Between tradition and modernity: Girls' talk about sexual relationships and violence in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique

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This paper interrogates the influence of a tradition-modernity dichotomy on perspectives and practices on sexual violence and sexual relationships involving girls in three districts of Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique. Through deploying an analytical framework of positioning within multiple discursive sites, we argue that although the dichotomy misrepresents the complexity of contemporary communities, it is nonetheless deployed by girls, educational initiatives, and researchers in their reflections on girls' sexual practices and sexual violence. The analysis examines variations between communities in patterns of and perspectives about sexual relationships, transactional sex and sexual violence. It illuminates ways in which features of 'modernisation' and 'tradition' both exacerbate and protect girls from violence. Across contexts, girls actively positioned themselves *between* tradition and modernity, while positioning others at the extreme poles. Education initiatives also invoked bipolar positions in their attempts to protect girls' rights to education and freedom from violence. The paper concludes by considering the implications for educational intervention and the potential for the analytical framing to generate richer, more contextualised understandings about girls' perspectives, experiences and ways of resisting sexual violence.

Introduction

There are few comparative studies of girls' experiences of sexual violence. Where comparisons across sites have been made, they have tended to distinguish between rural and urban settings, generating questions about the influence of context on patterns of violence, including the influence of modernisation. While these are important questions, in this paper we argue that the dichotomy between tradition and modernity evident in the literature on young women's sexual relationships and sexual violence reinforces a view of rural communities as static and backward, and of girls in poor, rural communities as passive victims. In contrast, urban settings, transformed by modernising influences, are depicted as dynamic, progressive spaces, bringing new risks but also creating spaces in which young women may have some agency in negotiating sexual relationships. However, in their discussions about sexual relationships and sexual violence, girls in a research study in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique conducted in 2013, talked about standing *between* tradition and modernity. Whether they lived in the town centre, the edge of town or in more remote rural communities, their accounts contradict the sharp tradition/modernity dichotomy.

In this paper, we develop a theorisation of positioning to offer a more nuanced comparative account of the dynamics of sexual relationships and sexual violence in girls' lives. This

theorisation enables us to explore the ways in which material and discursive contexts, which are themselves fluid, influence gender norms, sexual practices and violence, and to examine the active ways in which girls engage with these contexts to negotiate subjectivities. Careful attempts at self-positioning enable girls to resist the dangers they attach to the two poles of tradition and modernity. But such self-positioning also entails distancing from other members of their communities, who are cast at the extreme ends of the pole, thus re-working the dichotomy and having the potential to disrupt everyday relationships with peers or family members who are perceived as too 'modern' or too 'backward'. Through comparing these dynamics around the ways girls in three communities navigate conflicting femininity discourses, gender norms, sexual relationships and sexual violence, we aim to develop an analytic framing that can generate insights into the relationship between sexual violence and social context, and to reflect on the educational implications.

Changing patterns of sexual violence in the literature

Although there is a rapidly expanding literature documenting girls' experiences of sexual violence in schools and communities in different contexts, there is little agreement on how patterns of violence vary according to spatial location or whether they have changed over time. A key axis of the debate has been on the effects of modernity versus tradition, and linked to this the relationship of violence with poverty and inequality. Some (e.g. Pinker, 2011) have drawn on progress narratives (Dube 1988) to argue that modernity, including economic and industrial development, expansion of schooling and literacy, information technologies and particularly the influence of human rights discourse, has led to a decline since the mid-20th century in violence against women in the global north. Lending some support to this view are studies that have found higher prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in poorer regions (World Health Organisation 2013) and in traditional rural communities than in more industrialised settings, where there may be better provision of services and female empowerment (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006). Such violence has been associated with patriarchal gender norms, in which women are expected to submit to male domination. IPV and other 'harmful traditional practices', including early marriage and female genital mutilation, serve to maintain gender hierarchies (Winter, Thompson and Jeffreys 2002), most commonly in rural communities of non-western societies.

Other studies, however, have found that gender violence persists or increases with modernisation. Several studies in Mozambique, for example, have revealed higher rates of forced sex against girls in urban than rural areas (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2002; Instituto Nacional da Saúde, 2010; Andersson et al. 2012). These studies pose a challenge to progress narratives in which economic development, the growth of rights discourses, changing gender norms and increasing sexual freedoms for women are assumed to lead to reductions in gender violence. Such assumptions have been critiqued from a number of perspectives. There is a persuasive body of work arguing that economic development has not led to reductions in violence, and that modernisation has increased inequalities and gender violence (Merry 2009; Walby 2013). A number of commentators have argued that increasing economic insecurity, inequalities and destabilisation of norms that sustain male privilege make it difficult for young men to attain hegemonic masculine ideals , or those characteristics, such as strength, control and the ability to provide, that successful men are expected to display. Thwarting of these expectations has been associated with increasing the potential for violence (Moore 1994;

