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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CRITICAL ANALYSES ON WOMEN'S SEXUALITY IN OMOTIC PROVERBS

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#### ABSTRACT

This study analyzed Omotic proverbs to examine whether any gender biases exist in the way women's sexuality is portrayed. Primary and secondary data were used for the study. The proverbs were collected with an interview with ten informants from Omotic languages speaking areas and from two published sources on Omotic proverbs. Then the collected proverbs were analyzed qualitatively. The theoretical apparatus for the study has been drawn from a combination of approaches including patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and feminism. The selected proverbs were grouped based on their themes. The study revealed that in the selected Omotic proverbs, women's sexuality was portrayed inappropriately. Even though there is changing images of women's sexuality in the Omotic languages speaking family, it is wise to note that these changes are sometimes hampered by entrenched male centered societal views about women. Therefore, to bring radical change on the Omotic languages speaking people an extensive training and education about women's sexuality must be implemented by all concerned bodies.

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#### INTRODUCTION

According to Jeylan (2005) in Africa, women have long been used as a conduit via which men formed and solidified their relation with other men. Families enhance their wealth and alliance through giving away their female children. For example, among the Somali, women served as a commodity to seal peace between feuding groups in inter-tribal warfare (Lewis, 1985). The Somali also imposed other customary practices on their females, as part of rites of passage or for reasons of religion and tradition. To protect the chastity of their unmarried females, the Somalis long practiced infibulations. This was to provide "visual proof that an unmarried female is virgin" and to increase her value in the marriage deal. "The smaller the entrance to a bride's vagina, the greater her reputation, the higher her value in the marriage market and the more honorable her family becomes." (Hicks and Gwynne, 1995: 387) African proverbs communicate the existence of these and other modes of objectifying women within the display of the patriarchal structure. They clearly depict how African patriarchy objectifies women by placing different demands on their body and reproduction, and through inculcating different rituals of conformity to patriarchal demands reveal the patriarchal view that women could find

fulfillments when they give birth to children and ensure the perpetuation of the family (Ankrah et al., 1994). According to Jeylan (2005) one aspect of the suppression of women is their being considered as degraded sexual objects to satisfy the pleasure of men. African proverbs that portray women as sexual objects show the complex relationship between power and sexuality, and hegemonic masculinity as a source for the imposition and practice of unwanted sexual assault on women. They also point out the society's belief that female sexuality is determined by male sexual virility. The Igbo proverb, "A woman carrying a vagina would ask to be sexed, that the vagina is her own, but when it causes trouble, the real owner (of the vagina) would be looked for," depicts the society's view that women's sexuality is inactive in the absence of masculine involvement. Similarly, the proverb, "One cannot be afraid of the wide vagina because it cannot sex itself," pronounces the passivity of women's sexuality and by inference, the determinacy of masculinity. Traditionally, sexual violence is an encounter in which "the female right (sex) is violated by force, i.e., the male privilege" (Hahn, 1998: 150). They also demonstrate that the sexual humiliation of women is the manifestation as well as the reinforcement of women's gender-based oppression and men's collective and individual assumption of power over women (Disch, 1997). One aspect of the traditional socialization of males into dominance reflected in African proverbs is the male demonstration of their sexual capability on females (Tlou, 2002). The traditional ideology about women's sexuality in Africa reveals that women are losers in the battle of sexuality

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whereas men are considered as spoilers. But this wrong attitude towards women's sexuality can be disproved even using proverbs among the Omotic languages speaking people. This study tries to show the wrong ideologies that considers women as sexually passive and men as sexually active in Omotic proverbs.

**Conceptual Review of Proverbs:** Proverbs are considered the most common genre of folklore, found among all cultures of the world. They are simple and often short statements with deep meaning, guidelines for individual, family and village behaviors. Proverbs are not built from a vacuum, rather on repeated real life experiences and observations. Like any form of language, "proverbs are mirrors through which people look at themselves – a stage for experiencing themselves to others" (Malunga & Banda, 2004: 2). Similarly, Jackie Lee (2015) notes that proverbs are the mirror of cultures in that they: "can reflect the customs, traditions, values, opinions and beliefs of a particular society" (2015: 561). Indeed, by looking at peoples proverbs, we can understand how they think and look at the world, their culture, values, behaviors, aspirations, and preoccupation. A proverb is an adage; a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense, and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth expressed in it (Finnegan, 1970). Similarly, Okpewho (1992) suggests that, proverb is a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm. Proverbs can further be defined as: "short wise sayings which are often based on observable facts and heavily linked with the culture of the people" (Zakariyah, 2013: 22).

