

**A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GRAFFITI WRITTEN  
IN SHONA AND ENGLISH FOUND IN SELECTED URBAN  
AREAS OF ZIMBABWE**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

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I, Hugh Mangeya, declare that **A sociolinguistic analysis of graffiti written in Shona and English in selected urban areas of Zimbabwe** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

.....

Signature

Date

## ABSTRACT

Various researches across the world have established that graffiti writing is a universal social practice. The actual occurrence or manifestation of graffiti is however far from being universal cross-culturally. It varies based on a wide array of social variables. This research therefore set out to interrogate the occurrence of graffiti writing as a unique social practice in Zimbabwean urban areas. Three Zimbabwean urban areas (Harare, Chitungwiza and Gweru) were specifically sampled for the collection of graffiti inscriptions on various surfaces which included toilet walls, durawalls as well as road signs. Graffiti data collected from the various surfaces was complemented by reader feedback contributions from *The Herald* and *Newsday*. Focus group discussions provided a third tier of data aimed at establishing participants' multiple reactions towards the practice of graffiti. Analysis of data was done based on three significant sections of participants' attitudes towards graffiti, urban street protest graffiti as well as educational graffiti collected from various toilet surfaces in urban areas. Participants' attitudes towards graffiti revealed varied reactions towards the practice of graffiti. The reactions were partly influenced by the participants' ages as well as levels of education and maturity. Age and maturity proved to be predictors of the extent to which participants were willing to be pragmatic in so far as the appreciation of graffiti writing is concerned. Older and more experienced and mature participants were thus willing to look past the 'deviant' nature of graffiti writing to consider the various pressures that force writers to take to the wall. Urban street protest graffiti is a term coined in this research to capture the unique type of graffiti that is written on various surfaces along streets in urban areas. This highly textual graffiti is drastically different from the post-graffiti commonly found in Western urban cities and is aptly referred to as street art. Urban street protest mainly manifested itself in Zimbabwean urban areas in two main themes of protest inscriptions directed towards the operations of Zimbabwe's electrical energy supplier (commonly referred to by its former name of the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority - ZESA) as well as through political inscriptions. Political inscriptions expose a high degree of nuances that have not been hitherto discussed in literature on political graffiti inscriptions. The research analysed how graffiti writing can be employed for both pro-hegemonic and anti-hegemonic purposes. Inscriptions in high schools and tertiary institutions highlighted a differential construction of discourse on a gendered basis. Inscriptions in female toilets indicated a tendency of graffiti writers to perpetuate dominant educational, health, traditional and religious discourses which assert

male dominance. The inscriptions show a major preoccupation with restricting or policing of female sexuality by fellow students mainly through the discursive usages of social corrective Shona labels such as *hure* (prostitute) and *gaba* ([big] tin). These are labels that are virtually absent in graffiti inscriptions in male toilets which is suggestive of a situation whereby female inscriptions are conservative. A consequence of such conservatism in inscriptions in female toilets is that no new sexualities are reconstructed and negotiated through discourses in discursive spaces provided by the inherently private nature of toilets in general. Thus, cultural and religious normative expectations are regarded as still weighing heavily on female high school writers in the construction and negotiation of sexuality and gendered behaviours, attitudes, norms and values through discourses constructed through graffiti. In contrast, male inscriptions highlight a major subversion of dominant discourses on abstinence and responsible sexual behaviours and attitudes. Corrective social labels such as *ngochani* (gay person) are mainly employed to pressure males into indulging and engaging in heterosexual behaviours. Discourses constructed through graffiti inscriptions in male toilets also demonstrate how sexuality is constructed through debate on the appropriateness of marginalised sexualities such as masturbation and homosexuality.

## **LIST OF KEY TERMS**

Graffiti, urban street protest graffiti, social practice, social construct, sexuality, socialisation, urban public space, naturalisation, neutralisation, interpellation

## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to my wife (Carol) and my daughters (Ruvimbo and Ropafadzo) who have been my source of inspiration from the conception to the completion of this research.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of the study

Graffiti writing is an enduring practice that is regarded to be as ancient as human communication (Christen 2003; Teixeira, Otta & de Olivera, 2003; Jena 2012; Daly 2013). Teixeira et al (2003) trace the origins of graffiti to Lascaux in France (15 000 BC) and Serra da Capivara National Park in Brazil whilst Jena (2012) and Daly (2013) trace it to biblical times with reference to the writing on the wall by an invisible hand in the book of Daniel, chapter 5. They point out that in spite of its longevity, graffiti writing only got widespread recognition following its proliferation in the urban space around the 1960s and 1970s. The term graffiti can be defined in a number of ways depending on the ‘loaning’ language on which the definition is based. For instance, when the term is defined from the original Italian verb *graffiare* (‘to scratch’) the term assumes the meaning ‘little scratchings’ (Whiting and Koller, 2007:4). Whiting and Koller (2007) go on to point out that the first collection of graffiti was scratched onto glass. Noting the narrowness of this definition they go on to rightly point out that in contemporary societies graffiti is no longer just scratched. Technological advances have however seen the introduction of more effective instruments of writing graffiti such as the magic marker and the spray-can. In Zimbabwe most graffiti writers use simple tools such as the pen and the pencil, contrary to (Chitauro-Mawema’s (2006) observation that faeces are the most used in graffiti writing. Inscriptions written with pens and pencils nevertheless have the problem of fading with time to the point of natural erasure.

When defined from its Greek root, *graphein* implies drawings or scribblings on flat surfaces (Whitehead, 2004). In this light, graffiti can be taken as a pictorial or written inscription on a publicly available surface. These definitions however do not capture transgressive elements associated with the practice. Graffiti writing is a practice that is referred to as a norm violation. This is because the scratching and writings are predominantly inscribed on both public and private property without permission. Resultantly, graffiti writing is mostly associated with notions of illegality and rule-breaking. In the Zimbabwean context, graffiti is mostly written on a wide array of surfaces which include precast and brick walls (henceforth referred to as durawalls), roadside signs, as well as inside the toilet surfaces such as on walls and toilet doors. There are, however, instances whereby some can be written on classroom walls (both interior and exterior) and corridor walls.

It is important to appreciate that graffiti writing is rarely an individual and isolated practice. In most cases walls are literally covered by contributions made by a variety of participants. Usually this may entail a situation whereby one or more participants may respond to a contribution made by other participants. This gives rise to a situation whereby individuals participate in discourse communities necessarily involving the construction and negotiation of meaning (Litosseliti, 2006). The construction of discourse brings to the fore the importance of the context in which it (discourse) is used. Context in this case is taken to include the totality of the socio- economic as well as political environment, at all the three levels. The social aspect of context can be taken to also include cultural aspects that inform the social construction of discourse as well as the structuring of power relations in and through discourse. A better appreciation of any discourse necessarily entails a consideration of contexts at local, national and international levels. The relationship and interaction of these various contexts entail that graffiti writers engage in discourse constrained by what they bring

into the process of negotiation of meaning. This, therefore, means that the prevailing social and gender orders in which graffiti is constructed is important in determining its nature and essence. Participants are involved in continually negotiating and constructing discourse in accordance to the social milieu. It is then appreciated that graffiti writers are faced with a variety of options in the construction of discourse. Following Bartolomeo's (2001) observation that there is a distinct language reserved for members of the graffiti culture that may only be acquired through participation or repeated exposure to its culture, the research submits that the making of choices by participants in graffiti is by no means haphazard. It is instead a systematic process which makes graffiti a distinct form of communication. The systematic nature of graffiti was noted by Ley and Cybriwsky (1974:491) who observed consistencies in the form, quality and location of graffiti practiced by black youths in New York and Philadelphia. Regularities are a manifestation of an underlying system governing graffiti practices. The research, therefore, is an exploration of regularities in discursive practices of Zimbabwean graffiti writing.

In Zimbabwe, graffiti is written in three major languages, namely, Shona, English and Ndebele. For the purposes of this study, the researcher focuses on graffiti written in Shona and English. The choice of graffiti written in Shona and English is mainly informed by the fact the present researcher is a bilingual a fluent bilingual of speaker of the two languages involved. This includes graffiti written entirely in Shona and in English as well as inscriptions involving code-switching between Shona and English. Data for the research was collected from urban high schools, tertiary educational institutions and from various public and private surfaces in the community (including residential areas) in three Zimbabwean urban areas of Harare, Chitungwiza and Gweru. A three-tier research methodology of

collection of graffiti inscriptions from various surfaces, focus group discussions and reader feedback contributions in two daily newspapers, was used in eliciting the data.

### **1.1 Who writes graffiti in Zimbabwe's urban areas?**

The previous section has already established that graffiti writing is a norm-violating human practice that has long-standing history. Each social set up invariably experiences graffiti in one form or the other. The ubiquitous and omnipresent nature of graffiti prompt a deceptively simple question: Who writes graffiti? Notions about the identities of the social actors involved in the practice of graffiti inscription are at the core of the present study. Answers to this question however get entangled in a myriad of social politics as graffiti is inherently a practice that sets out to destabilise existing dominant and hegemonic relations. Graffiti inscriptions cannot be separated from the wide power struggles characterising socio-economic as well as political institutions. The act of inscribing has to be therefore contextualised within the framework of how discourse is discursively employed in doing ideological work. Discourse is central in the social construction and perpetuation of ideology and as such it is crucial in the structuring, maintenance as well as resisting of power relations in any given social milieu.

It is in the background of the significance of discourse in the social construction, perpetuation as well as resisting of ideology and relationships of power that questions on who inscribes graffiti become very significant. Ideology and power are notions that entail strategic control over scarce resources by particular sections of society. Van Dijk (2001b) points out the significance of such resources as knowledge, status, authority and media in power relations. Discourse can be regarded as one such resource as it is a site in which ideology and power are both explicitly and implicitly inscribed. Graffiti, by virtue of it being a non-conventional and

norm-violating practice, is conceived of as a medium that is central in contestations of ideology and power through discourse. Foucault (1990; 1997) argues that resistance is a crucial defining factor in relationships of power. In fact, resistance is regarded as the essence of any power relations. It becomes imperative to explore the extent to which graffiti offers its various agents an opportunity to operate within the realm of power relations. The research does not by any means assume that graffiti is invariably employed as a tool for resisting hegemonic relations. It is important to explore how graffiti writing can be used as a discursive tool in the services of both the resistance and perpetuation of skewed power relations. Considering both these competing dimensions can go a long way in providing insights into answering questions relating to who is involved in the inscription of graffiti on the urban landscape.