Swartz, Harding and De Lannoy 2012; Finchman 2014). Others however, have critiqued this perspective as both inaccurate and discriminatory, since gender violence is not a way of life for many men disempowered by poverty (Bennett 2010). African feminist writers have pointed out that rights discourses, often equated with modernity and the global north, are integral to national debates on morality, justice and humanity in African contexts and thus part and parcel of cultural practices (Ndashe 2005; Bennett 2010). While for many women life may have improved, inequitable gender regimes persist with modernisation. Indeed, the roots of modernity in the 18th century European Enlightenment cemented a gender hierarchy in which masculinity was associated with science, reason and progress, and femininity positioned beneath this and associated with tradition and the private sphere (Paechter 2003). Gender violence has continued to sustain gender hierarchies and to be a form through which masculine dominance is enacted in modernised and modernising contexts (Hearn 2012; Jakobsen 2014), including through the institutional cultures of schools (Harber 2004; Dunne 2008). A growing literature in Europe and the USA based on empirical studies with school aged girls has drawn attention to their commonplace experiences of sexual harassment, exploitation and sexualisation associated with new technologies and commercialism (Stein 2005; Barter et al. 2009; Ringrose et al. 2012).

A rich body of research in sub-Saharan Africa focusing on young women's experiences of sexual coercion and transactional sex has considered the ways in which such practices vary between settings associated with tradition and modernity. Many studies have shown how young women in poor communities may be compelled into sex with older men for survival, subsistence or to pay school fees, and have demonstrated how young women have little negotiating power within such encounters (Luke and Kurz 2002; Madise, Zulu and Ciera 2007; Hattori and DeRose 2008). However, a number of studies from South Africa have associated features of modernity with increasing agency for young women in sexual decision-making, and with constraints on that agency. For example, Jewkes and Morrell (2012) found that young women exercised a high degree of control in negotiating entry into sexual relationships, though once in these relationships their negotiating power waned. South African studies have traced how 'modern' young women are expected to be sexually active and material consumers and are bombarded by a proliferation of media images showing glamorous lifestyles, wealth and easy sex in soap operas, billboards and magazines (Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Jewkes and Morrell 2012). They may choose to engage in transactional sex to enact a discourse of freedom symbolised by sexual activity, and for material goods, including fashionable clothes and jewellery. But the imbalance of power in transactional sexual relationships with older men who have greater spending power constrains girls' agency and enhance risks of violence within those relationships (Hampshire et al. 2011; Stoebenam et al 2011; Jewkes and Morrell 2012). In many African countries, cross-generational sex has been a feature both of tradition, where it has been endorsed within early marriage practices, and of modernity, where girls are sometimes blamed for breaking chastity taboos (Walker et al 2014).   Studies with young women in cities in Ghana (Oduro, Swartz and Arnot 2012), Kenya (Chege and Arnot 2012) and South Africa (Salo 2003) have traced how, influenced by global cultural flows, young women try to break free of normative femininities associated with tradition, but the continuing consequences of poverty can trap them within risky and violent sexual encounters. This literature on coercive and transactional sex suggests that some aspects of modernising may be contaminating through bringing new risks, posing a powerful reposte to assumptions within progress narratives. It starts to draw out some of the complex dilemmas for young women, struggling to assert identities as 'modern' young women.

Recurring through these studies is a tendency to pit tradition against modernity. Traditional gender norms, associated particularly with poor, rural communities, are held to violate and constrain girls' agency and sexual freedoms (Human Rights Watch 2010; Parikh 2012; Jakobsen 2014). In contrast, in the studies discussed above modernity is seen to erode such constraints and expand possibilities for sexual agency, but most studies also point to the continuing material and discursive risks of transactional sex for women in contemporary, urban settings, for whom the potential to negotiate sex and relationships remains hindered by financial dependence, and generational and gender power differentials, leaving them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. While these studies go some way to uncovering changing dynamics around sexual choice and coercion for young women across time and space, the depictions of tradition or modernity give little attention to the heterogeneity of postcolonial contexts, in which indigenous and modernising forces are interwoven in complex ways (Appadurai 1996; Eisenstadt 2000; Holden 2008). While there is some nuance in the depiction of 'modern' girls, they are contrasted with more homogenised representations of girls in poor, rural communities as victims of poverty and cultural norms. There is therefore a need to move beyond the tradition-modernity dichotomy, and to build a conceptual vocabulary that enables us to explore the dynamics of gender violence with girls in diverse contexts criss-crossed by multiple discourses and social conditions. We attempt to do this through working with a theorisation of positioning.

Positioning gender, tradition and modernity

The concept of positioning has been used within poststructuralism to analyse the relationship between discourse and subjectivity (Burr 1995; Davies and Harre 1999). Theories of positioning view the subject as produced within and by sets of social beliefs, norms and practices, or discourses, which, though often accepted as taken-for-granted truths, are not fixed but historically and socially constituted. Postcolonial critiques, for example, have traced the continuing domination of international organisations, governments and NGOs through development discourses that privilege knowledge systems from the global north, reinforced through representations of the south as backward and inferior (Spivak 1988; Mohanty 1991; Wells 2015). Feminist writers have traced how shoring up the boundaries of binary gender discourses entails those who step outside conventions of manhood or womanhood facing exclusion, hostility and violence (Bennett 2010). Ian Holden's analysis of the autobiographical writings of political leaders in new postcolonial states links together these binary discursive formulations around gender and tradition-modernity (Holden 2008). For leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, first president of independent Ghana, building a new nation required constructing an ideal masculinity, embodied within the leader, that was distanced from stereotypes of African masculinity under colonialism, and his writings emphasise self-control, asceticism, leadership and rationalism[1]. Such self-positioning was achieved in part through assigning the opposite qualities to women, who were associated in Nkrumah's writings with emotion, motherhood and tradition, and mainly erased from narratives of nation-building. Though inflected by indigenous influences, the drive for the modern nation, Holden argues, entailed distancing from tradition, and from the femininity to which tradition is discursively bound.