Based on the above definitions, proverbs could be conceptualized as any wise saying that converts the central idea in a given context, objectively and truthfully. While much has been written on what a proverb is, it is more important to understand what a proverb does. According to the Yoruba of Nigeria, "Proverbs are the horses of speech" meaning that in the event where communication gets lost, proverbs are used to recover it (Schipper, 1991: 1). Schipper's idea is succinctly apparent in the following Igbo proverb which says, "Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (Oha, 1999: 87), meaning that proverb help to accelerate the smooth glide of words through the throat. Proverbs has not been studied adequately among the Omotic languages speaking people. However, there are few attempts to collect and study Omotic proverbs. For instance, Bezabih (2011) collected more than 2000 Wolaita proverbs and compiled them in a book entitled as: 'Wolayttattoleemisohaasaya' [Wolaita proverbs]. Furthermore, Getachew and Tsegaye (1995) also collected Wolaita, Dawro, Gamo, and Gofa (Omotic language speaking family) proverbs, provided direct Amharic translation of each, and published in a book entitled as: 'Wolaita, Dawro, Gamo, and Gofa Proverbs and their Amharic Translation'. Meshesha et al. (2014) also published three articles on social, economic, and cultural implications of Wolaita proverbs. Moreover, Meshesha (2015) in his article entitled: "The Prejudiced Negative Images of Femininity in Wolaita Proverbs" analyzed Wolaita proverbs as a way of exposing the prejudiced negative images of femininity. Dereje (2017) also conducted his PhD on: "The images of women and the society's attitude in Wolaita proverbs." But all the studies conducted on the proverbs do not focus on women's sexuality in proverbs. Moreover there is no study on Omotic proverbs in relation to gender or the representations of women's sexuality in the society's proverbs.

Therefore, by examining the usage of proverbs by the Omotic languages speaking people, this study demonstrates the ways in which women's sexuality is constructed and reinforced using theoretical approaches including patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and feminism.

**Theoretical Framework:** This study is anchored on a combination of theoretical approaches including patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and feminism. Through the lens of these theories, the study tries to find out to what extent proverbs have been used among the Omotic languages speaking people to maintain the traditional sexual depiction of women. The study therefore attempts to identify and analyze women's sexuality as portrayed in the Omotic proverbs. In a society where patriarchal practices and beliefs are prevalent, the relationship between men and women is based on gender inequality. Patriarchy, as defined by social scientists such as Weber (1947), is "a system of government in which men rule society through their position as head of households" (quoted in Walby, 1990: 19). However, the meaning of the term has advanced since Weber, especially in the writing by radical feminists, who developed the elements of the domination of women by men. For example, Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (1990: 20). This particular culture privileges the exercise of men's power over women. Commenting on the meaning of patriarchy and its effects on women, Mutunda (2015) observes: Patriarchy is a gender system in which men dominate women. The endorsed superior status of men is encouraged and sustained by social institutions that are considered unquestionable. In addition, this system of social stratification based on sex provides men with power and material advantages while depriving women of both those benefits.

Deeply entrenched in the concept of patriarchy is the notion of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity is "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005:77). Hegemonic masculinity, when embodied by at least some men overtime and space, legitimates men's domination over women as a group. In essence, hegemonic masculinity, as Mutunda (2015) suggests, refers to that view of masculinity which has established dominance in society. In addition, this form of masculinity is mostly supported by social institutions namely schools, religion, and law, just to cite a few. Furthermore, Mimi Schippers (2007:94) has defined hegemonic masculinity as "the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women in their society". As shown in the definitions above, hegemonic masculinity legitimates the domination of men over women. Feminists have also focused on this gender inequality which stresses women's inferiority to men. Three feminist approaches namely the liberal, radical, and socialist, try to provide different explanations for the roots of gender inequality. Liberal feminism holds that "women and men are identical by their essential nature but women are deprived of the opportunities to realize their potentials on account of their gender" (Ndungo, 1998:47). Another liberal feminist, Betty Friedman (cited in Belfatmi, 2013: 16) explains gender inequality in terms of culture and social subordination.