Secondly, the question on who writes graffiti invokes important aspects about people's general attitudes towards graffiti writers in general. Characterising graffiti as an anonymous practice does not necessarily entail that people do not construct schemas about people who write it. The writing process might be an anonymous one, but inherent contestations of power and control over such linguistic resources as mainstream discourse involves the attribution of the practice to particular segments of society which are stereotyped to be most likely to engage in it. An analysis of participants' attitudes towards the practice of graffiti can therefore go a long a way in providing answers pertaining to the commonplace beliefs about the 'type' of people most likely to engage in graffiti writing. These attitudes can also help answer how the perceptions on the 'typical' graffiti writers interfaces with other factors such as place to form a dialectical relation which, in turn, influences attitudes toward the content of graffiti inscriptions.

Lastly, questions about the identities of graffiti writers can also be to a large part answered by an exploration of what the researcher has dialogically referred to as the ‘crucial what of graffiti’, in response to Cresswell’s (1992) questioning of the crucial where of graffiti. That is, an analysis of the content of graffiti can expose themes that can then be used to answer questions about the potential writers of graffiti. The inscriptions, in this light, can be taken as representing a particular social category which screams ‘I am here, I exist, I have something to say’ (Deiulio, 1978:517). What is said can also be used to provide insights on segments of societies that are most likely to have said it.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem.**

Graffiti, in Zimbabwe, is generally associated with delinquency and anti-social behaviour. As a result, previous studies on Zimbabwean graffiti have not paid much attention to the socio-economic and political issues raised on the various graffiti platforms across the urban areas. The researcher uses Mbembe (2001) to argue that in spite of its negative perception, graffiti still offers individuals and groups with discursive spaces on which to construct alternative discourses especially in a context dominated by unconditional master codes, characterised by general impunity. This, therefore, provides the impetus for the sociolinguistic exploration of graffiti writing in relation to how various social groups appropriate discursive spaces offered to them by various surfaces and how they empower them to (re)produce social relationships of power.

## **1.3 Aim of the study**

Graffiti is a distinct form of communication through which participants are actively involved in the construction of discourse. This assumes that the construction of discourse through graffiti is constrained by social variables. The research is driven by the assumption that

Zimbabwean graffiti writing exhibits sociolinguistic variations. The research is therefore aimed at exploring the nature of sociolinguistic variations and the social variables shaping discursive practices in Zimbabwean urban graffiti.

### **1.3.1 Objectives**

The research is guided by the following objectives:

To establish people's attitudes towards graffiti writing in Zimbabwe's urban areas.
To investigate the nature of street graffiti in Zimbabwean urban areas.
To explore the nature of socio-economic and political graffiti in Zimbabwe's urban areas.
To explore the existence and nature of gendered differences in graffiti.

### **1.3.2 Research questions.**

The research is informed by the following research questions:

What are the people' attitudes towards graffiti?
What is the nature of urban street graffiti in Zimbabwe?
What themes dominate socio-economic as well as political graffiti in Zimbabwe's urban areas?
How are issues of sexuality and gender negotiated in toilet graffiti in educational institutions?

#### **1.4Justification.**

Graffiti is as a form of discourse and by extension a distinct type of social practice (Litosseliti, 2006). This ultimately means that it is a discourse constrained by the social context in which it is practiced. Approaching graffiti from this perspective serves to distinguish graffiti practices according to their spatial and contextual distribution. Whilst it is appreciated that past research has focused on graffiti, it needs to be pointed out that differences in social orders in which these practices are situated entail differences in discursive practices. Studies in South American graffiti are not likely to reveal the same results as similar studies in Europe and North America. Teixeira et al's (2003) gendered study of graffiti in Brazil, Italy, Spain, United States of America and Germany conclude that women used more romantic language and were more interested in more private issues than men – who show an interest toward public affairs. They also reveal that men were concerned with politics in Latin-speaking countries and prejudiced against foreigners in Anglo-Saxon countries. Their research also reveals a consistent pattern regarding sexual content. Ruto (2007), on the other hand, reveals that women are not involved in graffiti and that men who are involved in the practice are mainly preoccupied with sexual issues. Both studies reveal that graffiti is constrained by the socio-cultural context in which it is practiced. As a result, the discourse is indicative of the environmental factors which help to shape graffiti as a discursive practice. The research argues that Zimbabwean graffiti has its own distinct character which is a result of its distinct socio-cultural as well as political context. For instance, it has to be appreciated that Zimbabwe, unlike most European and American countries, is a predominantly heterosexual country. This has implications on notions concerning the ‘legitimacy’ or ‘appropriateness’ of alternative sexuality practices. The intolerance of homosexuality, manifested in the sexual deviancy law of 2006, is also manifested through institutionalised uses of discourses. The country also has its own peculiar

political history which is bound to affect the graffiti discursive practices in ways which are different from other regions.

The concept of markings made by human beings is by no means a new concept in the study of cultures. Archaeology has been generally known as contributing immensely to revealing various cultural aspects of particular groups of people. <http://issues.tigweborg.org/culture> defines culture as:

the many ways in which human beings express themselves for the purposes of uniting with others, forming a group, defining an identity, and even for distinguishing themselves as unique.

It follows that a particular cultural practice can both be centrifugal and centripetal; both uniting and separating people. It is along the same vein that graffiti is conceived of as a discourse manifesting both centrifugal and centripetal forces. In this manner, graffiti can be taken as a space through which aspects of the Zimbabwean culture are recorded for various degrees of posterity (mainly due to its relative non-permanent nature). Thus a study of Zimbabwean graffiti goes a long way in revealing various cultural aspects.

## **1.5 Definition of terms**

*Discourse:* Discourse is defined by Woods (2006) as a construction and negotiation of meaning in which context is of vital importance. This means that discourse is by no means constant. It varies from one situation to another depending on, amongst other factors, the participants involved and the kind of meaning that is being negotiated.

*Discourse analysis:* The term discourse analysis is a blanket term that can potentially be used to refer to a number of phenomena. In this research the term discourse is defined as the

analysis of language in its social and cognitive context (Brown and Yule, 1983; Coulthard, 1985). Thus, language usage can be best appreciated in its context of use.

*Discursive practices:* The term practice refers to ‘the construction and reflection of social realities through actions that invoke identity, ideology, belief, and power’ (Young, 2009: 1). Discourse on the graffiti platform can only be best appreciated as a practice aimed at situating the self in relation to their social environment.

*Context:* Refers to the ‘network of physical, spatial, temporal, social, interactional, institutional, political, and historical circumstances in which participants’ practice discourse (Young, 2009: 1). Thus, there are a host of factors that determine linguistic usage and the nature and type of discourse used can only be understood in its particular environment.

*Graffiti:* A term that is used to refer to institutionally illicit marks, made by an individual or individuals, in which there has been an attempt to establish some sort of coherent composition, (Young, 2009). Such markings can be made upon a wall or other surfaces that is usually visually accessible to the public.

*Social order:* A core concept in social science which accounts for social actions can be accounted for by considering people as individuals capable of independent action and also as part of larger social groups governing their conduct, (Weber, 2003). Thus, social phenomena such as graffiti can be accounted both from an individual point of view and a group perspective.

*Social constructionism:* is an approach of interpreting social phenomena that rejects the essentialist notion of analysing human behaviour as a product deriving from instinctual drives. The constructionist perspective perceives behaviour as a product of experience in its cultural context (Westcott, 1986 cited in Lips, 2008). Graffiti is, therefore, perceived of not as a product of naturally delinquent individuals, but as a product of individuals’ interpretive and interactive processes.

*Social construct:* A social construct is any human behaviour that is best understood to be the by-product of countless choices rather than of laws resulting from divine will or nature. Such choices are typically based on such factors as reality, knowledge and learning. That is, a social construct is a product of how people interpret and interact in their specific contexts.

*Critical Discourse Analysis:* Critical discourse analysis is regarded as an approach that primarily ‘studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in social and political context’ (van Dijk, 2001b: 352). Graffiti discursive practices are explored in relation to how individuals are positioning themselves in so far as power relations are concerned.

## **1.6 Scope of study**

The research investigates the link between the Zimbabwean society and issues raised using the medium of graffiti. It analyses how language use is linked to the social milieu in which it is situated. Chapter 1 is the introduction of the study. It highlights the area of investigation, research questions, research methods and justification of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant literature. It identifies the main issues dealt with in the literature and identifies the gap in knowledge that this study seeks to fill. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical grounding of the research. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the research methodology used in the study. It presents the data gathering techniques and the analytical framework that are employed in this study. Chapter 5 is a presentation of the research findings. Chapter 6 is the data analysis chapter which examines, amongst others, the themes of sex and sexuality as they manifest in graffiti, how individual identity is negotiated on the graffiti platform, how gender issues are enacted and reflected upon in graffiti and how the interface of politics and graffiti is negotiated. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions and recommendations.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

The research is a sociolinguistic analysis of graffiti found in Zimbabwe's urban areas. It is submitted by the researcher that graffiti should not be seen as a product of naturally delinquent individuals in society. Such an essentialist approach does not fully appreciate or account for the widespread occurrence of graffiti as a phenomenon across the world, in general, and Zimbabwe, in particular. Graffiti should, instead, be perceived as one of the available media individuals in Zimbabwe utilise to explore particular issues and topics. It becomes vital to explore the attitudes of various sectors of society towards the graffiti practice as well as the range of themes explored on the graffiti platform. It is also submitted by the research that graffiti is a practice that enables the gaining of insights into the relationships between master and subordinate codes and how they provide sites for the contestation of ideology and power. Hence, graffiti can only be appreciated and analysed in its particular socio-cultural context in order to enable a better analysis of its discursive practices.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced this study. It revealed that the practice of graffiti can be best understood in its socio-cultural context. It is context that enables a full appreciation of the employment of discourse in graffiti. The current chapter is a review of literature on graffiti to reveal the gap in knowledge that this research intends to fill.