As Holden's analysis illustrates, positioning is not just a passive process, but involves active alignment with subject positions within a range of discourses in order to construct a version of the self. Investments in particular subject positions may bring particular benefits, such as social

status or social acceptance even when there are evident disadvantages. For example, where there are femininity norms of compliance and domesticity, there may be social advantages for women in not speaking out against violence by their intimate partners or in reinterpreting such violence as a sign of love (Wood and Jewkes 1997). But, as discussed in the previous section, in the discourse of the 'modern girl' signifiers of chastity and domesticity compete with autonomy and sexual freedom, creating complex dilemmas of self-positioning along a sexuality-decency continuum (Duits and Van Zoonen 2005). It is in managing conflicting positions within multiple discursive fields that there may be spaces for agency (McNay 2001).

Positioning is used in this paper as a conceptual tool to analyse the ways girls are positioned, and position themselves and others within multiple discursive sites. Our comparative analysis explores how these positioning processes operate in three districts of three countries with varying material and discursive influences. Spatially, we are interested in how material and discursive contexts position girls in ways that may protect from or increase risks of violence, and in how girls actively negotiate subject positions. Temporally, our analysis looks at how girls position themselves and others in relation to durable and long-held norms and practices in their communities, in relation to disruptive moments/flows associated with modernisation (such as NGO interventions, new technologies, changing labour patterns), and their own future projections. Through this analytic process, our intention is to develop an analysis that disrupts the distortions of the tradition-modernity binary in work with girls on sexual relationships and violence.

Before considering the girls' own positioning, we introduce the national and local contexts in which the research took place, focusing particularly on their location within the tradition-modernity dichotomy/discourse.

Research contexts and methods

Since independence, Kenya Ghana and Mozambique have been undergoing processes of modernisation, and there have been high levels of economic growth in recent years, and strong drives towards Education for All, particularly in basic education. However, the material benefits associated with modernisation have been unequally distributed. Ghana is now ranked as middle income, but 30% of its population are living in multi-dimensional poverty[2], with poverty levels highest in the north of the country far from Accra. Kenya too has a relatively advanced economy and an affluent urban minority, but three quarters of people work in agriculture, and 48% live in multi-dimensional poverty. Mozambique's long struggle for independence, followed by protracted civil war until 1992, left a weak infrastructure, and although it too has a fast growing economy, 70% of its population are living in multi-dimensional poverty, with most people working on the land (Hanlon 2010). Within education, although pro-poor policies, including abolition of school fees, and school feeding programmes, have helped increase access to basic education in rural areas, modernising governments since independence in Ghana have been criticised for continuing the colonial approach of prioritising urban conurbations, whilst neglecting the needs and interests of rural populations (Dei 2004). Studies in Ghana (Pryor 2005; Akyeampong et al 2006; Akyeampong 2009; Ghartey Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah 2009) and Kenya (Alwy and Schech 2004) have criticised the ways that poor road networks, teacher shortages, and education systems, including language of instruction and school curriculum, that

are not shaped to local concerns . While there has been a huge expansion in school enrolments in all three countries, particularly at primary school level, in 2012 only 61% of students from the appropriate age group were enrolled at secondary school in Ghana, and only 27% of boys and 24% of girls in Mozambique (UNESCO 2015)[3], and a shift system still operates in Mozambique because of the lack of school buildings and teaching force, particularly in rural areas.

In the post-independence period, gendered inequalities have persisted in all three countries, with Kenya ranked 122, Ghana 123 and Mozambique 146 out of 149 countries on the Gender Inequality Index[4]. Echoing research findings elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa discussed above, studies on gender and sexual practices in these countries have traced the persistence of inequitable gender regimes, in both the continuation of customary practices, including early marriage, and in misogynist attitudes and sexual exploitation in sexual relationships in urban settings (Groes-Green 2012; Oduro, Swartz and Arnot 2012). Some of the contaminations of modernity discussed above have also been identified in a study in a city in Kenya, in which porn video shows and local brew dens were associated with risky and violent sexual practices, and often involved sex with much older men, using money or gifts as leverage for sex (Njue, Voeten and Remes 2011). In Mozambique, recent market liberalisation has opened up public access to sexually explicit media, through sexualised dress codes, Brazilian soap operas and pornography (Osorio and Cruz e Silva 2008). But while these studies have stressed the continuing vulnerability of young women, other studies in Mozambique have emphasised that more permissive sexual norms have also generated agency for women in urban areas to actively negotiate sexual practices (Arnfred 2011; Groes-Green 2013; Oledzka-Nielsen 2013; Salvi 2014). The co-existence of dominant, violent and selfish masculine performance along with more gender-equitable tendencies to restraint, anti-violence, and stressing sexual satisfaction of women, have been identified in a study with young, urban men in Mozambique, with men's self-positioning expressed differently within the family and among a group of friends (Groes-Green 2012). These studies add to the broader literature discussed above, in building a more complex picture of young women's sexual and gender positioning in more modernised settings. There is less evidence on young women in rural areas, though studies in remote rural settings of Kenya have traced the effects of the EFA discourse in enabling school girls increasingly to position themselves as successful learners with expanded career aspirations (Switzer 2010; Warrington and Kiragu 2012).

