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REVIEW ARTICLE

REFLECTIONS ON THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN RAPE CASES IN
ZIMBABWE : THE GUMBURA CASE

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ABSTRACT

The trials of well-known figures in society always attract media publicity; the trials of O. J Simpson in the United States and recently that of Oscar Pistorius in South Africa can be cited as examples. Even more interesting are the trials of well-known 'men of God' be it pastors, evangelists, bishop or whichever title is used. In Zimbabwe well-known church leader, Pastor Robert Martin Gumbura was convicted of rape and sentenced to forty years in jail in February 2014. His trial attracted a lot of media attention and he soon became a household name, and not only he but his congregation and all connected with him. In all of these cases the role of the media has come under scrutiny. Be it murder or rape, women are usually the victims or are they? Are they the victims, villains or victors? The Gumbura case in 2014 in Zimbabwe will be used as a case study. The case raised all these questions and his eleven wives, other church female churchgoers and any women associated with the pastor soon became part of the spotlight. Comments and speculations on their lifestyle and relations became quite commonplace in the mainstream media and social media. Even the victims of rape were not spared on these platforms. The dynamics of gender and the media became central during this trial. This paper reflects upon the portrayal of women in rape cases by the media. Focus was mainly on but not confined to two leading national papers in Zimbabwe, The Herald and Newsday. Social media platforms such as Whatsapp and Facebook were also referred to. The period under study was from October 2013 until February 2014 when the pastor was convicted.

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INTRODUCTION

Being well known attracts a lot of media publicity. Whether a celebrity in music, sport or politics or religion, the media is constantly interested in these people's lives. Controversial news stories that involve celebrities instantly make the headlines in any society. Celebrities who then become embroiled in crime attract even more attention especially crimes that are sexually related. The media frenzy associated with these trials is reminiscent of the trials of celebrities such as O.J Simpson, Bill Clinton in the United States of America and closer home in South Africa, Oscar Pistorius. The lives of these well-known people are suddenly open to scrutiny by the media from family, friends and lifestyle. And central to all of these trials are the women who are the victims. The trial of Pastor Robert Gumbura a church leader in Zimbabwe in 2014 stirred up a lot of controversy. Pastor Robert Gumbura was convicted of four counts of rape and possessing pornographic material. Most of these were filed by his own female

congregantes. The media had a field day considering the gravity of his crime and his status in society. It is not only the alleged criminal who seems to stand trial but his wife and entire family. The Gumbura trial drew a lot of attention to his polygamous lifestyle. His eleven wives soon became more interesting than the rape trial itself. The wives were even charged with possessing pornographic material. The women who had been raped, his wives and any women closely associated with him also became the subject of many media articles. This paper specifically looks at this aspect of gender and the media. The rape victims and all women closely associated with the accused seemed also to be on trial. This paper will zero in on the portrayal of women in sexually related cases in Zimbabwe.

Robert Martin Gumbura (57) was born in Makonde in Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe. He joined the End Time Message in 1978 and became a minister and rose to become quite a prominent figure not only in religious circles but in politics as well. He was set to stand as a member of parliament for Mabvuku in Harare. As a pastor he had a quite a following in Zimbabwe. By the time of going to trial, Gumbura had eleven wives and thirty children. His story

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began in October when he was accused of raping nine women and possessing pornographic material. He was arrested and proceedings began leading to his conviction in February 2014. He was convicted of rape and sentenced to forty years in prison.

In as much as the case was about rape, the women in Gumbura's life were brought under scrutiny. This inspired this study as it seeks to look at the portrayal of women in the media in this case print and social media. This is not an isolated study but adds on to already existing literature about gender.

Women and the media

From the early days of the Suffragist Movement that vote for the right to vote for women, to the 1960's which ushered in the women's liberation movement that campaigned for equal rights on issues such as employment, marital relationships and sexual orientation. Today this has changed to gender identities being seen as less fixed and personally empowering (Laughey, 2007). The relationship between gender and the media has generated a lot of debate especially in feminism theory. Some feminist scholars have attributed a link between how women are projected in the media with how they are viewed by society in general for example scholars who have looked at pornography have concluded that men who watch too much pornography are more prone to be violent and insensitive towards women (Dworkin & Mackinnon 1981, Tuchman 1978). Despite the direct effects perspective being heavily criticised and even dismissed, "today people still rely on newspapers, television and the internet for their information. It seems obvious and inevitable, that we will be affected by these experiences somehow" (Gauntlett, 2002). Furthermore according to Laughey (2007), 'the mass media play an important role in representing gender and the feminist pursuit of gender equality.'