The social practice of graffiti has been traced as far back as ‘early human societal living’ (Othen-Price, 2006: 6). Similarly Texeira et al (2003: 3) make the observation that ‘writing on the walls is an ancient behaviour.’ The two complementary observations are of major interest to the present study in two main ways. Firstly, the two researches link the production of graffiti to early human societal living. This implies that graffiti can be best appreciated and analysed within a particular social setting. It also suggests that graffiti itself is of major use or interest in so far as its relationship with a particular social group is concerned. The implication is that one can better appreciate graffiti from a social point of view, thereby justifying the need to look at graffiti from a socio-linguistic point of view. That is, it is not enough to just look at graffiti from a purely formal linguistics point of view. It is also imperative to look at how society is vital in shaping discursive practices in graffiti. Secondly, the fact that graffiti can be traced that far back implies that it is by far not a recent urban problem as is suggested by scholars such as Powers (1996). Graffiti predates the problem of urban decay and moral decadence. In fact, research has revealed that graffiti is as old as language itself. Apple (2006), O’Doherty (2012) and Daly (2013) regard graffiti writing as

the earliest form of human expression that preceded language in primitive times. This partly explains why societies are still involved in the practice of graffiti.

## **2.1 Major traditions in graffiti research**

This section reviews literature on graffiti. The section adopts a thematic approach in the reviewing of the literature. The themes on which the section is categorised are based on the major research traditions that have informed graffiti research. Themes on which the review is based include the character of graffiti as well as the relationship between graffiti and politics, gender, formal linguistic inquiry, identity construction and sexuality.

### **2.1.1 The character of graffiti**

It has already been noted in the above section that the social practice of graffiti dates back to early human societal living. The significance of this observation is that graffiti, as a social practice, has always been part and parcel of human civilisation. As a result, it is imperative to make an exploration of how various scholars have perceived the enduring nature of graffiti as a social practice. It is the submission of the researcher that it is not only the graffiti writers who have shaped how graffiti writing is to be perceived. Researchers have also gone a long way in shaping perceptions regarding graffiti as a social practice. Research has contributed in a big way to the formation of perceptions in so far as graffiti is concerned. If research approaches it in a positive way, then it may go a long way in influencing positive recognition. By extension, if research has a negative view of the social practice, then it is more likely that these discernments would be extended to the general readership. Thus, it is argued in this study that research is also as constitutive as the act of writing graffiti itself. This makes it necessary to review how graffiti research has characterised the act of graffiti writing, as it is

from this research that the general trends in graffiti research are determined. This section focuses on how the characterisation of the social practice of graffiti has been constructed in graffiti research.

Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) observe that the marking of graffiti in public spaces is just one small feature of man's heritage that is making a resurgence in urban areas. Similarly, Claramonte and Alonso (1993) note that graffiti has been found in ancient monuments such as the Egyptian pyramids, Greek temples and Roman ruins of the city of Pompeii. It is in this light that Graham (2004) concludes that graffiti will not go away. It is clear from these studies that graffiti is by no means a recent or modern phenomenon - suggesting that the social practice of graffiti is a relatively enduring one. People have always been involved in the social practice of graffiti. Viewed in this light, it means that social groups have always been involved in the construction of discourse on the graffiti platform. This necessitates an investigation of the various issues that societies grapple with in graffiti as well as the type of discursive practices that they employ in grappling with those issues. An in-depth sociolinguistic analysis of the discourse in graffiti undertaken in this study is vital in the establishment of the link between society and graffiti as a social practice.

Solomon and Yager (1975: 150) characterise graffiti as a medium that 'can serve as a release of repressed impulses.' They cite situations whereby, compared to more public areas, toilet graffiti is more hostile to out-groups. They also posit that women's graffiti tends to be significantly hostile because women need to compensate for their repressed aggressive impulses. These authors' perception of graffiti is that of a medium that acts as an equalising platform in the construction of discourse. One can expect to find men and women constructing more or less the same type of discourse and employing the same kinds of

discursive practices on the graffiti platform. Whilst the current researcher appreciates the importance of graffiti as a barometer for bottled up anger toward particular social groups or institutions, it is rather narrow to think of this function as the sole purpose of graffiti. Graffiti involves much more than the expression of repressed impulses. Graffiti can also be used to gauge how particular groups of people employ various discursive strategies to express the same idea in their discourse. Researchers, such as Nielsen (1980), Young (2009) and Obeng (2000) have shown how graffiti parallels everyday interaction.

Wales and Brewer (1976) point out that graffiti is of interest as an area of study mainly because it represents a form of spontaneous self-expression which does not suffer the inhibition of accountability and also for the fact that graffiti is a reflection of areas of conflict or popular preoccupation. This view of graffiti is important to the present research in that it characterises graffiti as an authentic platform where authentic discourse is constructed. The lack of contrition on the graffiti platform or wall has contributed immensely in the study of graffiti as an authentic reflection of culture. Heider (2012: 4), in the Egyptian post-revolution situation, characterises graffiti as a true reflection of ‘the beat of the street.’ Also implicit is that fact that the content of graffiti is both culture- and place-specific. For example, this explains why South African graffiti is fundamentally different from Zimbabwean graffiti; hence graffiti reflects the social milieu and geopolitical and cultural environment in which it is construed and constructed.

Alonso (1998) considers an analysis of graffiti in the urban area as very significant since it serves as an excellent tool in the understanding and appreciation of behaviours, attitudes and social process of certain segments in society. What is clear from this assertion is the fact that the way particular groups of individuals use language is never the same. One expects a

variation in the nature of discourses constructed in graffiti due to changes of context. This opens the door for the need to study graffiti in Zimbabwe's urban areas in a bid to understand what sort of issues the various social groups are interested in and how they employ language addressing these concerns.

Othen-Price (2006) characterises graffiti as an activity that is predominantly carried out by adolescent males. She argues that adolescent males are not endowed with the adolescent female's capacity to create babies. As a result, adolescent males revert to graffiti in response to the physiological need to use their bodies in more creative and productive ways. She further observes that graffiti writing in adolescent males is a rite of passage which the writer can decide to abandon for more legal ways of public writing. Two deductions may be made regarding her observations. Firstly, she seems to suggest that only teenagers are involved in the social practice of graffiti. There is need for a gendered investigation of graffiti as well as the discursive uses of language in the achievement of respective objectives and concerns. Secondly, she seems to suggest that it is only the males who are involved in graffiti. Such a view may be too limiting as there are situations whereby females are also involved in the writing of graffiti, as Tagwirei and Mangeya (2013) have shown in the case of primary school-going students. Females are also involved in the writing of graffiti. Although he does not specify any gender, Hookstra (2009) also makes the observation that graffiti is predominantly a teenage activity. This observation contradicts findings from researches carried out by Arluke et al (1987), Young (2000) and Obeng (2000) on graffiti at tertiary institutions, which obviously claims students who are past this stereotypical adolescent age associated with graffiti production. There is, therefore, need to move away from the limiting view of characterising graffiti as an exclusively adolescent or teenage activity and accommodate the possibility, if not reality, that graffiti writing cuts across all age categories.

Ouzman (2010) categorises graffiti as a modern language of the poor and the peripheral. It is apparent that the researcher not only views graffiti as a recent phenomenon, but he also regards it as a practice that is only restricted to the poor and the peripheral. He, however, does not make a distinction between the poor and the peripheral since the poor can also occupy the margins or periphery of society. According to the researcher, one will only expect to see graffiti in those areas that are only reserved for the poor and the ‘peripheral.’ Since this is obviously not the case, there is need to investigate what it is that influences the writing of graffiti as it is evident that institutions where one expects to find more affluent people experience the same social practice. Thus, there is a need to approach the issue of graffiti from a much more holistic approach and come up with a more objective classification of the various groups that are involved in graffiti as a discourse practice. The researcher also goes on to characterise graffiti writing as a form of aurality that acts to disrupt the harmonic elevator noise. This sort of characterisation betrays preconceptions of graffiti as an inferior form of discourse that has no immediate utility to society except as a disruption to dominant discourses by more privileged individuals in the society. It comes as no surprise that various institutions respond to the presence of graffiti by simple erasure without really taking time to look at how the content of graffiti can be useful to society. For example, it has already been established that graffiti can act as authentic instances of discourse which can be used as a barometer to measure such factors as behaviours and attitudes.

Hookstra (2009) approaches the study of graffiti from a legal and social acceptability perspective. She characterises graffiti as an ‘intercultural epidemic’ that is costing governmental entities large sums of amounts of money a year. The researcher points to how graffiti is especially perceived as a form of vandalism that can act to herald more serious

forms of crime in an area. The researcher uses the broken windows theory to justify her assertion when she quotes James Gibson, a senior associate in the Urban Institute, who states:

...walls covered with graffiti suggest tears in the fabric of society. It's synonymous with a loss of control. It says there is a group of people who can and will destroy public property and who can show how ineffective security is.

The notion of graffiti being construed as a precursor of even greater forms of crime is also brought out by Graham (2004) who points out that society goes to such great lengths in eradicating graffiti based on the fear that unchecked graffiti leads to more serious forms of crimes. Thus, there is a tendency to ignore some of the important issues that are raised in graffiti. Authorities simply sanitise walls that are covered in graffiti as a way of asserting their control on the perpetrators of graffiti. Since it has already been pointed out that graffiti is an ancient practice that will not go away, there is need to consider what writers of graffiti are concerned with.

Brighenti (2010) bases his research on ethnographic observation of Overspin, a crew of signature graffiti writers, and a number of individual graffiti writers based in the Italian cities of Vicenza, Schio, Verona and Trento. His research mainly aims to:

...understand how the community of graffiti writers defines itself, and how it traces its own boundaries and defines its own styles vis-a-vis other communities and different practices, (Brighenti, 2010: 316).

Similarly, basing their research in territorology, the science of territory formation which includes a study of boundary-making activities, Ley and Cybriwsy (1974: 292) observe how graffiti by urban black youth in New York and Philadelphia is remarkably linear in the sense that it follows 'the main transport arteries, and their targets are city-wide public structures.' The goal of the youth in writing graffiti in the urban area is to leave a mark and to claim some space outside of their ghetto. The magnitude of the mark is judged according to how brazen it is. There is generally high regard for graffiti that is written on the more inaccessible areas

they invade. Whilst the current researcher agrees that graffiti can be systematic to the extent that one can investigate its underlying factors, questions have to be asked on whether graffiti in the urban areas is a product of one section of the urban population. That is, attributing the production of graffiti to underprivileged sections of the urban population does not adequately account for the ubiquitous nature of graffiti inscriptions in urban set ups. If one is to buy such an explanation, it would suggest that the suburbs are not affected by graffiti. The research submits that everyone has the potential to be a graffiti writer. However, the differences in the writers' backgrounds lead to different discursive practices. It becomes important to investigate how these practices differ and whether they have a common system underpinning them.