She maintains that “lack of equal rights in different fields including education is the root of women’s oppression.” In fact, the liberal feminists believe there is no such thing as male/female nature but human nature. They imagine a society inhabited by human beings who will be the same in their essential nature. When some feminists began to perceive the inequality between women and men, they used the term “radical” to signify their commitment to seek the origin of the root cause of this inequality. One such theorist is Shulamith Firestone (1970) who is believed to be the first radical feminist. Throughout her work titled the dialectic of sex (1970), Firestone stresses that the root cause of women’s subordination is their biology. She argues that women’s biology, which includes menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, makes them to be dependent on men. This dependence inevitably produces unequal power relationships (Firestone, quoted in Belfatmi, 2013: 16). Other radical feminists argue that patriarchy is the origin of inequality existing between males and females. They focus on patriarchal oppression in every sphere of women’s lives from the most private to the most public. They stress the need to revalue the creative and nurturing aspects of femininity which have been devalued and distorted in patriarchal society. For instance, in her *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett (1970) maintains that patriarchy is perpetuated by the family, being the primary source of socialization which provides men with dominant disposition. She believes that patriarchy is the source of many social problems faced by women. She also argues that gender inequality is not related to social class but to male domination over women. In the same breath, Hartman (1997) argues that patriarchy creates the conditions for women to be systematically dominated, exploited and oppressed.

The very difference between men and women, which allow men to exploit the situation to dominate women and rule the world, is the very difference that concern radical feminists on a political level. Radical feminism sees that men have benefited of inequality; women, on the other hand, carry out unpaid work in higher jobs positions. Consequently, “unlike liberal feminism which claims that gender inequality should be reformed, radical feminism believes that it should be totally eradicated” (Belfatmi, 2013:17). Radical feminism promotes womanhood rather than aspiring to integrate and assimilate into male-dominated social arena. It is focused upon sexual oppression as a manifestation of women’s oppression and social order. Marxist and socialist feminism, nevertheless considers the entire system of capitalism as the root of women oppression. This theory highlights the provision of cheap labor to enhance capitalism. The theory finds significance in class relation in that one class is more advantaged than the other. Social feminists believe that the exploitative economic relations, where the worker is exploited by the dominant capitalist class, could serve as an understanding of gender relations. They further argue that women are second class citizen in patriarchal capitalism which demands for its survival on exploitation of working people and on the social exploitation of women (Humm, 1992). Social feminists hold that one way to get rid of gender inequality is the establishment of a communist society in which the production of wealth is commonly owned. They, therefore, relate gender inequality to economic differences.

## METHODOLOGY

**Design of the Study:** Qualitative research design was used for this study.

This is because it was believed to be suitable to interpret and explicate the existing women’s sexuality as revealed in the selected proverbs of the Omotic languages speaking people.

**Subjects of the Study:** The major population of this study is the Omotic languages speaking people. The researcher collected a total of more than 50 proverbs reflecting women’s sexuality. However, a sample of 15 proverbs was drawn from the 50 to the manageability and relevance of the study. Regarding the collection of the proverbs, three tools of data collection were used: document analysis, focus group study and semi-structured interview for 10 selected elders. Then, the collected proverbs were filtered based on their thematic relevance for the study and the selected 15 proverbs were analyzed using qualitative method of data analysis.

**Sampling Technique:** For this study, the researcher used purposive sampling procedure to come up with 15 proverbs having thematic reflection of women’s sexuality. The proverbs were collected through interviewing 10 elders who were systematically selected (using snowball sampling) from various communities of Wolaita, Dawro and Gofa zones based on their deep knowledge of the Omotic languages speaking people’s culture.

**Data Analysis:** For the analysis of the proverbs, the researcher used qualitative method of data analysis. Then, he presented the results and discussion in a systematic approach of transcribing the proverbs, translating them into English, and then analyzing and interpreting them within their relevant thematic category based on the theoretical framework of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and feminism.

**Analysis of the Selected Proverbs:** The discussions in this paper are based on data collected from documented sources and interviews made with 10 Omotic languages speaking native informants. The proverbs were then put into ten categories according to various themes that were found relevant to shade light on the ways women’s sexuality is perceived among the Omotic languages speaking people. These include: proverbs related to circumcision, proverbs related to fidelity, promiscuity, reluctance and sexual consent, proverbs relating to women’s sexual immorality, and proverbs showing women’s criticisms on men’s sexual incapability.

