



“The (Re)Making of Bodies and Enforcement of Masculinities: Aesthetics and Aspiration at a Zimbabwean University”

Pedzisayi Leslie Mangezvo*

Abstract

Drawing on a qualitative study of students from Africa University, Zimbabwe, this article explores the materiality of skin bleaching and skin whitening in asserting and enforcing current constructions of aspirational masculinities. The article reflects on how discourses of skin bleaching and skin whitening among University students present a prism through which we can interrogate hierarchies of male identities, the notions of “colourism”, aspiration and aesthetics among young African males in the twenty-first century. The article argues that skin bleaching and whitening among the students has incubated a colour stratification in the university that is redefining what it means to be a man, the dynamics of aesthetics, beauty and masculinities. Based on the analysis of empirical data from open-ended interviews, the article concludes that sensuality, beauty, male identities and the (re)making of bodies among the university students remain contested terrains that evoke numerous emotions and masculine sensibilities.

Keywords: gender, masculinities, sexuality, skin bleaching, whitening, aesthetics, aspiration

Résumé

A partir d'une étude qualitative réalisée auprès d'étudiants d'Africa University, au Zimbabwe, cet article explore la matérialité de la dépigmentation et du blanchiment de la peau en affirmant et en renforçant les constructions actuelles de masculinités souhaitées. L'article examine comment les discours sur la dépigmentation et le blanchiment de la peau parmi les étudiants de l'Université présentent un prisme à travers lequel nous pouvons interroger les

* Africa University, College of Social Sciences, Theology, Humanities and Education, Mutare, Zimbabwe. Email: mangezvo@africau.edu, mangezvo@yahoo.co.uk

hiérarchies des identités masculines, les notions de « colorisme », d'ambition et d'esthétique parmi les jeunes africains du XXI^e siècle. L'article soutient que la dépigmentation et le blanchiment de la peau parmi les étudiants ont créé une stratification des couleurs à l'université qui redéfinit la définition de l'homme, la dynamique d'esthétique, de beauté et de masculinités. Basé sur l'analyse de données empiriques issues d'entretiens ouverts, l'article conclut que la sensualité, la beauté, les identités masculines et les transformations corporelles parmi les étudiants restent des terrains contestés qui suscitent de nombreuses émotions et sensibilités masculines.

Mots-clés : genre, masculinités, sexualité, dépigmentation, blanchiment de la peau, esthétique, ambition

Introduction

Responding to a question on how he viewed black African men who bleached or whitened their skin, 26-year old Luambo foregrounded his answer with the observation that in his native Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this practice was common. Particularly among leading Lingala musicians based in the capital Kinshasa. For that reason, he did not view the idea of men bleaching or whitening their skin as entirely strange. While maintaining that he had no problems with both men and women who bleached or whitened their skin, Luambo was unambiguous in stating that it is something he would personally not do as he found it profoundly 'unmanly'. Meanwhile, 23-year-old Mazi, a Zimbabwean, found the notion of men bleaching or whitening their skin 'repulsive'. Mazi boldly declared that 'it is only homos [gay men] in this university, not normal men, who are into these disgusting practices like bleaching and doing their hair like ladies.'

Reflecting on skin bleaching or whitening, defined as the use of chemical substances to reduce the melanin concentration in the skin (ya Azibo 2011), among their compatriot men, both Luambo and Mazi were undoubtedly insightful, albeit in markedly different ways. Whereas Luambo was poised, Mazi was apoplectic. Personality differences may have had something to do with it, but their strikingly diverse responses were indicative of how skin bleaching had triggered a fascinating divide that spoke to numerous expressions of manhood among male students in the university. Many male and female students alike professed very sturdy aversion towards bleaching and whitening practices by men, while others insisted that individuals retained the right to deploy their physical bodies in any way that they felt comfortable.