The foregoing discussion highlights how research in graffiti has helped to shape perceptions on graffiti in four major ways. Firstly, the research has characterised graffiti writing as a practice dating back to early human civilisation. It is safe to conclude that graffiti represents one of the earliest and oldest forms of expression utilised by mankind. Given the relatively wide attention that graffiti recently receives in electronic and print media, it would be a form of academic injustice to undermine the study of graffiti. There is need to investigate what has contributed to this relative endurance of graffiti and to show how the practice manifests in terms of form and content in different social milieu. Secondly, research seems to suggest that graffiti writing is predominantly a preoccupation of teenagers or adolescents. This has the implication of narrowing the extent of the practice. It is not only the younger generation that is involved in graffiti. Some research has even gone on to limit graffiti to be the product of male adolescents. There is, therefore, need to fully investigate the extent to which various groups are involved in the practice. Thirdly, there is more concern in graffiti as a form of transgressive act that heralds even more serious forms of crime. Concerns of this nature are

informed by the broken windows theory to argue that graffiti, if left uncontrolled, gives the wrong impression that the community authorities are not worried about vandalism of property. Lastly, the research has correctly characterised graffiti as some form of aurality or discourse. Regarding graffiti as a form of discourse opens the door to an analysis of how sociolinguistic factors help in shaping the construction and negotiation of the discourse.

### **2.1.2 Graffiti and politics**

This section reviews literature that analyses graffiti in a political context. Various scholars have focused their research in establishing the relationship between various political environments and the nature of graffiti that obtains in those contexts.

Heider (2012) explores how graffiti flourished in the wake of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 Egyptian revolution. The study is against the backdrop of the Mubarak era in which graffiti was classified as a misdemeanour thereby making the writing of graffiti an illegal offence. This effectively meant that graffiti carrying anti-government messages were not tolerated during the Mubarak era. The research reveals how the revolution brought about a change in the content of graffiti. During this period, graffiti was just one of the many forms of art enjoying freedom of expression and it was being used to raise political awareness amongst the Egyptian people. The research reveals the ways in which political graffiti can be ‘mature, vigilant and passionate’ in various environments. The study reinforces the fluid nature of political graffiti. Its form and content does not remain the same over time. A change in the political environment necessarily translates to a corresponding change in the nature and content of graffiti. A study of political graffiti in the Zimbabwean context will go a long way in providing empirical evidence on how various political environments influence the form and content of political graffiti.

Wright (1993: 3) focuses on how graffiti at Thunderbolt's rock in Uralla is 'an engagement with mnemonic sites of postcolonial memory.' This form of political graffiti has led to the opening up of a vibrant dialogue between the present and the past. The researcher reveals how there is no one accepted version of history. History itself is contested. Graffiti provides one form in which there is contestation of the official version of history and that of the people. Thus, graffiti is a medium that can act to reveal how historical landscapes are contested terrains (Wright, 1993: 3). The researcher makes the submission that political discourse is incomplete with only the side of the dominant discourse. There is need to consider the importance and contribution of subordinate and/or subversive discourses. Thus, an analysis of political graffiti is never complete without focusing on both the dominant and subordinate discourses.

Peteet (1996) researches on the production of political graffiti in military-ruled Palestine in the intifada. She considers political graffiti as a form of cultural production different from other forms of cultural productions in the intifada. She points at how the sheer abundance of political graffiti challenged Israelis' claims to surveillance by showing how censorship can be circumvented. Of major importance in her research is the implication that no matter how constricting or strict the censorship laws may be, there will always be the presence of political graffiti. Graffiti will not be eradicated by merely sanitising the walls. The graffiti will always persist and, at times, it may take more subtle forms that may appear to be apolitical. Such subtle graffiti can only be best analysed in its socio-political environment. That is, analysis of graffiti can be best be made in the graffiti's socio-political milieu.

Alonso (1998: 5) regards political graffiti as ‘the most open system of graffiti.’ He characterises political graffiti as hurried and concise facts that include themes associated with such issues as labour conditions, freedom, political power, unemployment and civil rights. The researcher also points out how political graffiti is associated with critical social events which are usually not part of the everyday landscape. He cites the example of how the Los Angeles civil unrest of 1992 triggered a proliferation of political graffiti aimed against the police department and the judicial system. This study is used as a basis to analyse how the political environment has influenced various themes in Zimbabwe’s political graffiti.

Obeng (2000) analyses Legon graffiti in Ghana as a political discourse. He links the active political involvement of Ghanaian students to the proliferation of political graffiti at the University of Ghana. The researcher establishes the university’s graffiti as constituting political discourse by comparing it to van Dijk’s (1995) characteristics of political communication. Two important observations are made from Obeng’s (2000) research. First, parallels can be made between spoken/written discourse and graffiti. That is, graffiti is just one of the many forms of discourses that are at man’s disposal. What distinguishes it from other discourses is its unique features, especially in terms of form. However, it is noteworthy to observe that there are similarities between graffiti and other forms of discourse. Second, Obeng seems to be mainly concerned with negative features of political discourse such as insults and bending of the truth. This is only a part of both political graffiti and discourse. There is, therefore, need to take a holistic approach of political graffiti. That is, one that does not only look at the negative aspects of graffiti. One needs to look at political graffiti in its entirety in order to come up with a much more comprehensive analysis of characteristics that make up political graffiti discourse.

Lynn and Lea (2005) show how the Sighthill community of Glasgow subjected asylum seekers to racist graffiti. What is interesting in their research is the revelation that racist graffiti does not always follow the ‘blunt and uncompromising’ formula common in most graffiti of this type. In situations such as the Glasgow case whereby local authorities may have a strict policy of erasing political graffiti, the graffiti may take seemingly apolitical graffiti but which are laden with heteroglotic political meaning. Of major interest is the fact that political graffiti is not only used to refer to the political parties in a country, but can also refer to the relationships that exists between different community groups in an area. This discursive use of graffiti is used to investigate how different groups in Zimbabwe appropriate graffiti as a way of interpellating political deviance on the individuals concerned.

Texeira et al (2003) reveal how political graffiti is mainly produced by male graffiti writers. They also show how the extent to which one is involved in political graffiti is determined by one’s ethnic background. The researchers establish a link between one’s first language and the extent to which they are likely to participate in politics by showing how students whose first language is Latin were more involved in political issues in French Canadian schools compared to children whose first language is Anglic. Thus, the two factors influencing the extent to which one is politically involved in political graffiti is gender and ethnic background. The study is also important in that it dispels the misconception that it is only the adult who participates in political graffiti. The research shows that anyone can potentially be involved in political graffiti thus opening the way to finding out which groups of people are involved in political graffiti in Zimbabwe.

### **2.1.3 Graffiti and gender**

Gendered differences in the writing of graffiti have been a subject of debate in the literature. There is no agreement on the extent of involvement of the two genders in terms of participation in graffiti production. Othen-Price (2006) claims that females are not involved at all in the production of graffiti, while Wales and Brewer (1976) revealed that quantitatively females produce more graffiti than males. It is apparent that the extent to which the two genders are involved in the production of graffiti depends on the social environment in question. This section reviews literature that explores the relationship between gender and graffiti production.

Arluke et al (1987) base their study on five colleges and universities in the Boston – Cambridge area to investigate whether the decade of the 1970s contributed to a change in terms of women's production of graffiti. The researchers base their study on findings made by Kutakoff (1972) who establishes that women are more constrained by social conventions than males in the writing of graffiti. As such, they produced significantly less graffiti than men's and their writings were significantly more acceptable than that by males in terms of content and language. The study shows that the period of the decade 1970s 'may have had little or no impact on the pattern of gender differences in the sexual content and social acceptability of wall writings' (Kutakoff, 1972: 5). They reveal that graffiti produced by women is still more bound by convention, restraint, passivity and conformity. Whiting and Koller (2007: 8) point out that females are more often than not bound by the 'social ideal of "polite" femininity.' As a result graffiti produced by females is still more subdued in comparison to their male counterparts. If anything, the study shows that it is in fact men's graffiti that has become more sexual than it did before the 1970s decade. They hypothesise that graffiti writing, for the males, has become a way of restoring their eroded superior

position and level of control. This study, even though it focuses on one institution in the country, reveals how the production of graffiti may go against expectations. One cannot predict the nature of graffiti from a given setting since there are a variety of factors that influence it.

Wales and Brewer (1976) explore gendered differences in graffiti produced in four different high schools. The four schools represent different socio-economic and ethnic populations. The significant finding of the study is that females out-wrote males in so far as graffiti production was concerned. They observe that females produced 88% of the total graffiti, relegating males to insignificant actors in graffiti production. This subverts the notion of the female having a greater regard for moral codes and social conventions. From a qualitative point of view, the researchers argue that the extent to which females write romantic inscriptions is dependent on the socio-economic status of the participants. Participants in the lower socio-economic class wrote significantly more romantic inscriptions than their more affluent counterparts, whilst the upper level participants wrote significantly more erotic material. This study proves that even in the same social environment one cannot expect members from the same gender to behave in the same way in so far as production of graffiti is concerned. There are other social variables that set participants from the same gender apart. It is important to investigate how this manifests in the Zimbabwean situation in order to come up with a more complete picture regarding the involvement of the sexes in graffiti.

Green (2003) shows how public toilets are a context in which the enactment of gender is most salient. Since most public toilets are distinguished according to gender, in terms of usage, one can easily investigate the existence of any gendered differences between the two sexes. The study investigates whether there are any gendered differences in the production of graffiti.

The study reveals that the most dominant topic in male toilets is politics with special interest in racist issues. Males were also found to use more insults than their female counterparts. Women, on the other hand, were pre-occupied with issues to do with love and romance, personal advice on health and relationships, and the definition and characterisation of rape. Thus, graffiti from men's and women's toilets showed distinct differences in topic. The study is interesting in that the researcher uses the social variable of gender to reveal differences in the production and negotiation of discourse in graffiti. The same approach is adopted by the present researcher to investigate the relationship between graffiti production and gender in Zimbabwe's urban areas.