**Proverbs related to Circumcision:** Before dealing with the meaning of circumcision in Omotic proverbs, I think it will be good to see the traditional context how and when it is performed. According to my informants circumcision (“qaxxaraa” in Wolaita language) is performed by a traditionally skilled woman in circumcision among the Wolaita people. Girls are not circumcised traditionally until they get matured and get ready for a marriage ceremony. A girl is circumcised either at the initiative of her parents or by the one who wants to marry her. At circumcision the girl should be matured and get ready for her marriage ceremony. The issue of circumcision (“qaxxaraa”) will not be forgotten when marriage ceremony is arranged, because they are assumed to be highly interrelated cultural conditions. For this reason, the bride groom brings sheep (“Dorssaa”), butter (“Oyssaa”), comb (“Baxxariyaa”), cloth (“Maayyuwaa”), and mirror (“Hereggaa”). The sheep will be slaughtered and the blood and meat shall be eaten by the girl who waits in bed (“siiritta”) till the wound heals. Koso (“Hanqqoquwaa”), a traditional drink which is considered as a medicine is used for clearing the

bride's stomach. She will drink it one day before her wedding. At least two months after the circumcision ("qaxxaraa") the wedding date will be fixed by both families. The bride is also expected to prepare different kinds of food and materials for her wedding ceremony being assisted by her mother. The bride's father also will prepare wedding gifts ("woyttuwaa") for the bride and the bride groom. The gifts are usually expected to be cattle. Nowadays, this traditional practice is changing among the Wolaita people. Though the form of this culture is changing, the practice of circumcising girls is still taking place in some rural areas among the Wolaita people. Marrying the uncircumcised pollutes the clan (qaxtaretenaroeikkoyarraybayes). The function of proverbs like this one is to keep mutilation as a positive norm in order to control women's sexuality because it is believed traditionally that women are more powerful in their sexual potential than men. Even though it is harmful for women and the society as a whole this traditional assumption has continued and is still being practiced among the Wolaita society as some of my interviewees told me.

Among a traditional Wolaita people circumcision is assumed to be important and a woman who is not circumcised is considered as the one who pollutes her clan. But nowadays, it is known that circumcision is a very dangerous practice that harms women in many ways. It can cause many problems when women give birth due to the scar women develop at mutilation. This is caused as a result of their body lacking flexibility. Nowadays it is known that women's circumcision has no value for them. It rather affects their marital life. So the reason why people practice it in the rural areas and even in some towns among the Wolaita people is due to their wrong assumption about it. A woman who is not circumcised is assumed to be sexually active and might not be satisfied by her husband's sexual relationship with her; and as a result could go to other men and becomes promiscuous. This shows that the society has an attitude that women are not sexually inactive rather they are sexually better than men. That is why the society tries to reduce women's sexual capacity so that they could be passive like men for whom circumcision is thought to have no effect. I think the problem is not on understanding whether women are sexually active or not, but the problem lies on how the assumed problem tried to be solved which makes women suffer in their life. This also indicates that women's sexual desire has not been given due value; rather women's sexual desire is primarily seen from men's advantage.

One of my interviewees among the Wolaita people told me that she circumcised her child at the absence of her husband because he thought it is harmful for women. Even though she was informed that it is not a safe practice, she was dominated by social norms. Wolaita children also need to be circumcised because they do not want their own friends to look down on them for their being uncircumcised. In order to avoid the pressure that comes from their own relatives they prefer to be circumcised. In the old days circumcision was a common and an official practice in the Wolaita society. Because of this the Wolaita people use the next proverb which says: "Doonaa libbamiyaa bollotiyo qaxxarawusu", "A heroine mutilates her husband's mother". They use this proverb to appreciate someone who does something that needs courage. But nowadays because of the action taken by the government circumcision of girls is being minimized; however it is still being practiced in secret.

