predisposition.

It is extensively known that by the end of the 1970s, Foucault had begun to refer to 'experience' as a way of accounting for his intellectual trajectory and redirecting his work on *The History of Sexuality*. Nevertheless, his interest in experience also decisively shaped his analysis of the 'critical attitude' he addressed at about the same time. This paper argues that Foucault's idea of critique is informed by a specific reading of 'experience'. As opposed to power, the experiences of Beri, Evelyn and the poetic protagonist are imagined as a dominant structure of knowledge in the literature of the dystopian and as a transformative force that constitutes the background of all taboo practices, and transcending events. The texts are redefinitions of Foucauldian analytics as a particular experience, a dynamic interplay between games of truth (the purity of sexual abstinence and innocence), forms of power (such as the authority of the chief) that end up being empty because the 'fruit' from Iyafi is not owned by the chief but by the powerless Jam. All the texts show that the protagonists develop complex relations to themselves that challenge radicalist feminist assumptions about the sexless, subordinated, powerless victim of adult sexual abuse. Accordingly, the Foucauldian account is problematized in the literature by the dystopian narratives of insubordination and the audacity of their protagonists to expose their own status as new and irreplicable subjectivities.

- Among the people of Lyela, a Gur-speaking ethnic group of a hundred and fifty thousand, living in northern Burkina Faso, dystopian tales (Dinslage 2001: 46-47) are told that confirm the Foucauldian paradigm on sexuality but also intersect with other narratives on the economics of capitalism. The story of the immured girl:

A young girl is immured in a hut without door or window, so she is kept in total seclusion to prevent her from having pre-marital sexual contact with young men.

Hare becomes aware of it and goes to ask his friend Squirrel to dig a tunnel for him that leads into the girl's hut. Using this tunnel, Hare succeeds in having sexual intercourse with the girl. When she finally gives birth to a baby, she is left with shame and disgrace. When the child starts to walk, all the bush animals assemble to find its father. The baby declares Hare to be its father and the latter has to obtain several rare objects that are very hard to get as bride gifts. When Hare get hold of these bride gifts using further tricks, he is allowed to marry the baby's mother and according to this, he is accepted to act as the legitimate father of the child.

The sexual motif of this tale points to anxieties among the Lyela to repress intimacy with girls as a way of protecting their girl children from passionate encounters that may lead to pre-marital sexual relationships without the protection of economic resources. The tale is implicated in the 'repression' hypothesis of sexuality, that is, in the importance that is given to the virginity of women and to the management of marriageable girls in Lyela society on the basis of economic affluence. Lyela girls are like Iyafi in *Taboo Love*, Evelyn in *The Last of the Virgins* and Beri in *The Herbalist*: they are cautioned to desist from pre-marital sex and are warned about the possible disaster that can be triggered from such an involvement. But more critically, this Foucauldian power motif points to the advent of primitive capitalism in traditional African societies with references to forms of materialism and capitalism such as 'rare objects' alluded to in the tale as a pre-condition to sexual access and marital status. This is consistent with Michel Foucault's (1990) theory of the sexual *episteme* in which he explains that 'repressive sexuality' came about recently in human history with the advent of capitalism. The tale aims to generate feelings of shame, fear and avoidance in girls who contemplate to indulge themselves in pre-marital sexuality with young men who are not yet economically emancipated and viable. The romantic relationship in the text starts out as infatuated love and becomes romantic love as intimacy develops over time. The story teaches us that, in indigenous African societies, the belief is that, without developing intimacy and eventually commitment, infatuated love may disappear suddenly. But the story also tells us that this Foucauldian motif is deconstructible even through the employment of deceptive techniques that reveal the presence of capitalism in the background.

Like in the past, sexuality is today riven with contradictions. We were told that in the aftermath of the sexual revolution of the sixties, the world would live in an era of sexual freedom, and this was backed up by real changes in society over the last several decades. However this often came into conflict with the *capitalist* reality of a world filled with examples of alienated and oppressed sexuality evidenced in the oral tale of Lyela. Despite the fact that Foucault was not a