Fuhu is 21 and is from Sierra Leone. I learnt during the course of my study that he was a very popular personality on campus for his fair looks and perceived sartorial superiority at the time of my study, he admitted to regularly using bleaching products since the age of 19. He said that a friend of his, back in Sierra Leone, introduced him to a chemical product that ostensibly removed blemishes and dark spots on the skin. Having struggled with dark blemishes on his chest area, Fuhu started using the product. Not only did the blemishes clear away, his skin retained a very soft tone and that is when he started using the substance on his face and hands. Reacting to the question of men and skin bleaching in general, Fuhu retorted, 'My body, my choice. Deal with it!'

Context and Content of Skin Bleaching at Africa University

As I have already mentioned, emerging from the students' narratives of skin bleaching and skin whitening were competing, fluid and often-contradictory notions of beauty, aesthetics, femininities and masculinities. The study population was limited to self-identified skin bleachers and whiteners who were recruited through self-referrals (snowballing). The empirical evidence suggests that both male and female students engaged in various practices of skin bleaching or whitening at the time of my study. Methodologically, the overall impression I got was that female students were generally forthcoming with their responses, acknowledging their use of chemical substances to bleach or whiten their facial skin, hands, legs, inner thighs, front and back pubic areas, and buttocks. Meanwhile, male students were commonly coy about the subject. Even those like Fuhu who disclosed that they bleached their skin like Fuhu sought to find alternative terms, preferring to characterise their practices in what they considered to be more 'palatable' terms like 'dermatological consciousness', 'skin toning' and 'hygiene.'. Others characterised it as simply skin lightening. The word "bleach" seemed loaded with negative connotations for most of the male bleachers to the extent that they found comfort in using alternative, albeit attractive, phrases.

The foregoing reminds one of the argument Jeffreys (2000) makes in analysing body art (cutting, tattooing and piercing) among young people from a feminist perspective. Jeffreys (ibid) contends that:

The industry of self-mutilation prefers to term its practices 'body decoration', 'body art' or 'body modification'. The practitioners use fashionable postmodern theory to provide a rationale for the mutilation in terms of 'reinscribing' and transgressing the boundaries of the body. They represent the activities from which they profit as a form of political resistance in language attractive to their young customers (Jeffreys 2000:409-410).

Jeffreys' (ibid) observations are pertinent as most of the male study participants did not perceive what they did as "bleaching" or "whitening", even in the face of evidence that ultimately, the result of what they did was a changed skin tone or hue. I found it fascinating that some of the male study participants were very particular about the need to make a distinction between skin bleaching, whitening, lightening, and removing blemishes. Most insisted that what they were doing was nothing more than merely taking care of acne and blemishes in different parts of their bodies. They claimed to be motivated by the aspiration to present flawless bodies or aesthetic masculinities, which they deployed relative to perceived trending femininities and other versions of masculinities. We see in these practices echoes of Beynon's (2002) observation that ideas of a 'new man' in modern times are typically built around expressions of domesticated, caring, sensitive and expressive manhoods. The 'new man' supposedly challenges traditional celebrations of masculinity built on ruggedness.

In straddling the divide between the aesthetic and the masculine, the students brought to the fore the contestation between seemingly new, sensitive masculinities and traditional notions of masculinity. There was a desire by the male students to be aesthetically expressive. However, there was also an undeniable wish to retain traditional notions of masculinities, which found expression in the refusal to acknowledge that what they were doing was skin bleaching. It was clear that some of the male students constructed skin bleaching as inherently feminine. As a result, the best way of not acknowledging it in male discourses was by giving it another name and poking fun at body remaking in general. Notwithstanding some of the male students' propensity to avoid the word 'bleaching', they used the same skin products that were used by self-identified skin bleachers and whiteners. They even acknowledged that their skin tone had changed dramatically. Yet, some of them still pushed back on the idea that they were bleaching their skin. Instead, they argued that they did not set out to bleach their skin but became victims of unintended consequences. Here is what 20-year-old Alfonso, a second year, male student from Mozambique had to say:

I have never used any products with the intention of lightening my skin, but I have used a product designed to clear blemishes that ended up having a side effect of lightening my skin.