Traditional society believes that if women are not circumcised they will not be satisfied during sexual intercourse; they are assumed to break household materials, become adulteress, become offensive and so on. This proves the idea raised by Akatsa-Bukachi (2005). He stated that women's oppression is caused by lack of physical integrity for the female body. In this he includes sexual and reproductive integrity. For example, female genital mutilation is done in order to reduce the sexuality of the woman so that she may become less sexual and remain chaste for the full and sole enjoyment of her husband. The proverb reveals that more attention is given to normalize male dominated culture rather than cope with the problems concerning women. But nowadays the situation is changing among the Wolaita people because of the actions the government is taking on those people who circumcise women illegally and due to the expansion of education among the Wolaita people.

### Sexuality and consent

Mishshireyaanetukushenbitaneygitaabirshsheys

A man unties his belt without the consent of his wife

According to Oha (1999) the notion of control is reflected in the practice of female genital mutilation. The idea is to deny women the ability to have sexual pleasure, because the woman is regarded as systematically, an object of man's pleasure. The idea of a woman's sexuality belonging to a man is vividly illustrated in this Omotic proverb: "A man unties his belt without the consent of his wife" from this proverb, a woman does not even have the right to her own sexuality. The idea in the proverb explicitly denies the woman her right to sexual pleasure. This makes her to be the property of man or his sex object. This is a very dangerous thought that must be changed through educating the society.

This proverb shows that women are raped even by their own husbands in a traditional Omotic languages speaking society. In this proverb it can be seen that the right of women is not given value as far as the man concentrates on his own need by considering her as a means of getting his own pleasure. This shows that considering women as a means of sexual pleasure for a man or as a sex object is an age old traditional attitude that needs radical change through teaching about the nature of women and their interest. Chastity before marriage on the part of the woman was essential in a traditional people. A woman who was not virtuous at marriage is a disgrace not only to herself, but also to members of her family. According to Idowu (1996) virginity is a cherished virtue almost in all traditional societies. A woman is expected to be faithful to her husband while the rule is loose regarding the man. In fact women are expected to be calm when their husbands have been found to have been involved in extra marital sexual affairs. While conducting this study I heard that a man had killed his wife because he found out that she had sexual affair with his friend. But I do not think the woman would do the same if she found her husband with another woman. This shows that the culture is in favor of men than women. Women's sexual desire is not given attention, whereas men are assumed deserving to enjoy their sexual desire even out of their marriage. According to Jeylan (2005) one aspect of the suppression of women is their being considered as degraded sexual objects to satisfy the pleasure of men. African proverbs that portray women as sexual objects show the complex relationship between power

and sexuality, and hegemonic masculinity as a source for the imposition and practice of unwanted sexual attack on women. Charon (1993:432) reminds us that “every society has its cognitive policemen who administer the ‘official’ definition of reality”. In their respective cases, the agents of social control like proverbs provide informal and formal disciplinary measures that are meant to keep men and women away from behavior that disturbs the normative structure of the society. The end result is the assurance of greater conformity and order, as opposed to deviance and disorder. Early thinking about the difference between women and men was based on essentialist ideas about gender, which maintained that women’s and men’s differences are based on biology. The belief that biology is destiny suggests in comparable situations, men exhibit masculine psychological traits, such as aggression which includes sexuality, rationality and assertiveness, whereas women will exhibit feminine traits such as gentleness, intuitiveness, and insensitivity (Mutunda, 2016).

According to Jeylan (2005) in Africa, women have for a long time been used as a conduit through which men formed and solidified their relations with other men. Families enhance their wealth and alliance by giving away their female children in marriage, often against the wish of the daughters. Men’s sexuality is considered as normal in a traditional society. But the sexual nature of women was given negative portrayals to enhance society’s unfavorable attitude towards women. The next proverb also shows how women’s sexuality is distorted among the Omotic languages speaking society.

#### **Sexuality and Women as Promiscuous:**

*Awaaqiyaamachchiyaaxinaamogguwaappediggawusu.*

A wife who is promiscuous prevents the corpse of her husband from being buried.

According to this proverb a woman who is promiscuous prevents the corpse of her husband from being buried in order to have sex with it. When a husband dies what we expect is that his wife will cry for him. But here a wife is assumed to prevent the dead body from being buried for sexual intercourse. Such proverbs trigger society to hate women even if there are no grounds to do so. One of my interviewee told me that this could be true; he said that in Wolaita if a husband is in a sick bed and his soul is not coming out, his wife will be advised to have sexual intercourse and the husband will be helped to get pleasure and to breathe his last. He also said that the society believes on women’s active sexual capacity and they used to eat raw met (which is a favorite food almost all over Ethiopia) in order to give them a capacity to have a long time enjoyment while having sexual intercourse with their wives. Even though this idea needs further research, whether a raw met improves men’s sexuality or not, but the idea still shows that the society believes in women’s active sexual capacity than men; which is the main reason for performing the circumcision of women among traditional societies like the Omotic languages speaking families in Ethiopia.