(later) Marxist, his analysis still broke critical ground into a Marxist understanding of sexuality, which deserves to be clarified and enriched in this paper. What emerges from a serious reading of this folktale is a very different picture of Foucauldian sexuality. Foucault's critique of sexuality revolves not only around power but also the repressive hypothesis and the socially constructed nature of sexuality. Foucault begins his history of sexuality with a discussion of what he calls the "repressive hypothesis", which he considers to be the dominant ways in which critical theorists understand the link between sexuality and society. The repressive hypothesis maintains that the key driving factor behind this relationship is the need for society to repress sex. Foucault associates the repressive hypothesis with the writings of the radical critical theorist Herbert Marcuse and the left wing Freudian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich; however, he clearly sees it as a broader conception held by much of what may loosely be called the left at the time. The origins of this dynamic are, according to these critical theorists, rooted in the development of capitalism. The hypothesis was that there is a key link between sexuality and the need to regulate sexuality in the interests of social order, and that while repression was an aspect of that strategy, it was not the only one and was certainly not the driving force behind the relationship. Foucault developed a conception of sexual freedom that was distinctive in its understanding that social and political repression is only one of a number of mechanisms that shape and constrain sexual formations in the interests of maintaining *power* relations. The oral discourse from Burkina Faso integrates taboos and prohibitions intended to consolidate an entire sexual mosaic. But this sexual montage points to the rise of capitalism in this indigenous society through the regulation of personal freedom. As Foucault points out, sexuality was repressed in capitalist and bourgeois societies, and this benefitted from a regime of unchanging liberty. The repressive hypothesis in The story of the immured girl is mounted within a general background of capitalist economics in which the central issue is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex, but rather to account for the fact that it is spoken about, discovered, positioned and institutionalized as one of the capillaries of capitalism.

Foucault explains in his other writings that capitalism is an ideology of discipline: with data on birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation and so forth. Therefore, it was important that the capitalist state should know about what was happening with its citizens' sexuality, and the use they made of it, but also that each individual should be capable of controlling the use he made of it. This was the situation of sexuality in the capitalist Western world in the aftermath of the upheavals of the sixties and seventies. However in the post-sexual revolution world, the repressive hypothesis became harder to sustain; it

became increasingly clear that capitalist countries were willing to accommodate various sexual relations, attitudes and representations which had previously been excluded and censored. This paved the way for a whole range of free love “radicals” (transgenderism, homosexuality, etc) that, in turn, accommodated themselves to the economic system. This dynamics is evident in the story of the immured girl where youths like the Hare that transgress the taboo on pre-marital sexuality are still allowed to integrate into the capitalist system through the acquisition of rare objects. While Reich and Marcuse posited a mechanical, and linear relationship between sexuality and capitalism repression, which is not quite borne out in the story, Foucault offered an alternative history of sexuality, which allowed him to return to the age of sexual repression in the Victorian era. What he found was that rather than capitalism simply inaugurating a new era of sexual repression, it promoted an incitement of knowledge discourse about sex and sexuality. Foucault provided a whole series of examples of this explosion of knowledge discussion about sex: the growing obsession with sexual knowledge in Catholic confession, the rise of scandalous literature written by libertines and people like the Marquis de Sade, the emergence of a whole medical apparatus and scientific theoretical tradition dealing with sexual knowledge and the growing concern with and discussion about sexuality by various elements of the judicial-police system. Foucault exposes a historical example in 1867, when a “simple minded” farm hand in a village called Lapcourt was arrested for obtaining some caresses from a young girl. After his arrest, he was turned over to the courts that, in turn, gave him over to medical doctors who placed him under observation for life and used him as an important subject of research for knowledge. This helps to elucidate the nature of the relationship between sexuality and capitalism by revealing how concurrent knowledge of sexuality was with the rise of capitalist society liberated from the structures of power.

The story shows that there is a dynamic relationship between knowledge of sexuality (e.g *When the child starts to walk, all the bush animals assemble to find its father...*) and capitalism, in which sexual experiences and identities are re-shaped by the material conditions and structures of class society, and are transformed by what are often contradictory developments with that society. In particular, the need that the capitalist class has for the reproduction of labour power, such as Hare’s child, and the way this is mediated through institutions such as the family and the state, shape how people both perceive and relate to each other sexually.