The districts where the research reported below took place were Tana River District, Coast Province, in Kenya, Nanumba North and South in Northern Ghana, and Manhiça District in the south of Mozambique. The sites in Kenya and Ghana were both rural districts, far from the capital, and distanced to some extent from some of the modernising forces discussed above, with the main source of livelihood being subsistence agriculture, and few households having access to electricity and mobile phones. The site in Mozambique was much closer to the capital, more densely populated and located along a main national road, bringing increased mobility and communications. As well as subsistence farming, people worked in a nearby sugar cane refinery, and many men migrated to work in mines in South Africa. Data collected from 1076 girls in the study on their housing, parents' education and food eaten the previous day were compiled to create a poverty index for each girl between 0 (high poverty) and 1 (lower poverty) (see table 1). This was based on what researchers in each country felt were the key poverty differentiators in the project communities, and drew from measures used in the Demographic Health Surveys. We were then able to compare poverty rates across settings (school, country, community types) by

calculating the mean poverty index of girls in the study who were located there. Whilst this indicates slightly higher poverty in the study location in Ghana, significant numbers experienced indicators of poverty in all country sites, with poverty accentuated differently in each location (around parental education in Ghana, housing in Kenya and food security in Mozambique).

Table 1: Poverty Index

	% of girls' responding that:		
	Ghana	Kenya	Mozambique
House made of grass/thatch (NB remaining girls' homes made of cement)	26	45	30
Mother had no education	83	31	27
Father had no education	68	22	22
Ate less than 3 meals the previous day	40	35	58
Overall poverty index[5]	0.45	0.66	0.65

In all three sites, an earlier study carried out in 2009 identified how material hardships coincided with a gendered division of labour in which girls were expected to carry out household chores like cleaning, fetching water and caring for younger children, and boys to work on the farm (Parkes and Heslop 2011). Child marriage was commonly practised, and many children left school because of families being unable to cover the costs of schooling. Chastity, domesticity and compliance were viewed as central attributes of femininity for unmarried girls, particularly in the Kenyan and Ghanaian sites, though in Manhiça district in Mozambique, this coincided with more permissive sexual norms (Heslop et al. 2015). With greater access to global technologies, including TV and mobile phones, and to networks outside their communities, data collected from girls in Mozambique showed they spoke more often than girls in Ghana or Kenya about dating, and admitted to having boyfriends themselves. While the influence of modernisation on material and discursive practices was most evident in the site in Mozambique, in all three sites there was evidence of erosion of traditions. Girls in Ghana spoke of a shift away from the customary practice of exchange marriages, in which a man wanting to marry could offer his own sister to marry one of the men of his wife's family in exchange. Girls in Kenya and Mozambique also reported that early marriage practices were declining. These shifts were associated with an increasingly dominant discourse of girls' rights to education, with the EFA discourse reinforced through government policies as well as local NGO initiatives, and repeatedly articulated by the girls (Parkes et al 2013).

These comparisons between the three districts begin to problematise a sharp polarisation of communities within a tradition-modernity dichotomy. Such comparisons are also complicated by material and discursive variations within the districts. While the communities where data was collected in Mozambique tended to have more access to services and information networks, some communities were further away from the town and its amenities, with most households lacking electricity and pipe-born water. While most of the communities where data was collected in Ghana lacked access to good roads, clinics, electricity and pipe-born water, there was also a sizable town in the district providing better resources and more varied employment sources. While the main religion in Manhiça was Christian, in the districts in Ghana and Kenya, Islam and Christianity

were both practiced. While the majority of communities in the Kenyan district where data was collected were inhabited by Pokomo communities living in villages clustered along the Tana River, there were also communities of Wardei pastoralists, mainly found in the hinterland and living in *manyattas* concentrated around watering points like dams and boreholes. However, some members of Wardei as well as Pokomo communities lived in a small town, with access to services and other sources of livelihoods.

These variations between communities even within a single district in each country make it difficult to compare and interpret patterns of sexual violence between the three districts on the basis of a tradition-modernity dichotomy. While the district in Mozambique was in many respects more modernised, all communities were affected by features of modernisation influencing girls' lives. One source of disruptive modernising ideas for girls across the communities was the work of the NGO ActionAid's Stop Violence Against Girls in School project, which involved a high profile presence in all the schools and neighbourhoods of the three districts from 2008, advocating for girls' rights to education and safety. The project included a research component, which began with a mixed methodology baseline study of gender equality and violence in and around project schools in 2009 (Parkes and Heslop 2011), followed by a longitudinal study tracking a group of girls over the course of the project, and ended with an endline study, carried out in 2013 to analyse change over the five years of the project (Parkes and Heslop 2013).The data discussed in this article are drawn data collected in 2013 for the longitudinal and endline studies.