Immorality of all forms is detested in the Omotic languages speaking society and if people were found to be immoral according to their culture, they are ostracized. The community teaches people to abide by the norms that are established using oral literature like proverbs. This however does not suggest that moral rules are not broken in the society. Immorality as a

matter of fact is not gender based. In other words, both men and women could be guilty of unethical conduct. But, proverbs like the above one are used to support those biased thoughts on women.

Other societies in Africa also have the same ideology like the Omotic languages speaking people towards women’s sexual promiscuity. According to Mutunda (2016), though a woman’s beauty matters when it comes to choosing a wife, Lunda peoples proverbs also take a step further to allege that beautiful women as they are promiscuous and dangerous: they say: “mukwenuwukudyandikanokahelainokawukumutalilakukuu wa”; (“The best friend you share food with is a snake, watch the way she behaves”), in other words, (“the wife you love and care for is a snake in disguise”). The philosophy communicated here is seen in another proverb from Tigre society (people from Northern part of Ethiopia) which states: “Lela mbomakumadikiakuminy” literally translated as (“If you bring up or care for a python, some day it will bite or swallow you”) meaning that a woman is like a snake, no matter how well a man cares for her; some day she will leave him for another man. In this proverb, a woman is compared to a snake that is poisonous and causes excruciating pain when it bites. Also in this proverb, a woman is depicted as a trouble-maker and very dangerous. The implication of the proverb is that a woman by nature is unreliable, and by virtue of this, she can “hook up” with any man she chooses to have sexual relationship with. The proverb thus exclusively ascribes a psychological trait to women without compelling evidence for it. This emanates from the belief that “men are the normative model of humanity and women are the extra” (Hagos, 2015: 186).

Traditional African society has its cultural moral code of behavior and it is observed that among the Omotic languages speaking people, male sexuality transcends this code. The proverb shows how men’s numerous sexual experiences are approved and endorsed by tradition. Sexual promiscuity allows men to have more than one sexual partner. It allows and finds it acceptable for a woman to share a man. They argue that sexual expressivity is undesirable in the female but tolerated in the male. Among the traditional Omotic languages speaking people women bear the burden of moral uprightness while men are allowed to seek numerous sexual partners freely. It suggests that men are entitled to their fun, and therefore exempted from this sexual moral code while ‘chastity is esteemed as the apex of feminine dignity’ (Tyson, 2006:12). In other words, it suggests that ‘sexual shyness is the measure of a good woman’s moral character’, while the opposite is valued and encouraged among men. Sometimes, this is taken to the extreme by way of enforced virginity tests. In relation to this women are usually represented as unfaithful in sexual matters in the proverbs of the Omotic languages speaking people. Even if women are unfaithful in this regard, it could be the society’s lack of interest to fulfill their sexual desires. One of my interviewees told me that her husband does not care about her sexual desire, but he enjoys with other women. She also told me that she will not be ashamed if she go like him; because she also have the same desire which is not considered by her husband. The next proverb also shows the depiction of women as sexually unfaithful among the Omotic languages speaking society.

### Proverbs related with women's Sexual Infidelity

Mechaasaaameneyogeycharkuwakuchiyoga

Trusting a woman is holding a cloud.

A cloud cannot be held by hand because it evaporates. Comparing a woman to a cloud degrades her worth. If a woman is not trusted, life will be very challenging not only for women but for their husbands as well. For example, a husband accepts his children by trusting his wife, since they do not come out from his body like they do from their mothers. A father is expected to believe his wife that the babies that she delivers belong to him. If he does not trust, everything will end there, especially in a traditional society where people could not check their children by genetic identification. Therefore lack of trust in women can cause marital problems which could be the reason for divorce.

Awayisiiqiyonaiyasawotawusu,  
azinaysiiqiyomachchiyalufatawusu

A girl well treated by her father and husband commits infidelity.