DISCUSSION

With the advent of Internet, ICTs and the digital technology of e-dating, Foucauldian sexuality intersected with capitalism no longer at the level of Foucauldian power but at the level of post-Foucauldian

knowledge. Today, child daters are even more knowledgeable and empowered to ‘narrate’ the dating historicism than radical feminists would have even dreamt of or wanted us to believe. Therefore, this paper will show the knowledge potential but also the challenges of this source of meta-knowledge in order to intersect it with narrative perspectives. Today, dating websites have replaced village gossiping and personal *ads* in newspapers and magazines. Thanks to the online technology, a greater number of individuals started to place personal *ads* on websites created by dating agencies. The agencies functioned through algorithms, questionnaires subscription and membership fees, smartphones and apps like *Tinder* and *Badoo*. Gradually, the perception of technology as ‘shady’ shifted into a new awareness of social acceptance and then into another consciousness of the technology as common practice and behaviour. e-Dating offers opportunities of access and convenience to child daters and adult singles by enabling them to collect a preliminary *sense* of their *compatibility* with prospective partners prior to deciding whether one desires to encounter them in the physical face-to-face context or not. e-Dating sites gather data that enable singles to eliminate people from the dating group that are likely to be poor relationship ‘material’ in general. There is an increase in the number of child e-daters who are actively seducing partners across the globe by exposing parts of their bodies to increase chances of negotiating romantic encounters. Today, an increasing number of people are turning to screens for almost every decision they wish to make on love and sexuality (or romance, for short); For example, in 1940, just 24% of heterosexual romantic dates in the US occurred via family channels, 21% through school, 21% through friends, 13% through Church, 12% at a restaurant or bar, 13% through neighbours, and 10% through co-workers. But, by 2009, 50% of couples met via bar, restaurant or friends, while 22% met via the digital technology, and from 2005 to 2012, more than 30% of US married couples met online (Aziz Ansari and Eric Klinenberg 2015). Among the five predominant dating apps, namely, *Bumble*, *Match*, *Tinder*, *Plenty of Fish* and *Zoosk* which rank in the fifty highest social apps, *Tinder* has become the principal app thanks to *Tinder Gold*, which is a paid ‘add-on’ with premium features (Sumter, Sindy, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg 2017). *Match.com* and *Zoosk* prioritize preferences of daters such as partners’ traits that may be desired or not. Romance is now valued as an economic, matchmaking process with the aid of digital clicks and algorithms that systematize the *happenstances* of human seduction. e-Daters are overly filtered in the cyberspace to get *exactly* what they desire and this ranges from specifications on educational level, to issues like height, geographical location and so on. So, digitization of the sexual economy shows that the e-dating site rationalizes the social exchange of mate selection (Miller 2005). The principle of mate choice openness is reduced to ‘self-closure’ in e-dating relationships and this

compromises the prospect of any long term sustainability of the rationalist metanarrative. The digital metanarrative assumes that the major objective of an online relationship is intimacy (Ben Zeev 2004, Ansari and Klinenberg 2015). Digital relationships are assumed to have a *linear* structure from contact to fructification of romance, whereas in the practical environment, a romantic relationship is a complex process in which some steps in the structure may be skipped, others may even take a backward turn in terms of passion or intimacy, while certain others may collapse in due course and revive later on in the process.

In the knowledgeeconomy of romance, reciprocity is not always an outcome in e-dating, as a variety of new exchange narratives are generated in, for example, Black/white dating exchanges (Mendelsohn 2014). Exchange narratives intrude in the relationship in the form of competition, altruism, status consistency and group gain. Mendelsohn (2014) observes further that interracial couples in the US and other modern societies have very similar socioeconomic status, education levels, and social class level; yet, the competitive narratives their romantic encounters generate minimize the imperative of reciprocity. Nevertheless, most relationships do not end up with intimacy and happiness online but with a sense of frustration, exhaustion and disappointment (Ben Zeev 2004). The reason for such dissatisfaction is that e-dating is chiefly focused on the economic power side of relationships and is disembedded from the knowledge side of romantic feelings to such a point where Facebook now promotes what is referred to as 'contactless friendships' minimized to LOLs, inane innuendos and pokes. Market rationalism is now compelling *OkCupid* to deploy matching algorithms that enable daters to respond to questions of political affiliation, social status, ethnicity, etc, thereby prioritizing variables like the user's response, a match to yield and so forth. However, while *eHarmony*, *Match.com*, *OkCupid* and apps like *Tinder* and *Badoo* are considered as very accessible and as deployable by everyone, irrespective of their age, gender or sexual preference (Sumter 2017), there are very serious lapses – as elucidated above - that need to be addressed to complement the rationalism and capitalism of the technology with offline humanism. With ready access to a large collection of prospective partners, the tendency is for digital daters to objectify online partners by educing an assessment-oriented, evaluative mindset. This mindset causes e-daters to objectify prospective partners; but in the same site of *objectification* of partners, it is observed that there is a weakening resolve of e-daters to commit to their partners, precisely as a resulting effect of this objectification (Finkel *et al.* 2012). Objectification causes e-daters to make ill-advised and lazy decisions when choosing from among a large pool of prospective partners flooding their inboxes as is the practice with *Anastasia Date Team* or