The said product, I later learned, is a very common cream that most bleachers use. Among student circles, it is a well-known skin-bleaching agent. Notwithstanding the 'side effect' of lightening his skin, Alfonso had not stopped using this product at the time of study. In fact, he had been using this product for two years at the time of my study, and seemed well pleased with the 'unintended' consequences of its use.

Whilst most of the study participants expressed situated understandings of beauty and aesthetics, the importance they placed on one's physical appearance was palpable. One's body was deployed as an embodiment of self-esteem, self-confidence and social acceptance. The physical body was also perceived as a source of self-expression. Self-expression assumes greater salience in this context given the students' considerable presence on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Whatsapp. As one student put it, 'it's all about the 'gram', papa.' Translated, "it is all about Instagram". It was inescapable that the remaking of the body was simultaneously informed by trends on campus and was a projection of the self-confidence that derived from having a certain skin tone in an environment where colour hierarchies apparently mattered.

Whether peers influenced one, or it was the media, celebrities or health concerns, the narratives of bleaching and whitening in the University were as numerous as there were individuals. Some self-identified bleachers and whiteners justified their practices by arguing that they were simply following trends in youth cultures and they did not want to be left out. Many rightly pointed out that Universities are spaces for youth experimentation, adventure and pushing the boundaries as far as cultural consumption was concerned. It is worth pointing out though, that many of the bleachers started well before they enrolled for their university studies. In the meantime, others' use of bleaching products had been spasmodic in that they had tried different skin products and stopped due to health concerns, only to try again. Yet others said that they needed to be light-skinned to feel beautiful. In all cases, there was an acceptance that aesthetics were a leading feature of black youth identities, masculinities and femininities. From this perspective, having a light skin qualified one to be an exemplar of physical beauty, attractiveness or both.

In concluding this section, it is important to note that body (re)making is not of recent vintage among African youths. Aesthetic representations have always been central to African forms of ritualism. Body paint, adornments, body piercing etc. have long served as expressions of numerous notions of beauty, sensuality, manhood and womanhood (Perani and Wolff 1999; Landau and Kaspin 2002). However, increased human mobility and global consumerism seem to be producing specific aesthetic socialities that have given greater prominence to contemporary forms of body (re)making such as skin bleaching and skin whitening. It is important that as these socialities take shape, we interrogate their broad consequences, particularly from the point of view of those who experience or live them.

There can be little argument that skin bleaching represents a permanent form of body art, comparable to related practices such as aesthetic skin branding or scarification. Sociologically and anthropologically, this means that it is not an outcome of some perceived psychiatric disorder. As Karamanoukian et al (2000) put it; it is one of many methods of self-expression. Evidence from students at Africa University demonstrate how skin bleaching and whitening practices were destabilizing long-held structures and dynamics of aesthetics among young, black Africans.

There are a couple of observations I would like to point out to the reader as a way of laying the platform for the reader's understanding of the primary questions of this study. It is important that I stress that these observations were true at the time of the study and should be understood as such. The first point to note is that skin bleaching and skin-whitening practices among students were reported to be widespread by the study participants. The second is that the practices were incubating a colour stratification system or 'beauty' regimes among the university students. The third is that the colour stratification system fed by bleaching and whitening practices shaped the contours of manhood or womanhood, the dynamics of aesthetics, beauty, femininities and masculinities. The fourth point is that beauty regimes on campus were accompanied by copious and conflicting arguments. The proponents of skin bleaching couched their views in agency discourses and postmodern theory to provide a rationale for their body remaking practices. From this perspective, individuals have the right to assert their agency in any way they see fit, including alterations to their physical bodies. Critics of the practices drew on identity and psychosocial theories to make the case that skin bleaching was a consequence of esteem or identity issues.