Johnson (2009) focuses on gendered differences in graffiti produced in a decommissioned jail. The study reveals that generally work produced by women is significantly different from that produced by men. Women were found to be focusing more on themes of love, relationships, nature and sadness. The author also reveals how women's drawings featured some form of facial portrait with teardrops. He distinguishes this from drawings done by men citing that men appeared to be obsessed with the female body. Whilst the Johnson's study indicates that women are interested more in love and relationships it does not go into detail on whether the different genders employ the same strategies in exploring the same issues. That is, the study does not reveal how the discursive strategies used are different from those employed by men and the significance of those differences.

Texeira et al (2003) investigate gendered differences in graffiti produced in Brazil, Spain, England, Germany and Italy. The most consistent difference highlighted in their study is the higher occurrence of romantic content in female graffiti. Women were found to express their love on restroom cubicles, which was virtually absent in male graffiti. They suggest that the

disparity in the expression of love in men's and women's graffiti is due to the fact that while men would prefer to derive intimacy from doing things together, women derive it from talking. This accounts for why there is a proliferation of romantic graffiti in women's restrooms. They also go on to state that 'reclamations of love on walls by women can be a way of reassuring their lovers of their attachment' and also that 'by turning their love affairs public, women get information about possible betrayals' (Texeira et al, 2003: 11). Their study also reveals a higher frequency of political graffiti in male restrooms. Lastly, the researchers argue that women produce significantly much longer stretches of graffiti than their male counterparts. Just as is observed in Johnson (2009) above, Texeira et al (2003) do not go on to reveal how the two genders are differentially constrained by culture in their writing of graffiti.

#### **2.1.4 Graffiti and linguistics**

This section reviews studies that have approached the study of graffiti from a linguistic point of view. There are a number of researches that have approached the study of graffiti from a language point of view.

Nilsen examines the grammar of graffiti. His research reveals that, like any other form of language, graffiti has its own distinct grammar. He notes that 'graffiti can be approached phonologically, morphologically, syntactically or semantically; although in many of them all four aspects are noteworthy' (Nilsen 1980: 234). Nilsen's grammatical approach is important in consolidating the point that graffiti is a distinct form of communication. A grammatical approach, though important in bringing to the fore the various systems that make it up, falls short in explaining discursive practices in graffiti. A mere understanding of phonology or morphology, for instance, does not adequately account for how meaning is constructed and

negotiated. There is need for an understanding of how factors outside grammar are responsible in accounting for context-specific graffiti. Thus a discourse analysis approach does a better job in accounting for graffiti as a distinct form of communication in which participants use knowledge beyond the utterance boundaries to negotiate meaning.

Claramonte and Alonso (1993) focus on the unique system of spelling that is employed in the graffiti medium. The researchers explore the unique orthographic system of graffiti that can be traced to systematic factors that influence its spelling system. They cite such issues as spelling ‘errors’ that are as a result of such issues as doubling of consonants and how popular forms in informal speech influence the graffiti orthography. The study also reveals how graffiti is not averse to lexical expansion through such strategies as acronym and use of slang terms. This shows a very close relationship between graffiti and everyday language in general. That is, graffiti can be investigated from a language point of view.

Whiting and Koller (2007) draw parallels between graffiti and everyday spoken language. In their research they look at discursive structures of graffiti as displayed in male toilets. The study is premised on the ‘talk-in-interaction’ notion of Schegloff and Sack’s (1973) theory of Conversational Analysis. Whiting and Koller (2007) observe that even though graffiti lacks the element of co-presence, which is a characteristic feature of everyday interaction, graffiti still retains much of the principles/characteristics of talk. They apply the principle of turn-taking to reveal that graffiti discourse is constrained by the same principles as those constraining everyday speech. Their research reveals that contributions in graffiti are not as haphazard and chaotic as construed. They, however, only look at one aspect of the graffiti discourse. There is also need to look at the socio-linguistic aspect in the construction of graffiti as a discourse.

Obeng (2000: 337) characterises graffiti as constituting discourse on the basis that it ‘consists of stimuli followed by responses.’ The researcher concludes that this is typically a characteristic of discourse in that participants take turns in the production of graffiti. He points to other factors such as turn-taking, repair, opening and closing as well as adjacency pairs to argue for the classification of graffiti as a form of discourse. The researcher, however, only focuses on the political aspect of graffiti. He does not broaden his analysis to look at other themes that come out in the graffiti discourse. This is a narrow approach to the analysis of graffiti. There is need to take a holistic approach at the themes that come out in the discourse of graffiti and also a need to analyse how social factors influence the occurrence of these themes and the discursive practices used.

Young (2009: 4) characterises graffiti as corresponding ‘to some type of public discourse.’ The researcher bases his characterisation of graffiti as a type of public discourse on the fact that a number of interlocutors are involved in the construction of the graffiti discourse. He, however, only focuses on the political aspect of the discourse whereby he focuses on how different groups have interacted in matters such as homosexuality on campus and in society in general. Thus, according to the researcher, the political aspect is a major feature of graffiti. He does not look at other variables in graffiti, which includes, for example, the enactment of gender. It is apparent that graffiti involves much more than the practice of politics in its discourse. There is, therefore, need to look at other themes that occur in graffiti discourse and how social variables constrain the nature of graffiti.

### **2.1.5 Graffiti and identity**

The construction of identity, be it individual or in groups, is inherently linked to the social practice of graffiti writing. The practice necessarily involves the dropping off of one's 'real' identity and the subsequent taking up or adoption of a new one. Normally, the individual may have to choose a completely new identity for themselves. This section reviews literature that has looked at the relationship between graffiti and the construction of identity.

Othen-Price (2006) investigates the process of identity formation in graffiti. The researcher points out how illegal graffiti writers, predominantly young men, use their activities as a tool to reconstruct the 'self' from a male perspective. This process necessarily involves a conscious choice of who the graffiti writer intends to be. Although it is appreciated that the graffiti writing process involves the construction of the self, the researcher does not really focus on the social factors that are involved in the selection of particular identities. That is, there is need to investigate whether the process of identity formation in graffiti is a systematic process. A sociolinguistic analysis of this process reveals the process of identity formation in graffiti.

Powers (1996) traces the social process of identity formation in Manhattan graffiti. The research reveals how graffiti writers choose names for themselves and then append their street number at the end, coming up with such names as 'Taki 183' and 'Yank 135.' Though her research sheds light on the rationale of the appended number on the graffiti writer's name, she does not, however, go into detail in trying to establish whether there is any consistency in the names that are used in a particular area. The present research however focuses not on the identities graffiti writers choose for themselves but on the social corrective labels that are constructed as a way of curbing deviant behaviours. A sociolinguistic approach to the study

of these labels constructed in graffiti highlight the involvement of cultural factors in the construction of discourse.

Hanauer (2004: 30) notes that though the practice of writing graffiti is a criminalised act it is, however, a process that is intended as a ‘highly visible representation of the self and message.’ That is, the writing of graffiti involves much more than writing a mere message. The process necessarily involves the construction and projection of particular identities. Hanauer (2004), however, looks at identity formation in relation to group identities. The research observes how supporters of the assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Rabin joined together to construct a group identity following his assassination. Thus, the study reveals the social and psychological factors that influenced the identity formation process. Although his research reveals that identities are not haphazard, his research does not, however, look at how individual writers come up with their own different identities, and how these individual identities can work together to bring out a ‘group’ or ‘national’ identity for a particular group of people.

Wright (1993) explains that the process of writing graffiti is a one that involves the writing of oneself into the landscape. It is perceived by the researcher as ‘a mode of self-creation’ whereby the writer becomes ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ (Wilson and David, 2002: 42-43). This implies that in choosing a particular identity the graffiti writer wants the reader to see the writer in a particular light. This suggests that the choice of the name is a deliberate one. The researcher does not go on to make the connection between the choice of the name picked and the environment in which the name is created. There is therefore need to account for how the social context in which the graffiti is written influences the choices of the identities formed.

Texeira et al (2003) characterise the process of creating the self under the notion of ‘presence’, which the researchers link to the process of demarcating territory. According to the researchers, when people leave their name, signatures or tags on a particular surface, it suggests an appropriation of a piece of that surface. Their research argues that the social process of marking presence is constrained by culture when they distinguish other cultures as ‘masculine cultures.’ Masculine cultures are those cultures that have a high disposition in the marking of presence. They involve a greater affinity in wanting to create an identity be it for the self or for the group. They go on to classify Italy, Germany and the USA as masculine cultures as a result of their high disposition in marking presence. They, however, do not go on to investigate the sort of masculine identities constructed and how these identities are influenced by the culture in question. The researchers also give the misconception that in masculine cultures men and women construct the same kind of identities.

### **2.1.6 Graffiti and sexuality**

Graffiti can afford the analyst an opportunity to come up with the nature of individual or group sexualities. Writers can, consciously or unconsciously, encode their sexuality, or at least their own understanding of the notion of sexuality through graffiti. In this section, the writer explores the body of research that has investigated the notion of sexuality in graffiti.

Othen-Price (2006: 13) states that the medium of graffiti allows ‘its writers to unconsciously explore forbidden notions of intimacy with each other.’ Such forbidden notions of intimacy may include repressed sexualities such as homosexuality. She argues that the wall is like an intrapsychic screen in that it is used as a public screen on which one’s most pressing unsatisfied desires are projected. It is, however, worth noting that Othen-Price (2006) is only

interested in investigating sexuality only in so far as the exploration of forbidden and undesirable elements of sexuality are concerned. There is, regardless, need to look at the complex nature of sexuality. That is, it is important to have a clearer understanding of how sexuality, in general is constructed in graffiti. This necessarily involves looking at both the normative and subservient aspects of sexuality as constructed in graffiti. Such an approach enables a more comprehensive study that explores the way sexuality is perceived in Zimbabwe; not just the forbidden elements.