Dating.com, etc. The advantage for e-daters is that they access short-term communication with prospective partners prior to face-to-face contact. When communication periods are too extensive, prior to a face-to-face confrontation, this actually hurts e-daters' romantic perspectives. This is so because daters tend to over-interpret social cues made available in communication (Finkel *et al.* 2012), and when communication is allowed to proceed for too long in the absence of a face-to-face reality checkout, any ensuing face-to-face confrontations may engender repulsive expectation barriers and abuses. This is a possibility because online communication lacks the 'experiential wealth' that one finds in an offline face-to-face meeting. In an offline context, valuable information about prospective daters can be gleaned but this is impossible to garner from online communication alone. Today, most daters would desire to confront a prospective partner in their physical affordances in order to arrive at a fair judgment by incorporating their communication to face-to-face intuitions before pursuing a love and sexual relationship.

As far as matching is concerned, there is no persuasive evidence that endorses claims of dating sites according to which mathematical algorithms nurture love outcomes that are superior to outcomes fostered by interactive modes of partner pairing (Finkel *et al.* 2012). e-Dating sites construct their mathematical algorithms on the basis of principles like complementarity, similarity, etc, which are not valuable to the welfare of a relationship as was previously thought (Finkel *et al.* 2012). e-Matching sites are not in a good position to discern *how* two daters will grow in their love relationship and mature in due course of time. For example, they cannot tell what real life situations e-daters will face, what coping attitudes they can demonstrate and deploy in the future, and cannot tell what interactive dynamics would eventually destabilize or even promote romantic seduction leading to the welfare of an enduring relationship. As such, it is unlikely that any matching algorithm that seeks to match two people based on information available *prior* to their awareness of each other can account for more than a very small proportion of the variance in long-term romantic outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction and stability. Online dating is likely to radically alter the dating landscape in the future. With the deployment of algorithms of *similarity* and *contrast*, dating web services are employing similarity as a chief factor in matching principally demographic categories like education, religion, smoking, political ideology, preference for children, and physical traits such as race, age, eye colour, and height. But the critical question is this: do these characteristics constitute attraction in themselves? Some attitudes and compartments may sharpen online daters' expectations and motivations, to become members of internet forums with varying backgrounds; however, it is not accurate to claim that attitudes and compartments mirror real interpersonal

modes of seduction. Many dating/matching sites like *eHarmony* and *Match.com* are not designed to potentialize the recipes for constructing genuine love. They employ photos, multiple categories, and other instruments to enable daters to guess and take decisions about the efficiency and prospects of their interactivity with other daters. The artificiality of photos, categorizations, socializations, etc is different from the real process of signification of interpersonal relationships with a potential mate that spawns *chemistry*, romance, love and sexuality.

Christian Rudder, is the CEO of *OkCupid* and, simultaneously, the website's data officer. When Rudder was queried about the performance of his dating site, he maintained that: "We're there to get you that first date. We do use math and we do get people dates. *I don't know how those dates go*" (Brown 2015). *OkCupid* advertises that its "matching algorithm helps you find the right people."). *OkCupid* points out that it is always *A/B testing* its matching methods, and tweaking for maximum outcomes. He added that *OkCupid* measures its success in terms of the extent to which it can stimulate conversations with responding partners: "We don't claim to evaluate you perfectly, but we do claim to find someone who claims to fulfill your claimed requirements, exactly." Nevertheless, a dating algorithm does not and cannot *pair* an individual with a partner. There is no evidence that what daters desire online can be matched to what they prefer offline. Consequently, giving daters what they desire online does not necessarily ameliorate the odds for an offline relationship. The science of randomized *A/B* experimentation that tests principally two variables means that a variable may work while another variable may not, and this is a classic flaw of science, as a whole. The motivation behind this science is getting daters more dates but *without doing anything else*. The offer in *Tinder's* service consists in proposing its users photos and text. e-Daters swipe right whenever they prefer what they see and swipe left whenever they do not. This is as far as online dating goes: offering a dater the opportunity to meet with another but with no guarantee that the meeting will translate into chemistry and a genuine romantic relationship.