This proverb also shows that a girl does not deserve well treatment; for fear of committing infidelity. As Beneria (2003) states traditional society privilege men over women through direct or indirect dominance over women, or by severely restricting women's movements, education, and economic development. Due to this traditional patriarchal structures show great resistance to change. Thus, social construction denotes those processes and agencies planned or unplanned, by which individuals are taught, persuaded, or compelled to conform to the usages and life values of the groups to which they belong. The ultimate aim of such an agenda is woman's "passive acceptance and respect for male domination" (Gilbert and Taylor, 1992). Men in a traditional society usually redirect their responsibility towards women or they will make their problem common with women. For example the Wolo Amhara's of Ethiopia uses a proverb which says: "Emisena Qula Yebalebetun Cheger Ayawqem" (Vagina and penis do not know their owner's problem). This proverb is used especially when a family could not manage the number of their children. Problems are expected to be shared by women, but pleasure is expected to be men centered. The next proverbs also represent women as sexually reluctant.

### Proverbs related with Women's Sexual Reluctance

Shoorwawukehiyageela'yabaawaasonyelawusu.

A girl who exposes herself to premarital sex gets a risk of giving birth to a fatherless child

Shalqqoshaarayaayeeyechuwadiggess

Unwanted pregnancy delays the woman from her mother's funeral.

As stated by Meshesha et al (2014) the traditional culture of the Wolaita people has socially recognized patterns of life for unmarried girls. Proverbially they criticize those girls who act differently from such pattern of life. Thus, they say, "Geela'iyagelaasugiidosaa minttanyelanawuyawusu," "A girl

comes back to her parent's home for giving birth to a child exactly after a week that she has been married"; just to provide a negative comment on sexual intercourse she has been making before marriage. In line with such unacceptable behavior of making sex before marriage, the Wolaita people say, "Shoorruwawukehiyageela'iyaaawaasonyelawusu," "A girl who is generous to her neighboring boys gives birth to a child before marriage". Wolaita people's culture is restricted with sexual fidelity towards women. They reject the idea of sex before marriage and disrespect girls who commit such an act. They say: "Shoorwawukehiyageela'yabaawaasonyelawusu", "a girl who exposes herself to premarital sex within the community gets a risk of giving birth to a fatherless child".

When this situation happens, the girl herself and her family get into serious crisis in the society. But the focus is on the women not their sexual partner, because the male is considered to do whatever he wishes. The Wolaita people also use another proverb to discourage woman from a premarital sex intercourse. They say: "shalqqoshaarayaayeeyechuwadiggess" which means: "unwanted pregnancy delays the woman from her mother's funeral". The function of this proverb is to discourage a pre-marital pregnancy of girls. Culturally, it is accepted that it is curse to a family when a girl gets pregnant before marriage. According to Fikre (2012) a child delivered in such situation used to be buried alive in traditional Wolaita society in the past. The social base of this proverb is advising girls to grow with good behavior. The social value of this proverb is to advise, girls to avoid pre-marital sexual intercourse and discourage illegal birth in the society. But the advice is directed towards women who are considered as responsible for the sexual intercourse which is committed by both men and women. This shows the biases the society has towards women on sex related problems. But nowadays the traditional ideas of sexual fidelity are changing in the Wolaita people. Both men and women are regarded as unfaithful if they were found committing sex before marriage and outside of their marriage partners. Some of my interviewees told me that the change that equally treated men and women in sexual matters came because of the influence of Biblical ideologies after the conversion of Wolaita society into Christianity.

**Proverbs showing women's criticisms on men's sexual incapability:** A woman who distorts sexual position breaks a penis

Katuwabeledeatümetamentewsu.

A man who is not capable to satisfy on a floor pulls to a bed  
Sean gedenagearsewgoches

Let my heel rub me than a weak person to exhaust me

Gelqaygilenapetegendetenegorogewsu.

Even though women are considered as passive sexually, but there are proverbs that show their opposition to this idea in their folklore. Most of the proverbs from Omotic languages speaking people give more value to men's sexual right over women. But there are proverbs that show men's incapability to satisfy women's sexual desire. Traditionally women were forced to be circumcised because men believe that they could not satisfy women unless their sexual power is reduced by cutting their clitoris which is their sensitive part to enjoy sex. This means ignoring the desire of women for the entire benefit of men. This shows that women's sexuality and desire has not been given due value, rather ignored and misrepresented wrongly.