Ruto (2007) focuses on male attitudes on sex, sexuality and issues surrounding sexuality as revealed via toilet graffiti at Kenya's Kenyatta University. She premises her choice of the university as object of 'inquiry' on two main factors. Firstly, she asserts that young people, especially males, can only express their views on sexuality issues through graffiti at university level due to the restrictive nature of the church-controlled school system in Kenya. Secondly, she considers young people in lower levels of university education as too preoccupied (where they are seen to be ignoring the self) with preparing for university so much that they do not involve themselves in petty sexuality matters. There are at least two observations that can be made from her research. Firstly, she notes that there is no graffiti in ladies' toilets and does not pursue whether it's a universal occurrence or a phenomenon only peculiar to her research. It therefore becomes imperative to find out whether in the Zimbabwean culture female students do indeed engage in graffiti practices. And if they do, what sorts of identities are constructed? Secondly, her study does not recognise the existence of graffiti in lower levels of education such as primary and secondary school. This gives the impression that either the students are 'too busy' to engage in graffiti practices or the authorities are too strict to allow such activities. Either way it becomes of necessity to investigate both the occurrence of graffiti at lower levels and how language is used to

construct gendered identities. Her study does not take into account graffiti generated by both students in high schools and by participants in the community. An inclusion of these participant variables is important in finding out whether they are going to alter her generalisation in a big way.

### **2.1.7 Graffiti vandalism-art dichotomy**

Bandanaraike (2001) asserts that graffiti invariably makes its presence known and that this presence inevitably draws reactions from its audience. The adage ‘the writing is on the wall’, which can be traced to the book of Daniel in the Bible, points to the ‘thereness’/immediacy of graffiti and the fact that it is difficult to ignore both the content, and to some extent, the forms graffiti takes in day to day lives. As a result of the difficulty of ignoring graffiti, it can be a taken-for-granted fact that it is bound to draw one particular form of reaction or another from its audience. This is especially so in light of the fact that encounters with graffiti can at times be very spontaneous (Frederick, 2009). In existing research and literature on graffiti, there are predominantly two broad perspectives on audience reactions to graffiti. Halsey and Young (2006) as well as Haworth, Bruce and Iverson (2013), summarise these two broad positions by stating that graffiti has been conflictingly and paradoxically labelled as either ‘art’ or ‘vandalism.’ The former tradition, regarding graffiti as art, mainly focuses on attitudes towards graffiti of the aerosol type. Murals, pieces, throw-up and, to some extent, tags are the epitome of graffiti as art. Halsey and Young (2006) justify graffiti-as-art on the three bases of skill, intent and aesthetics. That is, it takes a lot of skill and hard work to produce graffiti that is worthy of classification as art. It is interesting to note that generally graffiti-as-art is associated with New York and Philadelphia graffiti movements of the late 1960s, a period which is labelled as one of ‘hippie youth culture’ (Mrsevic 2012:9). It emerges that the perception of graffiti as art strongly makes a correlation between the subculture and the

factors of hip hop and youth cultures. This type of graffiti later evolved into a distinct kind of art whereby new genres of graffiti emerged and were later known as “post graffiti” and “neo graffiti”, which point to a period of renaissance in graffiti that is enjoying increased legitimacy as street art’ (Frederick 2009:213). Frederick (2009) takes the term street art, as well as graffiti art, as one that reasserts the productive interface and correlation between graffiti and the art world that has been forged by former graffiti artists like Haring and Basquiat who made the transition from practicing graffiti in the streets to being commissioned artists in renowned museums. Approached from this perspective, graffiti-as-art is taken as a form of creative production that is constrained by the conventions of commercial culture with regards to issues of brand formation and positioning (Barnet-Weiser, 2011). Street art is incorporated into the mainstream art culture where it is taken as another form of ‘cultural expression’ (Taylor and Marais, 2009) with some of it finding its way into art museums. It is also commercialised with the marketing strategies used mainly targeting youth cultures (Whitehead 2004). Graffiti is regarded as art especially when it is perceived as a way of beautifying otherwise dull environments.

The second tradition of attitudes towards graffiti perceives the practice as vandalism. In this regard graffiti is taken as a form of anti-social behaviour and a social crime (Taylor and Marais 2009). This is especially in line with ‘dominant criminal justice approaches to graffiti’ (Rowe and Hutton 2012, 67) which take graffiti as a practice that ‘degrades the social status of the community and diminishes the value of property’ (Teng, Puli, Karakouzian and Xu, 2012:681). Bandanaraike (2001) observes that most countries including Australia and New Zealand have criminalised graffiti under laws based on property damage statutes. Commonplace assumption made include ‘the writer’s supposed boredom, or the writer’s desire to damage and deface, or the writer’s lack of respect for other’s property’ (Halsey and

Young, 2006:279). Resultantly, there is the adoption of the broken windows approach whereby graffiti is used as a herald of more serious forms of crimes in a community. Halsey and Young (2006:289) observe how in Australia the media has interpellated (to use an Althusserian term) graffiti writers as people who are ‘on a slippery slope downwards into criminality.’ It is no wonder Cresswell (1992) perceives graffiti as representing a ‘discourse of disorder.’

There is need to interrogate whether the occurrence of graffiti in all the social contexts are neatly categorised along the dichotomy of vandalism-art tradition. Different social milieu invariably entails that the social formation of attitudes are not homogenous across the world. Resultantly, different socio-cultural contexts are likely to result in the formation of differential attitudes and reactions to graffiti writing.

### **2.1.8 Rethinking urban public space, discourse and graffiti**

Having explored the major traditions in graffiti research, it is imperative to establish a link between graffiti and the utilisation of public spaces in urban areas. It is important to appreciate how graffiti practices are inextricably linked with (in)appropriate usage of spaces in the urban spaces. An interrogation of urban public spaces can enhance the understanding of how the construction of what are considered ‘serious’ and ‘legitimate’ discourses is a crucial factor in the analysis of graffiti discourses.

The notion of space is crucial in people’s interaction and the construction of discourse. Space is conceptualised as a platform that can either facilitate or curtail the construction of effective discourse. Generally, space is controlled by clearly defined boundaries and social conventions that distinguish between public and private space (Brown 2006). Social

conventions determine the extent to which individuals are free to participate in any activity in or on these spaces. Hence, there is a relationship between the concept of space and the degree or extent to which individuals participate in activities carried within those spaces. The particular kind of space, for example whether public or private, determines whether the individuals can participate ‘publicly’ or ‘privately.’ Amin (2008) observes the existence of a very strong relationship between urban public space and such notions and concepts as civic culture and political formation. That is, what makes a space civic, for example, is the extent to which that space allows the free and unrestricted participation of individuals who might be total or relative strangers to each other. It needs to be emphasised though that the amenability of public spaces to free and unrestricted individual or group participation is always a question of degree. In modern societies regimes of censorship make freedom of expression difficult to enjoy. Resultantly, individual experiences of public spaces are always varied and more often contradictory. Some individuals and groups enjoy some public spaces more than others, and such variations further complicate the politics that always underlie graffiti as social practice.

Urban public spaces, contrary to private spaces, nevertheless allow for relative strangers to freely meet and confer. Individuals are afforded room and opportunities to interact and engage in discourse in such spaces. As a result, public spaces are relatively places for civic discussion. Crucial for this research is the definition of the concept of ‘free participation’, especially in relation to the social practice of graffiti. The research posits that the term free can be approached from a number of perspectives. The first perspective deals with whether an individual has permission or is socially or legally sanctioned to participate in particular activities. This implies that participation in activities which one is forbidden from indulging in may lead to negative ‘sanction’ such as prosecution and other forms of punitive actions. The other perspective of ‘free’ is whether an individual feels that their ‘contributions’ in

discourses can be regarded as legitimate. This becomes an abstract or mental concept in which the individual has the conviction that they have the right to make a contribution and that the contribution made would be socially respected. Failure of one's contribution to be socially recognised can easily lead to the perpetuation of 'unfreedoms' (Samuels, 2005:15). The amount of 'unfreedoms' prevailing in any given situation determines the extent to which individuals can be effective agents of social change. Participation in platforms that are viewed negatively would constrain the free participation of individuals. Thus, individuals may:

- be morally and/or legally free to participate in discourse and their opinions and/or contributions are socially respected.
- be morally and/or legally free to participate in discourse but their opinions and/or contributions are not socially respected.
- not be morally and/or legally free to participate in discourse but their opinions and/or contributions are socially respected.
- not be morally and/or legally free to participate in discourse and their opinions and/or contributions are socially respected

Whilst the first condition is the most ideal, most graffiti writers would hope for the third option whereby, in spite of the illegality of the platform, their opinions are socially held as important. In this way, the social practice of graffiti writing can be a way of freely engaging in discourse in public spaces; making the writers part and parcel of Habermas' (2001) public sphere. Iveson (2007:4) expands on the importance of public spaces in the urban environment by asserting that 'access to such places is said to be vital for opportunities both to address a/the public and to be addressed as a part of a/the public.' One can, therefore conclude that 'public space is measured according to its accessibility' (Tonnelat 2010:2) and that such access includes notions of the individual's accessibility to the space (the extent to which they

can freely participate – orally or otherwise) and intersubjectivity (the extent to which the individual can position other individuals towards their point of view). Graffiti writing, as a subculture, can then be seen as a system of actions that renegotiate the social significance of public spaces (Apple 2006:1).

One of the important features of public spaces is that they are socially constructed. They are a product of social convention whereby society, in one way or the other, ‘designates’ spaces whereby people can publicly come together for civic purposes. Nissen (2008:1129) declares that the concept of public space is inherently an urban one since ‘there is no definition that is not related to the city.’ S/he goes on to trace the concept of public space to as far back as the medieval city times. Whilst this conceptualisation of public space can be appreciated from the general viewpoint that ‘a city’s streets, parks, squares and other shared spaces’ (Amin 2008:5) are regarded as the epitome of ‘public encounter and formation of civic culture’ (*Ibid*), it is not entirely accurate that the notion of public space is entirely an urban one. Public spaces should be perceived as products of social construction and can as such refer to any space designated for public purposes. One would therefore expect that even in non-urban areas there are places that are set aside for public interaction where individuals are expected to behave like a public body. Chiwome (1992) explores how, in the Shona culture for example, grain threshing parties (*jakwara*) were publicly held, with individuals interacting ‘freely’ and ‘unrestricted’ discourses circulating amidst general consensus with individuals not having to fear backlash or retribution from offended individuals. Carr et al (1992), cited in Brown (2006:18), observes that such cultural festivities or functions as the *jakwara* in the Shona society provides:

...common ground where people can carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community whether in the normal routines of daily life or in periodic festivities: the physical manifestation of public space.

It is apparent that public space is not an inherently urban space. Rather, it is defined by the functions or purposes for which it is socially constructed to fulfil.