The emphasis in e-dating is then a deterministic one of prioritizing technological resources and essentializing knowledge by weighting matches, benchmarking attraction levels and dater activities or proposing daters to "match" with others, rather than exploring the *tacit* nature of hypertexts in rich knowledge that is embedded in daters' relationships. The spectre of the lost Big Love is a major problematic in the knowledge economy of e-sexuality. As a result, e-dating is now witnessing its own postmodern effects in terms of the lingering feeling in daters' minds that online sites are the 'uncanny valley' of digital mating. In the digital space, the dater is 'not quite' their true selves; the dater is actually a human being with all his

flaws and sordid nature. But in the place of that humanity, the dater presents themselves *at their best*, with curated pictures designed to persuade the other. Consequently, the dater may start to feel silly, because he has to 'self-represent' in terms of an odd smile, a measured way of talking to seduce one's mate, etc, and this experience can yield a sickening sense of what s/he is really not. From this moment, the dating relationship becomes transient and temporary as explained by Sam Lansky's essay on *Medium*, with his 'The theory of visitors,' in which tagged pictures transform into the realm of the ephemeral (Beers 2015). This dehumanization of romance in e-dating takes the form of an e-matchmaking session that prioritizes not only the rationalization of choices but also the infiltration of late capital into the Freudian sphere of the irrational, which is the realm of the unconscious, the interpersonal, and therefore, the sphere of the undecidable, the unpredictable and the unknowable in the humanities. e-Dating complies with *signifiers* of e-adverts (profiles of daters, data about their demographics, preferences, past life experience, etc) followed by the imperative to make a rational decision to purchase the 'product', which, in this case, is romance. The reasoning of late capital behind this process is that the more choices are available on a date-making website, the greater the opportunities for daters to make the choice (Massa 2013). *Match.com* maintains that its policy is to help a dater to "put[ting] yourself out there" and "open[ing] up options". It emphasizes informed choice ("Choose who you'd like to get in touch with") and stresses the effectivity of rationalism ("Receive your compatible matches straight away"). Romance and the interpersonal which belong to the Freudian realm of the unpredictable and the irrational are now transformed into a rational 'product'. But the increasing invasion of capital with its business 'speak' of the *unconscious* of daters is now a growing preoccupation. For example, the knowledge economy of dating has given rise to elevated subscription costs, employment of false pictures, data with doubtful information, while little thought has been given to other dimensions of matchmaking. This may explain why e-dating is not performing as much as it ought to (Walters 2011).

CONCLUSION

The great merit of Foucault's history of sexuality is that it is a networking narrative of *(dis)embeddedness* (Diekman 2000, Lewis 1997, Hunter 2002, Cole and Thomas 2009, Van Ausdall, Mimi Ilimuro 2010, Villeta 2009, Taylor, Ann and Glenn 1976, Simpson 2007) that goes beyond merely sexuality as a physical act in a vacuum (Singh 1995, Stephens, Dionne and Few 2007, Pace 2014) as suggested by concerns in the ENS student's question during the seminar, to represent sexuality as a complex social construction (Perilloux and Buss 2008). It has enabled us to explore a Latourian network of sexuality through new sexual identities (for e.g. the figure of the perverted youth, the girl child sexual victim, the bastard child,

homosexual, transgendered, monogamist, polygamist, legitimate couple, etc) (Moolla 2017), forms of sexual power and finally sexual knowledge through digital capitalism but with the prospect of other forms of social construction. With the emergence of capitalism in African societies, dystopian literature teaches us that sexuality began to be restructured in villages such as Mukomangoc and Lyela, at first within the ruling nobility families and then the mass of the urban populations where Beri and Evelyn belong. The urban bourgeoisie began to consider its own sexuality through its girl children as a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs. It was within these families that concerns were first raised about the sexuality of children, women and “perverse” men, and what was at the heart of these concerns was the obligation to preserve a healthy line of descent for a family and social class.

Foucault’s analysis on sexuality intersects with the logics of power in which the regulation of sexuality is key and is linked to a multitude of localised power relations such as the adult male chief, the adult transport officer, and environmental driving forces. They constitute what he calls the “juridico-discursive model” of power. But this power is also challenged by the female either by transgressing filial paternity at the end of *Taboo Love*, enforcing the agency of abortion practices as in *The Herbalist*, or by exercising a counter-power of choice as in *The Last of the Virgins*. Therefore, there is a need to rethink sexuality not just as a physical and isolated act, but as a power, a capitalist, knowledge and other possible open-ended metanarratives (Le Court and Barnes 1999). This paper suggests that even e-dating is chiefly problematized by the practical impossibility to measure compatibility because complementarity and similarity have little to do with the *quality* of emotions found in romance relationships. Therefore, beyond physique, power, capital, and knowledge there are new prospects for sexuality as an expanding network of metanarratives.

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