The endline study gathered survey data from 1855 schoolchildren and teachers, and qualitative data from a further 1,377 individuals (girls, boys, parents, head teachers, school committee members, and community and religious leaders) in 13 schools and their communities in Ghana, 14 in Mozambique and 15 in Kenya. It also involved district level education, health and police officers and national policymakers. However the analysis for this paper draws specifically on the data relating to sexual violence, and privileges the data collected from survey interviews and focus groups with girls[6]. We turn first to quantitative findings from survey interviews with 24 girls per school (in three age bands: 8-10, 11-13, 14-17), with a total sample of 1067 across the three countries. Descriptive and statistical analysis of this data was undertaken using SPSS. Indexes were developed on key measures (e.g. poverty; violence reporting) incorporating a number of variables to assist with analysis. While the quantitative analysis illuminates some variations in patterns of and responses to sexual violence within and between communities, we turn to qualitative data to explore whether differential positioning within the tradition-modernity discourse accounts for the observed variations between sites. Our analysis draws particularly on girls' focus group discussions (in three age bands in a sub-sample of four schools per country, total sample: 216 girls in 36 focus groups), in which they discussed the reasons girls have sexual relationships and the problems they have with staying safe.

Patterns of sexual violence

Sexual violence was more commonly reported by girls in Mozambique, who were more likely than girls in Kenya or Ghana to admit to having experienced forced sex, sex for goods, peeping and unwanted touching of breasts, buttocks or private parts (table 2).

Table 2: % girls experiencing sexual violence

Type of sexual violence[7]	Ghana	Moz	Kenya
Peeping	11.8	25.9	11.7
Touching	10.5	30.6	7.6
Comments	21.6	17.1	15.2
Forced sex	2.8	9.9	1.9
Forced or coerced sex in exchange for food, gifts, grades, or money	5.6	19.0	7.0

This finding lends some support to the body of work that claims that features of modernisation enhance risks of sexual violence. Variations within the project sites provide further support (see table 3). Project communities were categorised into 'types' according to contextual indicators determined by local research teams[8]. Although the differences between community types were often quite subtle, sexual violence levels were somewhat higher in towns and communities close to roads and more formal opportunities (these differences were statistically significant in Kenya, almost significant in Ghana and not significant in Mozambique). This could indicate that girls in the more remote rural communities were safer. Since these communities tended to have higher levels of poverty, this problematises assumptions about a straightforward linear effect of poverty on violence.

Table 3: Girls' experiences of sexual violence by community type

	Community type	% girls experiencing sexual violence	Poverty index
Moz	Close to the main road and formal employment opportunities	45.0	0.69
	Close to the main road but far from formal employment opportunities	35.9	0.61
	Far from the main road and formal employment opportunities	36.6	0.65
Kenya	Pokomo central	28.6	0.71
	Mixed central	9.5	0.71
	Pokomo remote	23.8	0.71
	Wardei remote	2.4	0.35
Ghana	Town	32.2	0.52
	Rural-close	20.0	0.33
	Rural-remote	22.8	0.42

% experiencing sexual violence: difference between groups analysed by ANOVA significance level 0.273 Mozambique, **0.034** Kenya, 0.079 Ghana.

However, an alternative explanation is that more rigid gender norms and taboos in speaking about sex were inhibiting girls in more remote communities from speaking out. Girls in towns, with greater access to media and support services, may have felt more confident in talking about sex and violence. When girls were asked about the actions they took following their most recent experience of sexual violence, 69.5% of girls in the Mozambique site reported their experiences to someone, compared with 52.3% in Kenya and 40.3% in Ghana. These findings may indicate that modernising forces are increasing sexual violence, or that they are empowering girls to speak out and seek help, or perhaps they have both effects. To investigate these issues further, we turn now to the qualitative data. We begin by examining how a group of girls in a Ghanaian town reported on perceived changes in sexual dynamics in their community.

Sexual coercion on the edge of town in Ghana

The complex positioning of girls between tradition and modernity was evident in a discussion between Fouzia, Khadija, Habida, Sana, Naja and Adisah, 12-14 year old girls who attended a school located in a mainly Muslim suburb on the fringes of the main town in the district where data was being collected.

With a poverty index (0.39) quite high for a school in town, most families engaged in crop farming and animal rearing, and girls' labour was important for contributing to household livelihoods. Girls spoke frequently about how girls in their community were coerced to have sex for money, often to pay for school fees or uniform. Adisah narrated how she had resisted such sexual coercion:

> "It happened one day my mother prepared *kenkey* (dumpling) for me to sell and I went and sold the *kenkey* and on my way home the money was missing and I was sitting on the way crying. Finally I decided to go home and tell my mother and she said I should go and look for the money. So I went out and was crying and a certain man saw me and said to me that if I agree he will rape me and give me the money. But I refused and told him that if I go home and my mother kills me it is better than giving myself to him to rape me. And my father said I should stop selling the *kenkey*, if I continue to sell the kenkey, I will become a bad girl and may give myself to boys."

The economic pressures on the family are clearly evident in Adisah's distress and her mother's anger when she loses the money earned from selling dumplings after school. However, the main purpose of this narrative is to position herself, somewhat heroically, as resisting the violence of transactional sex. Her account of her father's response shows the value attached to chastity for his daughter. While at times girls expressed some sympathy for girls driven to transactional sex because of extreme poverty, this account clearly places responsibility on girls to resist. Sexual predation of men and boys appears to be taken for granted, while girls who enter into these relationships become 'bad girls'.