Imagining Aesthetics, Imagining Aspiration

Skin bleaching and whitening not only speaks to the economics of aesthetics but the aesthetics of an economy of (re)making bodies among students. Some students were reportedly traveling as far as Tanzania for skin lightening injections or spending as much as USD80 for homemade bleaching products. It is important that we acknowledge how body remaking extends beyond the realm of the physical body. There is an economic premium to the narrative as bleachers spent money on products that they believe will either improve or enhance their physical appearance. At the time of my study, students freely spoke about the incubation of a colour stratification system in the university. In this structure, the light-skinned individuals, figuratively referred to as 'yellow bones', embodied the essence of beauty. They were the exemplars of aesthetics or 'beauty in motion' as one of the study participants put it.

On the female side, 'yellow bones' were popular with members of the opposite sex as well as compatriot female students. Popularity on campus was an end in itself for some of the study participants. This popularity had less to do with being well liked as it did to being well known and attracting fair amounts of attention in student social circles like fraternity parties and pageants. It was all about who got invited to the 'coolest' parties (on or off campus) and who commanded the biggest attention, 'loves' and 'likes' on popular social media platforms Snapchat and Instagram. This point was driven home by the study participants' purposeful deconstruction of the materiality of different social media platforms for different purposes. WhatsApp was mainly for communication while Twitter was the platform of choice for constructive engagement. As one student put it, on Twitter 'people like you because of what you say and not what you look like.' Meanwhile, Instagram was the place to be for aesthetics- a platform to attract followers based on beauty, looks and dress sense as opposed to one's ideas. This lends credence to the point made earlier about the student who made the point that 'it was all for the 'gram', papa.'

If Connell (1995) wrote about a patriarchal dividend that men in all patriarchal societies benefited from, one can argue that 'yellow bones' in this context had a colour dividend from which they drew immense benefits. They deployed the colour dividend to inhabit sought after physical, aesthetic and virtual spaces within the student community. For females, there appeared to be pressure to live up to the ideals of a perfect feminine beauty, albeit media-promoted beauty images. The "likes" from followers on social media platforms like Instagram were a source of social validation, an acceptance into the sought after aesthetic world. Most female study participants were very honest to point out that this was a world which valorized hips, narrow waists and light skin. Of these three, light skin was the easiest and cheapest to attain. Unsurprisingly, they went for the low hanging fruit the easiest and cheapest option.

The empirical data points to a strong association that bleachers made between imaginings of aesthetics and body remaking practices. Global consumer patterns as dictated by the media and celebrity culture seemed to inspire the bleaching practices of some of the male study participants. Some of them owned up to using skin bleaching and skin whitening products to look like their favourite African local celebrities who publicly celebrated the 'virtues' of skin bleaching and whitening. These students subscribed to a hip-hop culture that fuses popular notions of beauty, sensuality and masculinity with a fairer skin tone. Some of the celebrity names mentioned in this regard were South African songstresses, Kelly Khumalo and Mshoza. Kelly Khumalo

is on record declaring that she was going to bleach and whiten her skin until Jesus comes back. Meanwhile, Mshoza publicly admitted to being unhappy with the fact that her skin was dark. She wanted to have a lighter skin tone like Michael Jackson. She has since become one of the leading public personalities who have completely changed their skin colour from dark to very white.

Other male study participants claimed that they used skin-lightening products to get a fairer skin tone because 'the trend these days is that women prefer metrosexual males'. This provided an interesting angle to the discourses on skin bleaching and skin whitening. The question one had to confront then was whether skin colour determined metro-sexuality. The empirical evidence do not provide a clear answer to the question. More so because issues of metro-sexuality are often complex. However, we learn from the empirical evidence that masculinity concerns pervaded the male students' notions of metro-sexual, image-conscious men who not only projected heterosexual prowess, but were also equally sensitive and expressive in their interface with femininities and other versions of masculinities.