The boundary between private and public space is not as clear cut as might be assumed. It is now much more than the ‘open space, meaning streets, parks, plazas and other publicly-owned and managed outdoor spaces, as opposed to the private domain of housing and work’ (Tonnelat 2010:1). There are instances when spaces can get ambiguous such as is the case with ‘privately-owned public spaces’ (Berg 2009). The same is obviously true of publicly-owned private spaces such as family weddings, parties and funerals considered private affairs; open only to selected members. In some instances private space may be appropriated and converted into public space. The line separating public and private places is not very clear. These semantic movements significantly inform the present understanding of community graffiti. Demant and Landolt (2014:172) adopt a relational approach to the definition of space whereby they take it to be ‘the product of power-filled social relations [...] and not solely as a “stage” on which these relations are enacted.’ Thus, space is much more than the physical location that has been designated to perform particular functions. Instead, it is better understood from the perspective of the people who are utilising it. In order to illustrate this point Demant and Landolt (2014) reveal how something as mundane as beer drinking by youths serves as a point where space is appropriated and thus produced (one could add, reproduced) in specific ways. In the same manner, graffiti can be conceived as a social practice that produces and reproduces space. It is a process that involves the appropriation of spaces that have been socially designated for other uses or purposes, be they originally conceived as private or public. In the process of being thus re-humanised, the private or public character of space undergoes metamorphosis.

Unlike in other countries where there are spaces (referred to as legal walls) set aside for graffiti writers to practice and showcase their art (McAuliffe 2013), Zimbabwe does not have any public spaces set aside for the inscription of graffiti. Lachman (1988) notes how New York City graffiti writers appropriated public spaces in an effort to win fame for themselves. Instances of inscription on toilet walls, for example, entail turning a space that has been otherwise meant for private business into a public platform for constructing discourse. The same can be said about inscriptions on durawalls whereby a space that is made for security and other purposes is turned into a platform of interaction by members of the public. This process of converting a private space into a platform for public issues can be construed as ‘publicisation of private space’, something akin to Nissen’s (2008:1129) ‘privatisation of public space’ whereby even durawalls of privately-owned buildings and institutions can be appropriated so that they take up a public function in so far as the construction of discourse is concerned.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

It has been shown in the review of the literature that research in graffiti has had a major impact in the determination of general perceptions on graffiti. In this body of research, some literature, on the one hand, has mainly characterised graffiti as a marginalised and childish (adolescent) discourse that is not to be taken seriously while others use the broken windows theory to argue that graffiti is a precursor of more serious forms of crime. As such, this has influenced a more militant and combative approach towards graffiti – leading to the sanitisation of walls that are covered in graffiti. Another major issue that arises from graffiti research is the fact that it mainly focuses at the micro-level. Most researchers focus on one section of society. Examples of such research include research that focus on tertiary institutions such as Arluke *et al* (1987) and Young (2000), on high schools such as Wales and

Brewer (1976), and research on gendered differences such as Green (2003). There is need to take a macro-approach whereby focus is put on more than one institution in a society and more sociolinguistic variables are looked at. The present research addresses such limitations by focusing on four urban areas in Zimbabwe and including analyses of graffiti produced in different institutions of society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an outline of the research that has been carried out in and around the area of graffiti. It was revealed that most of the research conducted on graffiti mostly focuses on either graffiti's transgressive nature or its classification as a form of art. Both of these approaches fuel the negative view that mostly justify discounting graffiti as an illegitimate and 'unserious' form of discourse that does not need or warrant serious attention both from an academic point of view and a policy-making and planning point of view. This chapter builds on the review of the literature by making an explication of the theoretical framework underpinning data analysis in the present research. The researcher, therefore, makes an account of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth referred to as CDA) and demonstrates how it is going to be employed in the research for the analysis and interpretation of graffiti found in Zimbabwe's selected urban areas. The researcher argues that since CDA views language as a social practice there is serious need to incorporate aspects of Social constructionism (SC) in CDA as it helps drive home the fact that language, and indeed discourse, is both a product of a people's interaction and that, most importantly, it is a misconception to assume that there is a specific group of people who are mainly predisposed towards or against graffiti. Thus, the incorporation of some aspects of social constructionism in CDA helps to show that graffiti is socially and culturally constrained such that it warrants to be contextualised from both a spatial and a temporal point of view.

The three major schools of thought in CDA are outlined, namely, the CDA approaches according to Ruth Wodak (discourse historical approach), Norman Fairclough (discourse as social practice) and Teun van Dijk (socio-cognitive approach). These three major approaches,

though they are all concerned in studying the discursive realisation of relationships of power, domination and inequality in language, differ according to the specific aspect of language they focus on.

### **3.1 Medium**

It emerges that discourse is inextricably linked to medium. Buckingham (2003) defines medium as something that people make use of when they want to communicate indirectly with other people. The indirectness of the communication stems from the fact that there is no direct face-to-face communication. He goes on to point out that the term medium includes the whole range of modern communication media. This includes such media as the television, radio, photography, newspaper, recorded music, and so on. Buckingham (2003) also goes on to make a distinction between mass media from media that is intended to reach small or specialised audiences. It is the latter type of media that this research focuses on. Graffiti is the type of medium that, by its very nature, is not predisposed to reaching large audiences. Of importance in the issue of medium are the four important aspects of its production, language, representation and audience. Production is concerned with the individuals who are involved in disseminating the information. O'Neill (1997) makes the important observation that genres necessarily embody the values and beliefs of the community or individuals who produce them. Graffiti is a medium that is produced by individuals who will be working alone. Focus is put on the nature of individuals who are involved in graffiti production. It is important to make an analysis of the nature of the individual producers so as to fully appreciate the issues that are raised in graffiti discourse.

Language is a very important aspect in so far as medium is concerned. Language can be approached from different perspectives. The first one, which is taken by Buckingham (2003),

has to do with the nature of language that is used. This refers to whether the language is oral or visual. The other perspective is concerned with genre. Genre is defined by Bhatia (1993) and Swales (1990) as a distinctive class of literary composition that is defined by style, form or content. As Chandler (2000) rightly observes, genre refers to a distinctive type of text. Each medium is characterised by its own specific codes and conventions. Conventions will necessarily include the kind of content that is associated with the medium. This necessitates the analysis of how conventions linked with graffiti can also be linked with the kind of topics and issues dealt with in graffiti as a medium.

The notion of representation is an important one in so far as medium issues are concerned. Representation is defined by Hall (1997) as a process that connects meaning and language to culture. This implies that representation or meaning making is not universal. It is specific to particular cultural or social contexts. The way people or individuals represent the world is determined by shared conventions in each and every social milieu. One can extend this argument to media by saying that each medium is involved in the meaning-making process in the sense that particular types of media will necessarily dictate the explicit use of particular types of representations. This can be further extended using the CDA approach by stating that representations are not innocent or neutral. They are inflected ideologically and, therefore, necessarily involve the production and reproduction of power relations through the discursive practices that are used. Graffiti can thus be taken as a medium through which representations are made. Of major interest then is what sort of meanings are represented in graffiti and the extent to which they are involved in the enactment and resistance of relations of power in any given cultural or social setting.

The notion of audiences has to do with the target consumers of the communication carried in any given form of medium. The argument is that producers of any given type of medium communicate messages that are targeted to specific individuals or groups of people. Thus it becomes crucial to establish the targeted audience for any given medium and how the audience is involved in the interactive power negotiation process in any given context.

The notion of medium highlights the centrality of spaces in both the production and reception of the content of graffiti. Processes of production and consumption of discourse are never value-free. Properties of a particular medium can influence the extent to which discourses constructed within it are accepted as appropriate, legitimate or normal. An instance is how graffiti discourses are generally regarded as discourses of disorder by virtue of what Cresswell (1992) has characterised as the crucial where of graffiti. Notions of the significance of the medium in the social construction of reality are reinforced by Seu (2010) who argues that at times the choice can conveniently opt to focus on the acceptability of the medium rather than on the function of the message. It is therefore important to explore how participants' attitudes towards graffiti writing are shaped or informed by the nature of the media on which the graffiti is inscribed.

### **3.2 Social practices**

A better appreciation of CDA is best developed by first expanding on the notion of social practice. Fairclough (1995) defines the term 'social practice' as a relatively stabilised form of social activity. It is considered any activity that people carry out for a sustained period of time so that it becomes routine. From the definition of genre discussed above, social practices end up becoming distinct types of social activities which are recognisable from their own peculiar codes and conventions. Fairclough (1995) goes on to point out that every social

practice is an articulation of diverse elements which operate within a relatively stable configuration which always includes discourse. Each social practice necessarily includes elements such as activities, subjects and their social relations, objects, time and place, forms of consciousness, values and discourse. Crucially, these elements are dialectically related in the sense that even though they are different elements they are not discrete (Fairclough, 2001). Fairclough (2001) further points out that there is a sense in which each of these elements internalises the others without necessarily being reducible to them. However, it is the element of discourse which this research is specifically concerned with. The important role of discourse in social practices cannot be overemphasised. Discourse, Fairclough (2001) observes, figures in three main ways in the construction of social practices. Firstly, it figures in as part of the social activity within practices. In this sense, the construction of discourse is taken as an important social activity in the production and stabilisation of the social practice. For example, for us to say that there is the practice of graffiti, members have to actively participate in it by the activity of writing on the surfaces. The nature of the writing must also be characterised by consistent conventions which set graffiti apart from other types of writing or discourses.

Second, discourse can also figure in representation. Fairclough (2001) states that social actors within any social practice are actively involved in the representation of other social practices in the process of representing their own. This is a fact that Buckingham (2003) reinforces when he argues that the media does not just provide its producers and consumers with a window to the world. That is to say reality is not just presented but it is actually represented. The process of representation is not, however, a straightforward one. Producers are inevitably presented with choices from which they make their representations. At the end of the day, the discourse that is constructed on any medium is actually the way in which the producers invite

their consumers to perceive or experience the world in a specific way or manner. There are, therefore, high chances that representations in any medium are ways in which the audience is made to experience other versions of reality. Significantly, there is no single or absolute version of reality. Reality, as Gergen (1999) rightly observes, is constructed. It is from this construction of multiple versions of reality that one is interested in how the relationship between discursive practices and relationships of power are represented in any medium. In so far as graffiti is concerned, it becomes of paramount importance to analyse the extent to which representations made in graffiti relate to the prevailing status quo in matters to do with power relations. For instance, it can be argued that the nature of social labels used to refer to sexually deviant individuals is inextricably related to the social environment in which the labels are constructed. The labels can thus be taken as either reproducing or resisting hegemonic patriarchal discourses disseminated in educational, health and religious institutions. This necessarily entails the incorporation, in the analysis, of the individuals and/or groups represented in graffiti and the nature of these representations. As Fairclough (1992; 2001) argues social actors are represented differently according to how they are positioned within the practice in question so that at the end representation becomes a process of social construction which determines and shapes social processes and practices.