The portrayal of women in the media thus continues to be an area of much study, Lang (1978) an early researcher to note that, for women to become newsworthy in the 1970's they had to have been 'mothered, married or been sired by a man of achievement. A SARDC report (1997) observes that 'Women continue to be portrayed as 'sex objects' or as mothers. Where programming and news coverage are specifically aimed toward women, the focus is primarily domestic and seldom empowering. Sensationalism takes precedence over the careful collection and analysis of data and it is within this context that considerable coverage is devoted to violence against women.

A study of British newspapers portrayal of women (Stratford, 2006) revealed that 'common to almost all complaints is the grievance that the women's character and personal life has been caricatured by the newspaper concerned, with no regard to personal suffering but it seems, great regard to selling newspapers. The caricature and sensationalism of women's life is clearly an effective selling point.' Women thus are usually connected with non- important, mundane issues and if at all given coverage it is connected with sex, scandals and conflict. Reporting on issues is still heavily biased. According to Mulvey (2004) 'Men see women as objects, while women themselves and other women view themselves through the

male gaze.' Women's issues are thus seen through a patriarchal gaze. Opoku Mensah (2012) also observes that, 'When women are represented, it is often in relation to a male news actor who is the centre of coverage, or women are portrayed, stereotypically as victims of crimes'. The reporting of violence against women especially rape thus continues to dominate women reporting inasmuch as this shows the concern by the media to such social ills it seems even in these cases women continue to be portrayed negatively. Crawford (2006:64) 'observes that the tendency to focus on the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence against women is widespread'. Wadsworth (2008) further observes that, 'women who are raped are often doubly victimised, first by the assailant and later by the attitudes of other people. The victim may find that her own family and friends, the court system and society all tend to blame her and treat her negatively because of something that was not her fault.' The attitudes of society usually find vent in the media. One writer observed of the Gumbura trial "What has struck me deeply as I have watched the case proceed is how the women embroiled in this controversy have seemed to be on trial themselves. (Her Zimbabwe, Wednesday January 8, 2014)

Bhebhe (February 10, 2014) affirms the above by commenting that "Gumbura's case has, at different times, been trending on various Zimbabwean social media platforms and often, the analysis of the case has shifted from discussion around the gravity of the charges Gumbura is facing to a social and moral analysis of the women involved."

This study seeks to further probe these observations on how women are portrayed by the media in Zimbabwe. The Gumbura case roused much media interest not only on traditional media platforms but even new media and the eleven wives and all women associated with Gumbura soon became newsworthy.

The media in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's population is currently estimated at 13, 1 million (2012) and this population relies on main media outlets which consist mainly of the national broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), Zimpapers (publishers of The Herald, The Chronicle, H- Metro to name a few), Daily News and Newsday. According to a survey by the Zimbabwe all Media Products Survey (ZAMPS) in 2014 The Herald was the leading daily paper with a readership of 1 857 004 followed by Newsday with a readership of 973 930, in third place H-Metro with a readership of 965 028, Daily News 926 640, and The Chronicle with 612 710. From these statistics it can be seen that the main news source is the print media and hence the focus on the two leading daily newspapers in the country The Herald and The Newsday.

From November to January, the Gumbura case featured in the two main newspapers in Zimbabwe. Gumbura instantly became newsworthy. Stories were gathered randomly from both newspapers 16 from The Herald and 14 from Newsday. Below is a table of events on how the case progressed from November 2013 to February 2014.

Fig. 1. Table of Events of the Gumbura Trial

THE HERALD	NEWSDAY
19 Nov - Pastor Gumbura back in Court for rape	19 Nov – Pastor faces new rape charges
28 Nov - Latest : Pastor Gumbura’s bail revoked	22 Nov – 10 more women press charges against pastor
Dec 10 – Pastor Gumbura Trial Opens	27 Nov – Pastor Gumbura back behind bars
Dec 13 – RGM church women belong to Gumbura	29 Nov – ‘Rape Pastor’ Gumbura bail revoked
Dec 18 – Gumbura case : Top Cleric testifies	5 Dec- ‘Rapist’ pastor Gumbura’s wives in pictures
Dec 20 – We were in love, Gumbura tells Court	10 Dec – ‘Rapist’ Pastor trial opens : ‘Victim tells sordid rape trial
Dec 21- Gumbura’s wives applied to watch TV court told	12 Dec- Woman recounts thwarting Gumbura from raping her
Jan 8- Gumbura judgement deferred again	13 Dec – ‘Rapist’ pastor Gumbura owns every woman in his church, Court told
Jan 8 – Gumbura’s wives in court for pornography	
Jan 9 – Gumbura judgement set for January 24	14 Dec- ‘Rapist’ pastor Gumbura held 17-year old in sexual
Jan 15 – Gumbura wife’s trial opens	20 Dec – Gumbura ‘I want to have 100 children with different women”
Jan 17 – Gumbura faces fresh rape trial	22 Dec - Gumbura judgement set for January
Jan 25 – Gumbura judgement deferred again	15 Jan – Gumbura wives deny charges
Feb 3 - D- Day for Gumbura	24 Jan – Gumbura judgement
Feb 6 – I was wrongly convicted argues Gumbura	31 Jan - Breaking: Gumbura convicted
Feb 8- Gumbura: The Untold Story	
Feb13 –Gumbura porn Case in disarray	

Both newspapers from the table of events constantly covered the case. Focus was on the bizarre nature of this rape trial. The fact that he was a Pastor and married to eleven wives and went on to rape his own church congregants attracted much attention. The case opened in November as women from his church came forward to press charges. Throughout the trial, Gumbura maintained that he was innocent and that the victims consented to having sexual relations with him. Both The Herald and Newsday and other news platforms formally and informally kept the public abreast of the proceedings of the case.