Most female study participants identified facial skin as the part of the body that got the most attention and effort when bleaching and whitening, followed by hands and inner thighs that may have been scarred by the friction caused by walking or sports. Some mentioned that they bleached the front and back pubic areas as well as their buttocks, with one female participant saying she does it for her boyfriend. Needless to say, the face is the most visible and prominent part of the body. The aspiration for soft, smooth and 'perfect' facial skin was evident. So too were constructions of femininities and masculinities based on how societies imagine beauty, aesthetics and sensuality.

Paradoxically, some of the female participants found the idea of the opposite sex bleaching or whitening their skin preposterous. There was a deep antipathy towards skin bleaching for its perceived effeminacy and lack of authenticity. Responses ranged from the idea being weird to downright un-masculine, unfeminine and artificial. Anga was a 24-year old female from Tanzania when I was carrying out the study. She was a self-confessed bleaching addict who boasted that she had been bleaching her entire body for five straight years. The fact that she bleached her skin did not mean that she supported the idea of men doing likewise. She had this to say about men who bleached or whitened their skin:

I think it is not masculine for men to do that. In fact, I am actually disgusted by men who do that because in general, men shouldn't be going out of their way to look attractive... Bleaching to me is like applying lipstick, so I cannot date a man who applies lipstick like me. Is he also going to be wearing more perfume than me? It's insane!

This is a view that was supported by 22-year old Zihura from Tanzania who asserted that bleaching is for women only because it makes them look more attractive, feminine and, by extension, sensual. Zihura had been bleaching for three years at the time of my study and said that she concentrated on her facial skin, hands and inner thighs. She argued that there was no justification for men to bleach or whiten their skin as it 'compromises their manliness, leaving us to doubt even their sexuality.' Zihura went on to assert that women, by contrast, 'need to be beautiful'. In one of the key highlights of my study, Zihura avowed that given a choice, she would rather be light than dark skinned. She reasoned that light skin is easily noticeable, magnifies one's facial appearance, a result of which was more attention, particularly from men. From this perspective, light-skinned women are aesthetically visible and men, in general, tend to notice them faster than they do dark-skinned ones. Arguing her case, Zihura maintained that currently 'light skin is awesome. It's just beautiful.' Her thoughts on the relationship between skin tone, beauty and confidence found expression in this quote from my interview with her:

What's important is that both men and women are noticing me, but especially men! [Laughter]. If I am to be dark-skinned, it means I have to be very pretty in order for people to find me attractive. Because I am not that pretty, I would rather be light so that people will notice my skin tone fast.

Nono was a 21-year old female from Zimbabwe. She said that she had been bleaching her skin since the age of 19. She admitted to her skin bleaching with a haughty laugh, stating in the vernacular that '*ndoyuza ini*' (I bleach). Her sentiments regarding the materiality of skin colour aligned with Zihura's when she said:

I would rather be light-skinned or something close to that because I have experienced both and I definitely look better in light skin.

Nono rationalised her skin bleaching practices by claiming that puberty left her with no choice but to bleach. The aesthetics of it were central. Here is part of what she said in her interview:

My face suffered great[ly] [during] puberty, so I ended up with dark spots and applying make up every morning to cover up and it was a struggle and naturally, I love natural beauty and it was bringing with it low self-esteem. Also, every product that clears those spots makes the skin lighter. I just had to make the whole body even hence, I apply to my whole body. It's really a good feeling to wake up looking all natural and beautiful and not worrying about staining your clothes with foundation.

Zihura's desire to stand out among both men and women would have come as little surprise to critical femininities and masculinities scholars. Such an aspiration was consistent with the way that femininities are constructed and expressed in opposition to versions of masculinities and other femininities (Connell 1995). Whilst attracting the attention or gambits of the opposite sex seemed to be the key driver of skin bleaching and whitening practices, there was the equally important veneration, goodwill and validation from fellow female students to savour. Founded on a rooted belief that light skin was synonymous with physical beauty, participants like Zihura deployed skin bleaching as a strategy for espousing a superior identity over fellow female students. Bleaching was therefore for the consumption of both male and female audiences. We see in these narratives how students encountered the social world through their physical bodies. Social and symbolic relationships were shaped by and became inscribed on the body.