The group were even more critical of those girls in town who they perceived as practising transactional sex to provide the trappings of more 'modern' femininity, including fashionable clothes, jewellery and mobile phones:

> Sana: Madam, some of the things come from us. When they tell you to live like a village girl, we won't be like that, you will go and buy short skirt with men seeing you and as they are seeing you, they will want to befriend you.
>
> […]
>
> Fouzia: She will go to a market. You know as for villagers they don't know school matters. She will go and convey all her old wears to the colleagues who are villagers and go into the market and buy new dresses which are modern and start wearing them for men to see.
>
> Khadija: It often comes from us the girls, a girl will buy a *bumsu*[9] and wear it, walking and shaking the buttocks and another girl seeing this will also go and buy another type of *bumsu* and wear it for people to see because (she thinks) that is why they are looking at that my colleague.

These girls, living in a liminal space on the edge of town, seem positioned uncomfortably between tradition and modernity. Sana voices the imperative for girls like her to distinguish themselves from village girls, a point that is reiterated by Fouzia's depiction of village girls as ignorant of the value of education. Girls wearing short skirts and dresses are recognisably modern, in contrast to the poverty, ignorance and victimhood associated with rural girls and symbolised by traditionally long dresses covering the body, but these 'modern' clothes also symbolise the promiscuity from which the girls go to some lengths to distance themselves. The girls resolve this difficult self-positioning by invoking education as an alternative signifier of modernity:

> Khadija: If you marry early and give birth and after the outdooring[10], the boy will go back to school and he will even get a new girl who is enjoying fashion, but you cannot enjoy the fashion that you wanted to enjoy. The new one he marries will be wearing high heel shoes enjoying fashion and when you are going to wear sandals, you will wear a local one. So he will be laughing at you and insulting you. And you will say if I had gone to school and completed, I would have enjoyed fashion better than this.

Again the ambivalent positioning of girls is evident. There is a clear rejection of tradition in the form of early marriage and pregnancy. In this narrative, marriage appears to be viewed as a form of transactional sex, with the transaction a means to 'enjoy fashion'. Khadija also recognises that fashionable girls are more attractive to boys. But the girl who enters into this transaction is short-sighted. Transactional sex or early marriage offer a quick but illusory route to the benefits of modernity, but ultimately trap a girl back in poverty and tradition, while education is seen as offering longer term benefits. Frequently girls saw schooling as incompatible with sexual activity. The discourse of the 'good' modern girl entailed refraining from boyfriends and sex until completing education, thus delaying rather than losing access to the material and symbolic rewards of modernity. Abstinence messages were repeatedly articulated within school, church or mosque, and in the project's girls' clubs in Ghana.

Sexual harassment and transactional sex in Mozambique

Transactional sex was also viewed with ambivalence by girls in the Mozambique district, but there was less emphasis on chastity and abstinence in their self-positioning, as explained by Tatiana, Irina, Melita, Tânia and Belinha, a group of 14-17 year olds attending a primary school in a rural neighbourhood.

> Melita: There are those girls who date men for goods but there are also those who do it for love and are good girls themselves.
> Belinha: It is normal for a woman to date a man who she does not really like only because he gives her money and other things. This happens many times here. […]
> Tatiana: Yes it is common for this to happen. Many people date up until they marry for financial interest or other material benefits. Even parents, when they realize that their daughter is dating a boy with some possessions, they take the girl to his house and soon start making arrangements for the marriage between the two.

The community these girls lived in was some way from the town and its amenities, many families struggled to create livelihoods through subsistence farming and some girls complained of erratic or non-existent material support from their fathers, who had migrated to work in South Africa. Transactional sex was understood to be commonplace in these harsh material circumstances, and Tatiana's comment suggests that the practice is generating some modifications to more traditional marriage practices (see also Salvi 2014). Reversing the custom of girls being married and sent to their husband's family following an exchange of money or goods between the families, here the material exchange between the girl and the man takes place first, and the parents subsequently adapt by making arrangements for marriage. These changing sexual practices are viewed with some ambivalence by girls. While in this context, a 'good girl' can engage in sexual activity, Melita seems to disapprove of transactional sex merely as a means to acquire material benefits, which may be associated with greed or setting oneself apart from one's peers.

While girls often viewed themselves as having some agency in these decisions about sexual encounters, they also spoke about frequent sexual aggression by men in the community. They described having to flee from men in cars or men following them in the bush and trying to grab them on their way home from school:

Tânia: It happens a lot, there are men from this community who do not go to school and stay waiting for us; they suddenly appear from the bush, grab us while we are running away from them. They always try to grab us but we shout out loud. This has been happening for a long time and we know that we should report it at home or to the community leader, because these are the people who must do something to help for sure.

These accounts seem to signal a particularly pernicious form of sexual harassment by men in the community in Mozambique, which girls in Kenya and Ghana rarely spoke about. The communities in Kenya and Ghana were far from the capital, with few roads, and fewer strangers from outside the community. In this community in Mozambique, on the other hand, there was much more mobility – more cars, more money, more migrant labour. It is possible that some of the sexual aggression came from men coming to work for short periods in the area, on for example large building projects or to work in the local sugar factory. Tânia's reference to 'men

from this community', however, seems to indicate sexual aggression also among known community members. The double discourse on female sexuality in this context, with norms on female passivity coexisting with more permissive practices of transactional sex, may be interpreted by some men as rendering schoolgirls easy sexual prey. The girls position themselves as vulnerable, but also as knowledgeable about the actions to take to protect themselves and the responsibilities they can expect from others. Modernising forces in this context appear to be both creating the conditions for violence, and creating a more enabling climate for intervention.