In the end Robert Gumbura was convicted of four counts of rape and possessing pornographic material and was sentenced to forty years in prison.

The portrayal of women in the case

The Wives

The use of sensationalism has been used from time immemorial to attract readers and increase sales. Sex, scandal and conflict among well known and respected people seem to attract attention sometimes at the expense of those involved. Sensationalism is the use of shocking details to cause a lot of excitement or interest, Subject matter, language or style producing or designed to produce startling or thrilling impressions or to excite and please vulgar tastes. The presentation of stories in a way that is intended to provoke public interest or excitement (oxford dictionaries)

From the onset Gumbura’s case sparked interest and excitement and provoked public interest because of the type of family he had. Furthermore he was embroiled in sex scandals with his female congregants. The media seemed intrigued by his eleven wives. Both The Herald and Newsday made it a point to always refer to Gumbura’s ‘11 wives and 30 children’ whenever reporting on the case. In the Newsday they had a special article in which all eleven women appeared in pictures. Before long it seemed the wives became part of the case, most of the reports on the proceedings of the court case would allude to his eleven wives. Reports such as,

‘In his defence; the pastor who has 11 wives and 30 children said he had consensual sex with 5 of the women including his sixth wife’s young sister.’

‘The church leader, who has 11 wives and is being represented in court by Reikai Maphosa’ (10 December 2013, Newsday). I was wrongly convicted, argues Gumbura who has 11 wives and 30 children was facing 9 counts of raping six women and one of possessing pornographic material’ (February 6, 2014) ‘Gumbura has 30 children with his 11 wives’ (Dec 6 2015 Newsday) In all these reports it seemed noteworthy to mention his 11 wives and 30 children. It became more of a major highlight in this case how the wives were reacting to this case. Even more intriguing was how Gumbura managed this family. It even became popular to refer to a man with many wives as having a ‘Gumbura’ of wives.

Sensational reporting characterised the case headlines such as ‘I want to have 100 children with different wives (20 Dec Newsday)’

‘Gumbura’s wives applied to watch TV (Dec 21 2013 The Herald)’

‘ RGM women belong to Gumbura (13 Dec 2013 The Herald)’

‘Rapist’ pastor Gumbura owns every woman in his church, court told’ (Dec 13, 2013 Newsday) and statements such as the ‘Pastor is a great lover’ (Newsday December 6,2015) and on Facebook:

‘Gumbura’s wives on auction: Hurry while stock last’ (Masasi a Gumbura accessed 25 February 2015)

Instead of being looked as a serious violation of trust, and human rights the case ended up being more of a caricature. The nature and lives of these women became more interesting than the case itself. The constant mentioning of his wives ensured that the public would speculate on the lifestyle in the home.

The Church women

The wives and other female members of the church were also brought before the courts on pornographic charges and possessing pornographic material. Nude pictures of four wives and other female congregants were discovered in the house.

The story that attracted much attention however was the conversation between two women who belonged to Gumbura's End Time Message Church. An explicit conversation alleged to belong to two RGM women on Whatsapp also began to make rounds in the public all this questioning the character of the women who were raped and the type of female congregants at this church. The conversation was believed to be between two women from Gumbura's church after he was arrested and during the trial. The following is a summary of the Whatsapp conversation these two ladies had concerning the pastor :

First interesting snippet from conversation (*In this one, they claim that a plan had been hatched for Gumbura to bolt out of Zimbabwe as soon as he had been granted bail. One of the ladies admits she had sex with the Pastor before and after she was married and now she is scared to tell her hubby because he is a nice person!*)

SNIPPET 2 (*In this one, the ladies reveal that Gumbura was such a ferocious bedroom bull that he would rotate five ladies before ahem ...you know...one of the ladies claims she fainted when she saw how big his manhood was and that after the act she bled intensely but that afterward they would spend some great quality time together whenever an opportunity arose, one of the ladies also says she misses the Pastor greatly because the dude she is currently dating does it the rabbit way, by not lasting long in bed. Of course Pastor was being powered and rolling on powerful sex stimulant drug Viagra!*)