The male participants of this study presented mixed, often contradictory views. In terms of dating, many of them expressed a strong preference for light-skinned women. Nevertheless, they had very negative views about skin bleaching and skin whitening practices by women. The common sentiment was that 'naturally' light-skinned women were preferable to the pejoratively referred 'former black individuals' or (FBIs). These individuals would have chemically transformed their skin from a dark to a light tone. To shame them, people referred to them by their former skin colour as a reminder of their inauthenticity. Ben, 24, was a self-identified bleacher who claimed only to bleach the underside of his chin right through to his neck. Ben commented 'there is a certain level of beauty that is associated with being light-skinned.' Having said that, Ben was against the practice of bleaching by women, remarking that it was 'fake' beauty and a sexual turn off. Ben argued that there was something off-putting knowing that someone had deliberately altered their physical appearance. Asked to comment on why it was right for him to do it, but wrong for women to do the same, Ben implausibly made the argument that he was using chemical substances to get rid of blemishes on his body. It just so happened that he got a fairer skin tone in the process. He contrasted his situation with that of most women who he claimed were doing it to change the way they looked.

Aesthetics, Skin Bleaching and the Making of 'Former Black Individuals' (F.B.Is)

In the preceding section, I mentioned a pejoratives by which bleachers were sometimes referred. Former black individual or FBI is a derogatory term I first encountered in an interview with one Zimbabwean female

study participant. It made for a good laugh but instructive as well in the insights it provided into the production of beauty narratives. It is true in its literal meaning if one considers that a bleacher transitions from a darker skin tone to a lighter one. Yet, the term is also profoundly derogatory as its import is to body shame. In a sense, the pejorative is emblematic of the conflicting narratives skin bleaching among black African youths conjures. For example, 25-year-old Kete who is male and from Zimbabwe contended that these days men must be careful about the women they date, otherwise they will marry an FBI. 'That's a pseudo-yellow bone, man', said Kete tongue in cheek. A bleacher for over five years himself, Kete, without a hint of contradiction, bemoaned the prevalence of FBIs. Is FBI a local pejorative to Zimbabwe or is this a more widely used pejorative? This was difficult to establish. Among Zimbabweans, the more popular term used to refer to skin bleaching practices is '*kuyuzwa*' (using), which is sort of pidgin combining the Shona vernacular and English. The term F.B.I.'s genesis and usage therefore requires further research.

Overall, the term 'yellow bone' is central to the discourses of skin bleaching, particularly in southern Africa. The term denotes light-skinned black person, invariably a light-skinned black woman. Depending on the context, it carries both positive and negative connotations. Positively, yellow bone is the personification of beauty, sensuality and femininity. The reference however, carries negative inferences when used in the context of identity politics (ya Azibo 2011). Interestingly, most of the participants in my study, both male and female, expressed a desire to have a 'yellow bone' baby because light-skinned babies are 'cute', 'adorable' and 'good looking'.

Male students pointed out that some of the most popular guys on campus were those that were dating the most beautiful female students and invariably, these tended to be light-skinned. Most expressed a wish to date a 'yellow bone' to stand out on campus, but also detested how the yellow bone craze had produced sexually cannibalistic masculinities where there was intense competition to sleep with one. The male students claimed that it had become an informal rite of passage for most male students to either date or be sexually intimate with a 'yellow bone' or an FBI. At the time the study was conducted, the ability to do so had become a significant marker of manhood among male students.