The following proverbs show that women are not happy with their men's weak sexual performance, due to men's ignorance of women's sexuality. Men also blame women by using proverbs when they fail to satisfy women. They say: "a woman who distorts sexual position breaks a penis" ("Katuwabeledeatümetetamentewsu"). The women also respond using proverbs to show men who are not capable to satisfy them. They say: "a man who is not capable to satisfy on a floor pulls to a bed" "(Sean gedenagearsewgoches." The same idea is also expressed in Amharic proverb which says: "LayteqemegnkitenAretebegn" It shows that even though the woman wanted the satisfaction she gets nothing but being moisturized by the man's sperm. The men also use the next proverb among the Omotic languages speaking people when the women are not willing to have sex that do not satisfy them. They say: "when there is no woman, you will be forced to have sex with a donkey."

This shows that since animals do not have knowledge, their right is violated by men. But if men treated women properly they will not be exposed to this very shameful act. Moreover proverbs from Omotic languages speaking people also depicts women as preferring masturbation than having sex with men who could not satisfy them as they wanted unlike men who prefer bestiality as a solution for sexual satisfaction at the absence of their sexual partners. The Women also say: "Let my heel rub me than a weak person to exhaust me" ("Gelqaygilenapetegendetenegorpogewsu" this shows that a woman like a man desires sexual satisfaction from men. If they do not get what they wanted, they will try another solution to fix their sexual need. It also implies that a woman desires to have masturbation if a man could not satisfy her. Studies also show that most women enjoy being touch slowly on their clitoris than to have direct sexual intercourse with men. This shows that men are ignorant about the desire of women in their sexual interactions in a traditional society like the Omotic languages speaking people of Ethiopia. I think the best solution to improve the sexuality of both men and women is to incorporate sex related educational system for our people.

## Conclusions and Recommendation

### Conclusion

According to Jeylan (2005) and other researchers African proverbs about sexuality reveal that women are losers in the battle of sexuality whereas men are spoilers. Sexual violence is also considered as an encounter in which "the female right (sex) is violated by force, i.e., the male privilege" (Hahn, 1998: 150). They also demonstrate that the sexual humiliation of women is the manifestation as well as the reinforcement of women's gender-based oppression and men's collective and individual assumption of power over women (Disch, 1997). One aspect of the traditional socialization of males into dominance in Africa is the male demonstration of their sexual competence on females (Tlou, 2002). Even though the same idea is reflected in Omotic proverbs that proves the ideas reflected by previous studies; Contrary to these ideas; it can be seen from this study that women are not sexually passive as they were considered in many proverbs of African societies. As it can be seen in the Omotic proverbs' women also use proverbs to show men's sexual incapability to satisfy the desires of women (here we can see that men are sexually passive while women are sexually active and competent than men). I think this changing image of women in Omotic proverbs help us to view women's sexual representations from

a different direction. I think most of the problem came from viewing women from men's point of view which does not consider women's interest and desire. The problem of misunderstanding women's sexuality by men still could be seen among the Omotic languages speaking people's proverbs or traditions. Even though the traditional attitude of the society is changing among the Omotic languages speaking people towards women sexuality, but a lot of work must be done in order to change the society's attitude radically.

### Recommendation

Even if there is changing images of women among the Omotic proverbs that could help us to view women's sexuality from a different view point; there is still misunderstanding women's sexuality among the Omotic languages speaking people. As we have seen how women's sexuality is represented in Omotic proverbs, women are not still advantaged in terms of their sexuality. Based on the above conclusion of the proverbs analyzed and interpreted the researcher has made the following recommendations:

- In order to change the age old traditions that undermines and oppress women's sexuality further studies should be conducted in other areas of folklore among the Omotic languages speaking people.
- Most studies in Africa shows that women's sexuality is negatively portrayed as passive. They are considered as passive compared with men who are considered as active in their sexuality. But this study shows that there is changing images of women among the Omotic languages speaking people's proverbs. Hence researchers that study women's sexuality in proverbs must give due attention to those proverbs that shows women's active sexuality.
- Moreover sex related educational programs should be designed in order to change the society's traditional thoughts that undermine women's sexuality among the Omotic languages speaking people in particular and Ethiopia in General.

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