SNIPPET 3 (*In this snippet one of the ladies says she managed to fool the guy who married her since he is the brotherly type who could not really tell what a virgin was like. She also said that the Pastor had given her some vagina tightening creams and that she actually bled on her wedding night.*)

SNIPPET 4 (*In this snippet its revealed that one lady by the name of charity was impregnated by Gumbura but she aborted. Apparently Gumbura used the withdrawal method but Charity was too tight so he could not withdraw on time. (Source: Bulawayo24.com)*)

The actual Whatsapp conversation was from 2- 7 January thus it cannot be contained in this paper hence the summary. This conversation brought much criticism of the women from his church. It seemed from this conversation that the women enjoyed Gumbura's sex escapades and actually praised him. The whole court case it seemed from this conversation was a set up and it was the devil who was out to destroy him. Such reports in social media further called to question the characters of those who claimed to be raped with some saying they were also part of the plot to bring down the pastor.

The victims of Rape

The women who were raped were not spared either, while the mainstream newspapers that is the Herald and Newsday tended to focus more on the court proceedings, social media was not so kind. Speculations on the type of women and the church were rife. Even the lady lawyer representing Gumbura was not spared. Comments such as these appeared on facebook pages such as Zim247:

(Zim 247 dec12 2013), (accessed 2/10/2015) – Kelly Nyasha ‘Gumbura haana mhosva vakadzi ivavo vaida kurara naye’ (*Gumbura is not guilty it is those women who wanted to sleep with him*)

Muchengeti Hwande – vasikana muZimbabwe kupusa (*Girls in Zimbabwe are dumb*)

Noah Mwedzi – this lady lawyer will go to hell and she definitely doesn't have a conscience

Bento Mhosva – vakadzi ava vainakirwa izvozvi vakuti rape munhu ungarararwa 10 years uchinakirwa nhasi oti ndarepwa mahure (*These women enjoyed now they cry rape, you can't have sex for 10 years and now you say you have been raped, prostitutes*)

These comments came from the general public as they reacted to the reports in the media on the Gumbura case. The women who were raped were seen as loose women, bitter women who had other motives to bring down Gumbura. Their sad stories of being forced into sex, being violated and being taken advantage off became overshadowed by these comments. Instead Gumbura became the victim of women who were being used by political and religious rivals to oust him. However some of the readers sympathised with the victims and called for a stiff penalty for Gumbura.

The Media's Role

George Gerbner (1994:43) says, ‘Minorities are made not born’ ‘Gender, race, class, ethnicity, age and disability define society's power structure. Consequently their portrayals affect how we see each other and ourselves’. Furthermore the media has an agenda setting role in society. It has the power to influence attitudes and opinions of the general public. Its traditional role of educating is not only limited to political issues but social and developmental issues in society. The media in Zimbabwe has been effective in bringing to the fore issues on domestic violence, child abuse and violence against women but there is still much to be done. When it comes to the portrayal of women, the Zimbabwean media has the potential to influence the public's perception on issues of rape. Myths about rape can be dismissed through gender sensitive framing of issues to do with rape. Gender sensitivity is important in discussing such issues on any media platform in order to protect the victims who are in essence survivors of such violence. Thus there is need to encourage gender sensitive language on all media platforms and this can be achieved partly through training journalists on gender issues.

Concluding remarks

The Gumbura case revealed that women seem to feature only in sensational and mundane instances and rarely in developmental and political issues. In sexually related cases, domestic violence and cases involving celebrities and well known people, women seem to feature prominently but are portrayed negatively. Furthermore ethical concerns especially on new media platforms are a serious issue as shown from the conversations above and yet these uncensored platforms (

facebook, whatsapp, blogs) reflect that much education needs to be done in society concerning rape and violence against women.

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News articles

The herald

- 19 November - Pastor Gumbura back in Court for rape
28 Nov - Latest : Pastor Gumbura's bail revoked

- Dec 10 – Pastor Gumbura Trial Opens
Dec 13 – RGM church women belong to Gumbura
Dec 18 – Gumbura case : Top Cleric testifies
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Feb 6 – I was wrongly convicted argues Gumbura
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News day

- 19 Nov – Pastor faces new rape charges
22 Nov – 10 more women press charges against pastor
27 Nov – Pastor Gumbura back behind bars
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13 Dec – 'Rapist' pastor Gumbura owns every woman in his church, Court told
14 Dec- 'Rapist' pastor Gumbura held 17-year old in sexual
20 Dec – Gumbura 'I want to have 100 children with different women'
22 Dec - Gumbura judgement set for January
15 Jan – Gumbura wives deny charges
24 Jan – Gumbura judgement
31 Jan - Breaking News: Gumbura convicted

Facebook Pages: Zim247 (accessed 10/02/2015), Masasi a Gumbura (accessed 25/02/2015)

News sites: Bulawayo24.com (accessed 27/02/2015)