Meanwhile, some female participants were of the view that the dawn of skin bleaching and whitening products had made men 'more presentable', 'less scruffy', 'delicious' and exemplars of 'softened masculinities.' These female participants claimed that many of their male counterparts were increasingly responding to the requirements of 'good physical appearance'

as many males were paying a lot of attention to their physical appearance and dressing. Many put this down to other variables but especially the media. As a result, males were investing considerably in beauty products, not necessarily as part of conspicuous consumption, but to keep up with trends of 'presentable men'.

Colourism, Masculinities and Femininities

There was enough evidence of colourism on campus. The colour complex in the university expressed a typical predilection for light skin among both male and female students. In fairness, this reality mirrored findings from other parts of Africa, which show a similar growing trend (Adebajo 2002; Blay 2011). As such, there is a window of opportunity here to interrogate the complex interlocking of colourism and gender. In particular, hierarchies of femininities and masculinities. African women, for example, are some of the biggest consumers of skin bleaching products (de Giudice and Yves 2002), with the practice reaching very high levels in countries like Ghana (Pierre 2008), Kenya, Senegal, Mali, South Africa and Nigeria (Adebajo 2002; Blay 2009, Harada et al 2001; Lewis et al 2009, Mahe et al 1993; Olumide et al 2008). Whilst obtaining prevalence rates on skin bleaching is challenging, there were estimates ranging from 30 percent of women in Ghana (Blay 2010) to even higher rates estimated in cities like Lagos, Nigeria, where up to 77 percent of women may use skin bleaching products (Kpinate, Muñoz Sastre and Mullet 2010).

It is fair to suggest that public discourses over skin bleaching and whitening can comfortably be contained into three broad analytical frameworks. The three frameworks reflect the tensions generated by the manipulations of the body, particularly the black African body. First, are beauty discourses, which are essentially based on the mass marketing of cosmetic whitening products (Hunter 2011). These discourses openly celebrate skin lightening as a means of asserting oneself. In that respect, such discourses are unapologetic about body remaking in the broad sense. Second, are public health discourses, which are designed to dissuade potential skin bleachers by exposing the health risks associated with the practices. From this perspective, there are numerous dermatological consequences to skin bleaching, including skin lesions, eczema, bacterial and fungal infections (Ajose 2005; Mahé et al. 2003). Third, are identity discourses, which mostly situate their objections to skin bleaching within the broad histories of colonial subjection. From this perspective, skin bleaching results from low self-esteem, and to some degree, self-hatred. The self-hate is explained as part of the lingering psychological scars of colonialism (Charles 2014). Commentators argue that skin bleaching

reflects a desire to de-Africanise oneself due to a negative African/black self-concept, and thus represents an attempt to emulate white people (Blay 2010).

At Africa University, most of the study participants rejected the notion that skin bleaching and whitening was in any way connected to colonialism. Whilst acknowledging that in some cases, there were self-esteem issues, these were not constructed as linked to notions of self-hatred. Instead, the overriding sentiment was that body-(re)making has always been interwoven into the fabric of African culture. Sakunda, a 23-year-old Angolan male student argued that even before Westernisation, African communities were engaged in body-(re)making for ritual or aesthetic purposes and bleaching and whitening should be viewed in that historical context. In this regard, bleaching was perceived as simply a continuation of practices that are as old as African culture itself. According to Sakunda, instead of identifying bleachers as victims of self-hatred, it was useful to view them as exemplars of contemporary African youth identities. Skin bleaching was therefore nothing more than an expression of the reality of the day. It is a view that was also supported by 21-year-old Liberian male, Yomy, who said:

That's not true. (That bleachers hate being black). Even after bleaching your skin, you remain a black person. Bleaching is just enhancing how you look. What then should we say about the white people who bleach their skin to get whiter or those that sit in the sun to get a tan? Do they hate being white or they just want to achieve a certain shade that makes them more comfortable?