Protection of girls in a Kenyan pastoralist community

While girls in the majority Pokomo communities in the Kenyan district also spoke about transactional sex, pregnancy outside marriage, and sexual violence by men in the community, among the semi-nomadic Wardei community girls denied that these happened. The Wardei communities were among the poorest of all the communities surveyed (see table 3), with their livelihoods frequently threatened by droughts, and men spent long periods travelling with their herds to seek pasture. The sporadic conflicts over pasture and water resources had recently erupted into violent outbreaks in the neighbouring district, and girls spoke about deaths of relatives, having to flee their homes, and impacts on family livelihoods (Parkes and Heslop 2013 pp. 42-43). In these harsh conditions, protecting daughters was of critical importance and such protection took a number of forms.

Strict positioning of girls within the discourse of chaste, demure, domestic femininity was key. Practices like FGM and early marriage, often against the wishes of the girl, were commonplace. Men's behaviour was also controlled, and men who committed sexual violence faced harsh punishments. 12-13 year old Fazul, Nalia, Mwajuma, Sabina and Malibe were highly critical of girls who they perceived as flouting the chaste femininity discourse. For example, in other communities where data was collected, pregnant school girls were often frowned upon, but girls tended to endorse their right to continue with their education, or to return after the birth. These girls, however, were in agreement that pregnant girls should not be allowed to attend school.

> Mwajuma: It would be a big shame to be pregnant so we have not seen it in our school.
>
> Sabina: It is not in our school but if a girl gets pregnant then she goes home and leaves school. She will not want to come back for fear pupils will be laughing at her because she has a baby.

With such strong community taboos in place, the extent of shame and stigma that the girls imagine would be experienced by a pregnant school girl would prohibit girls from returning to school. As found in studies with other nomadic groups, the sense of alienation from the dominant culture may heighten the community's need to maintain their collective identity through adhering to traditions (Dyer, 2006). Customary practices that both protect and constrain girls seemed to be more resilient than in other rural communities.

However, the girls also talked about how these practices were changing. As in other communities where data were collected, there was increasing recognition of the value of girls'

education, and the girls themselves had high aspirations for professional careers after secondary school or university and hoped to delay marriage. ActionAid's campaigning appeared to be helping girls to speak out against early marriage, and strengthening support systems in schools and communities, so that reports of girls being removed from school to be married against their will could be followed up by local activists:

Malibe: It has changed because now the pupils have agreed that if they know one of the pupils taken out of school for early marriage then we walk from school to report at the Action Aid office. They will get her back to school.

Sabina: Yes we go to Action Aid and now the parents are very afraid of Action Aid. They report to police and then you are put in prison.

Fazul: Now we are not seeing cases of early marriage a lot as in the past. Because we can report and then the parents are put in prison.

The girls position themselves as actively aligning with the discourse of girls' rights advocated by ActionAid, and in sharp opposition to their parents. In so doing, they are both challenging the normative discourse of feminine compliance and in positioning themselves as active and forward looking, they position their parents in contrast as fearful and backward. Girls also positioned their parents as deploying evasive strategies to resist change, like arranging FGM to take place in school holidays, or avoiding punishment for early marriage by pretending that their daughters were transferring to another school. Perhaps it is unsurprising that these positionings at times evoked hostility among parents, and on one occasion a group of fathers threatened to evict ActionAid from the community. In this community, the harsh regulation of girls as well as boys and men appears to have protected them from some of the sexual aggression that girls faced in other communities, but curtailed sexual and other forms of agency (such as freedom of movement) for girls. While many traditions were in flux, girls, and to an extent project activists, viewed parents as defending the past, and hindering their attempts to achieve their aspirations within a modern world.

Conclusion

Our analysis of empirical data compared girls' experiences of and responses to sexual violence in three different locations in three countries. With a very limited evidence base, analytical tools for such comparisons are weak. Existing research tends to deploy a tradition-modernity dichotomy, distinguishing between patterns of violence in rural and urban areas. Our analysis critiques this dichotomising, since it misrepresents the complexity of contemporary communities. We illustrate this through discussing the three largely rural districts where data were collected, each of which was criss-crossed by long held, durable gender and sexual norms co-existing with varying disruptive, modernising discourses. The tradition-modernity dichotomy evident in studies on sexual violence and young people inaccurately describes communities, while the more nuanced accounts of sexual violence and sexual practices of girls in cities reinforce a binary construction of modern urban girls as actors, in contrast to poor rural girls as victims.

However, while our analysis questions the 'truth' of the tradition-modernity dichotomy, it also illuminates its very real effects on girls' lives. In our data the imagined bi-polar distinctions

between 'modern' and 'traditional' girlhoods were repeatedly drawn upon by girls in positioning themselves in relation to sexual relationships and sexual violence. In setting out our theoretical underpinning of discursive positioning we discussed how historically processes of modernisation have discursively combined tradition and femininity. Our analysis of girls' talk about sexual violence and relationships shows the persistence of this yoking of tradition and femininity. Norms about domesticity, compliance and chastity held a grip on girls' lives across the research sites, in remote, rural settings and in more modernised towns.