Conclusion

The article concludes that sensuality, beauty, male identities and the (re) making of bodies among the university students remained contested terrains that evoked numerous emotions and feminine/masculine sensibilities. The findings provided a useful entry point into evolving youth identities and their notions of skin bleaching as it relates to aesthetics, masculinities and femininities. Notwithstanding African youths' long history of body remaking, there have been very few attempts at producing theoretical and conceptual insights into these practices. It is fair to suggest that these practices have largely escaped analytical scrutiny in terms of their broad consequences on communities in general and social relationships in particular. The (re) making of bodies, often portrayed in the practices of skin bleaching and the enhancement and reduction of various parts of the body, are increasingly pervasive practices in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. Unsurprisingly, these have generated much debate, discussion and controversy. Considering the potential psychosocial debates these practices are producing, further attention should be given to the subject.

References

- Adebajo, S. B., 2002, 'An epidemiological survey of the use of cosmetic skin lightening cosmetics among traders in Lagos, Nigeria', *Mercury* Volume 5, No. 7, pp.43-48.
- Blay, Y. A., 2011, 'Skin bleaching and global white supremacy: By way of introduction', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Volume 4, No. 4, pp.4-46.
- Brewer, J. D., 2000, *Ethnography*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Charles, C. A., 2003, 'Skin bleaching, self-hate, and black identity in Jamaica', *Journal of Black Studies*, Volume 33, No. 6, pp.711-728.
- Chitando E. & Chitando A., 2004, 'Black Female Identities in Harare: The Case of Young Women in Dreadlocks', *Zambezia*, Volume 31, No. 1 and 2, pp.1-21.
- Connell, R. W., 1995, *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S., 2011, 'The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research' in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.), London: Sage Publications.
- Hall, M. & Gough, B., 2011, 'Magazine and reader constructions of 'metrosexuality' and masculinity: A membership categorisation analysis', *Journal of Gender Studies*, Volume 20, No. 01, pp.67-86.
- Hunter, M.L., 2011, 'Buying racial capital: Skin-bleaching and cosmetic surgery in a globalized world', *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Volume 4, No. 4, pp.142-164.
- Jeffreys, S., 2000. 'Body art' and social status: Cutting, tattooing and piercing from a feminist perspective', *Feminism and Psychology*, Volume 10, No. 4, pp.409-429.
- Karamanoukian, R., et al, 2006, 'Aesthetic skin branding: a novel form of body art with adverse clinical sequela', *Journal of burn care & research*, Volume 27, No. 1, pp.108-110.
- Landau, P. S., & Kaspian, D. D., 2002, *Images and empires: visuality in colonial and postcolonial Africa*, University of California Press.
- Mayers, L.B., Judelson, D.A., Moriarty, B.W. and Rundell, K.W., 2002, 'Prevalence of body art (body piercing and tattooing) in university undergraduates and incidence of medical complications', *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, Vol. 77, No. 1, pp. 29-34.
- Olumide, Y.M., et al, 2008, 'Complications of chronic use of skin lightening cosmetics', *International Journal of Dermatology*, Volume 47, No. 4, pp.344-353.
- Perani, J., & Wolff, N. H., 1999, *Cloth, dress, and art patronage in Africa*, Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Pierre, J., 2008, 'I Like Your Colour! Skin bleaching and geographies of race in urban Ghana', *Feminist Review*, Volume 90, No.1, pp.9-29.
- Street, J.C., et al, 2015, 'Skin bleaching: A neglected form of injury and threat to global skin', *African Safety Promotion: A Journal of Injury and Violence Prevention*, Volume 12, No. 1, pp.52-71.
- Troman, G., Jeffrey, B., & Walford, G., 2005, *Methodological Issues and Practices in Ethnography (Studies in Educational Ethnography Volume 11)* In G. Troman, B. Jeffrey, & G. Walford, eds.), Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Ulin, P. R., 2002, *Qualitative Methods: A field guide for applied research in sexual and reproductive health*. North Carolina: Family Health International.
- Ya Azibo, D.A., 2011, 'Commentary: On skin bleaching and lightening as psychological misorientation mental disorder', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Volume 4, No. 4, pp.219-233.