Girls resisted these ties, which they associated with backwardness, poverty and victimhood, as exemplified in their narratives of girls forced to have transactional sex, give birth or marry. Their discussions repeatedly used tropes of modernity. Across the research sites, girls talked of their rights to education, to freedom from violence, and of their aspirations to delay marriage and hold professional careers. Girls living in town communities in the three countries spoke of their desires for fashionable clothes and consumer goods. Girls in the Mozambique communities sometimes referred to sexual freedoms for young women. These alignments with modern girlhoods also entailed distancing from rural village girls, who they positioned as victims of poverty and tradition, and from their own parents, who were depicted as constraining and looking back to the past.

But in none of the research sites did the girls wholeheartedly align themselves with these modern femininities. Instead they sought midway positions along a tradition-modernity continuum. Despite the evident attractions of modern girlhood, they were well aware of material and discursive risks. Many girls had witnessed or been threatened by sexual violence and coercion, and had observed the repercussions of unwanted pregnancies for girls in their communities. They were well aware of the stigma they risked in flouting normative gender discourses, and many had internalised the social norms instilled in religious institutions and families. Education was perceived by girls as a way to bridge the binary positioning, since it was viewed as enabling girls to acquire material and discursive benefits, at least in the longer term, without having recourse to the risks. But it is a precarious position to maintain in contexts where secondary and higher education continue to be denied to many.

Education, including the intervention of the ActionAid Stop Violence Against Girls project, in these communities had a bipolar effect. On the one hand, there was a push towards the pole of chaste femininity evident in the abstinence messages repeated in school and by project staff as a means to protect from violence. This was evident in all three sites, though less markedly in Mozambique where there were more permissive norms about teenage sex. On the other hand, there was a push towards modernity in the emphasis on girls' rights to education, safety and autonomy, and away from traditions, with their harmful cultural practices and constraints on girls' freedoms. For a modernising NGO intervention, this meant that moves to change perspectives and practices on violence at community level were often conflictual, most markedly in communities less influenced by media campaigns, and allied movements for women's and children's rights.

In this paper, we have proposed an analytic framework for comparative research that charts the continuing legacy of the gendered tradition-modernity dichotomy in framing and steering perspectives and practices on teenage sex and violence. We have used this framework to trace some of the complex processes through which girls in three African contexts navigate sexual relationships, coercion and violence. Recognition of girls' positioning *between* tradition and

modernity has the potential to generate more contextualised analyses of young people's sexual relationships and sexual violence, and to create more self-reflexive, responsive educational interventions to counter violence.

NOTES

[1] In Mozambique, over its protracted struggle for independence and nation-building, FRELIMO discouraged traditional institutions, and a new masculine ideal of *Homen Novo* (New Man) was based on modern, scientific socialism, equality, literacy and rejection of superstition (Sabaratnam 2012).

[2] The Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measures overlapping deprivations across domains of health, education and standard of living. Figures for Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique are from the 2014 Human Development Report (UNDP).

[3] Comparable figures on secondary school enrolment rates in Kenya were not available, but UNICEF report that between 2008-2012, the net enrolment rate was 51.6% for boys, 48.4% for girls. Accessed 27.8.15 http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/kenya_statistics.html.

[4] The Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures gender inequalities in three domains: reproductive health measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and economic status expressed as labour market participation. Figures for Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique are from the 2014 Human Development Report (UNDP).

[5] This index was calculated combining data from the 4 individual indicators shown in the table.

[6] See Parkes and Heslop 2013 for description of the research design for the full endline study. The ethical and methodological difficulties in researching violence with children have been well documented, including the high risk of harm and of producing inaccurate data (Leach 2015). These risks were addressed through designing a research protocol, which guided sensitive design of research instruments, sample selection, informed consent, researcher recruitment and training, and management of abuse disclosures (Parkes and Heslop 2013: 77). Ethical approval was granted by Institute of Education's Research Ethics Committee as well as local protocols in each country, and in accordance with ActionAid's Child Protection Policy.

[7] Full definitions used were:

- Peeping (in toilets, mirrors, under desk)
- Touching/ pinching breasts, buttocks, or private parts
- Sexual comments
- Forced/ unwanted sex
- Forced/coerced sex in exchange for food, gifts, grades, or money

[8] Project communities were categorised into 'types' by local research teams, who developed the key contextual indicators they felt differentiated communities within each district from each other. In Mozambique, distance from the main road was critical, as this brought an influx of people, money and ideas from elsewhere that was less apparent in more remote communities. In Ghana, closeness to the town, with its facilities, employment and transport was most important.

And in Kenya, ethnic group was considered key, along with remoteness, since social norms and livelihoods varied considerably between the two local ethnic groups.

[9] This is a local term used for any 'sexy' outfit ranging from short skirts to tube tops. The type being described here is more of a short skirt worn by young girls.

[10] Outdooring is a ceremony for when newborns are named and introduced to the community. It usually takes place on the 8th day after birth when the baby has been kept indoors for the first week.

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