Third, discourse can figure in ways of being and in the constitution of identities. This leads us to the point that identities are neither static nor predetermined. They are actively constructed in social practices during social interaction. Thus, it is from social interaction that identities are formed, transformed and contested.

Following Fairclough (1995), it emerges that language, being an inextricable part of the social practice of graffiti, is part of society and not external to it. This resonates with Fowler

and Hodge (1979) who also dismiss the assertion by most sociolinguists who argue for a relationship ‘between’ language and society. The dominant sociolinguistic view perceives a one-directional relationship between society and linguistic usage (society is the entity that influences language and not vice versa). This assumes that language and society are two separate and independent entities which happen to constantly come into contact. Rather, Fowler and Hodge (1979), as well as Fairclough (1995), establish an internal and dialectic relationship between the two whereby, ‘language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are, in part, linguistic phenomena’ (Fairclough, 1995: 23).

Linguistic phenomena, on the one hand, are perceived as social in the sense that whenever people use language they do so in ways which are socially constrained and which therefore have social effects. As explained by Fairclough and Wodak (1997), the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures and is at the same time shaped by them. Even ‘revolutionary’ or ‘transgressive’ use of language is also considered to be done within parameterised ways. Moreover ‘social phenomena are linguistic in the sense that the language activity which goes on in social contexts is not merely a reflection or expression of social processes and practices’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 23). What we have is a bi-directional relationship in which society influences the kind of language that is used from situation to situation and, at the same time, language also influences the society. This means that social phenomena are constructed and defined by language. One cannot thus speak of a social practice without necessarily involving language. However, Fairclough (2001) rightly observes that the two have a part-whole relationship. That is to say that linguistic phenomena (which is the ‘part’) is just but a strand of social phenomena (which is the whole). One can,

therefore, conclude that while discourse is socially constitutive, not all social phenomena are linguistic.

### **3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

According to van Dijk (1993), CDA is an analytical research methodology that proposes a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance and social inequality. Wodak (2001a) concurs with this characterisation by pointing out that CDA is a multifaceted research methodology that is mainly concerned with such important notions as power, ideology, domination and inequality. According to van Dijk (2012: 13), CDA is ‘a specific discourse analytic methodology that examines the role played by language in the construction of power relationships and the reproduction of dominance.’

Two aspects can be isolated for discussion from this characterisation. Firstly, CDA is a multifaceted research methodology (Wodak, 2001a; 2001b). The notion of ‘multifacetedness’ arises from the fact that the framework is influenced by a variety of disciplines. Wodak (1995) observes that CDA can be best characterised as a shared perspective by scholars from various disciplines on conducting linguistic, semiotic as well as discourse research. She goes on to point out that this shared perspective has its roots in the interpretation of the term ‘critical’ when approaching research in the social sciences. As such, scholars from across disciplines have contributed to the development of CDA. Most notable are contributions from disciplines such as linguistics, sociology and social psychology, among others. One can therefore conclude that CDA is ‘an amalgamation of a variety of micro-sociological theories and also theories on society and power’ (Rahimi and Riasati 2011). CDA is, therefore, not a homogenous model, nor a school of thought, nor paradigm, but at most a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis. It is not classified as a single method but

an approach, which consists of different perspectives and different methods for studying the relationship between the use of language and social context (Wang, 2006).

Secondly, CDA is inseparable from the notions of ‘power’ and ‘dominance.’ Wodak (2001a: 2) contends that the major aim of CDA is to critically investigate the occurrence of social inequality as it is ‘expressed, signalled, legitimated, constituted, and so on, by language use.’ Thus, society itself is structured from a power point view and language is a tool in this process of power organisation. Crucially, the framework appreciates that this social process of the establishment of power relations is not a cut and dried one. There are many things that are involved in the establishment of power dynamics. This includes, among other things, issues such as the enactment, reproduction, legitimisation and resistance of power. Thus, relationships of power are much more than a simple matter of dominant individuals or groups simply asserting their dominance on the dominated. Van Dijk (2012) asserts that notions of power and control are not absolute phenomena. People have more or less power. This ‘partial’ power is then in turn more or less resisted, accepted, condoned, complied with, or legitimated by the dominated. When the dominated does not fully accept the power exerted on them by the dominated this is referred to as ‘counterpower’, (Van Dijk 1993). It is also not always the case that power is exercised in obvious abusive acts and dominant groups; it may be enacted in a myriad of everyday taken-for-granted discourses. This claim, therefore, expands Habermas’ (1977) claim of language as a medium of domination and social force which, from its ideological nature, serves to legitimise relationships of social power. In making this claim, Habermas (1977) suggests that relations of power are only realised only in so far as the establishment of domination on the dominated is concerned.

There is need to dig deeper into these relations of power with the purposes of revealing some relationships of power which may not be as visible to the world as others. As such, Blommaert and Burken (2000: 448) reiterate that the purpose of CDA is to analyse and unravel ‘opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language.’ This means that not all relations of power are explicitly revealed in the process of interactions. What appears to be routine taken-for-granted ways of speaking can actually be used to naturalise existing relations of inequality. As Chouliariaki and Fairclough (1999: 4) rightly observe,

it is an important characteristic of the economic, social and cultural changes of late modernity that they exist in discourse as well as processes that are taking place outside discourse, and that the processes that are taking place outside discourse are substantially shaped by these discourse.

This implies that the power of discourse cannot be underestimated. Power relations are not only manifested ‘externally’, outside of discourse. These relations are actually shaped through discourse such that there is need to critically investigate discourse so as to establish the nature of relations constructed and/or construed through language use. As Meyer (2001) observes, approaches to social research, especially that into language, should be construed as a set of both explicit and implicit manifestations of power relations constructed through discourse. This implies that even the most innocuous use of language might be heavily ideologically inflected. Ricento (2003) sums up this argument by stating that the central goal of CDA is then to account for the intricate relationship between discourse, social cognition, power society and culture. This assertion seriously takes into consideration the fact that since speakers of language are always faced with choices in interaction the use of discourse is therefore not neutral. It is a case of representation which may be requiring audiences to perceive reality in particular ways. As a result, Meyer (2001) goes on to state that CDA scholars should endeavour to make explicit these power relations that are more often than not

hidden. It is only when this is done that the results from CDA are of practical relevance to society.

In carrying out a critical discourse analysis, it is important to note that there are three ‘levels’ involved. That is, the analyst should ‘separately’ consider the aspects of ‘critical’, ‘discourse’ and ‘analysis.’

### **3.3.1 Critical**

CDA has some of its roots in the Frankfurt school of Critical Theory. Critical Theory, according to Rogers, Malancaruvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hai and O’Garro-Joseph (2005) is mainly concerned with two issues. Firstly, it is a paradigm that attempts to establish as well as confront issues of power, privilege and hegemony. It is generally concerned with the ways in which aspects such as the economy, race, class, gender, religion, education and sexuality interact with issues of power and justice to construct, reproduce and transform social systems. The underlying belief in the Critical Theory paradigm is that people’s thoughts (their ideologies) are mediated by historically constructed power relations. As such facts are considered to be never neutral since they are inherently embedded in their contexts.

Secondly, Critical Theory contends that internalised hegemony is one of the most potent forms of oppression. This may be achieved through both coercion and consent. In trying to discover the true nature of domination through power, critical researchers focus on the many forms through which power may be realised. These include, ideology, material, physical, cultural, psychological and linguistic power. Most crucially, Critical Theory believes that the constitutive nature of discourse is central in the formation of subjectivities and subjugations. This is to say that like CDA, Critical Theory avoids positing a simple deterministic

relationship between discourse and the social (Wodak, 1995). In this sense, language is regarded as a product of human interaction aimed at producing, sustaining or resisting particular relationships of inequality. Graffiti writing is therefore regarded as a form of writing in politics where linguistic choices are ideologically inflected to further or curtail the power of particular individuals or groups.

The term ‘critical’ in CDA implies that the analyst is wary of the ‘present social order’ (Billig, 2003: 38). This is often associated with studying prevailing power relations in society. Thus the term ‘critical’ in CDA captures the analyst’s intention to uncover power relationships and expose inequities embedded in society (Rogers, 2004). One way of achieving this is through the establishment of links between linguistic structure and its discursive function in the construction of power relations. It involves an explicit and sustained focus on aspects of grammar, morphology, semantics, and syntax, among others, and relating them to how people use language in different contexts to achieve specific or particular outcomes. As Wodak (1995) notes, this involves the deconstruction of opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in discourse with the purpose of making explicit their underlying meaning. This may also necessarily include an investigation and explication of the networks of form-function relationships that are valued more than others. Another interpretation of ‘critical’ is that CDA seeks to overtly address social problems with the intention of seeking to find their solutions. The solution finding process may be accompanied by social and political action. The overarching belief is that in exposing power relations as reflected through language, the analyst will be automatically disrupting the power relations in the social contexts in which they are found. In sum, ‘critical’ entails an orientation that is aimed at locating social problems and the analysis of how discourse operates and is historically constructed, (Rogers

2004). Rogers goes on to point out that mere analysis of texts for power is not enough. The analyst must work from the analysis of the texts to the social and political context in which the text emerge. Wodak (1995: 204) summarises the goal of CDA as the establishment of connections between ‘social and political engagement’ with ‘a sociologically informed construction of society.’

### **3.3.2 Discourse**

Although van Dijk (1997) acknowledges that the common-sense definition of discourse is language use which is not only limited to spoken language but also to written (or printed) language, communication and interaction, CDA has two other approaches to its definition. According to O’Halloran (2001), within the CDA paradigm, the term ‘discourse’ has two different but related meanings. The first one relates to discourse as ‘language-in-use.’ This suggests the study of language is used in real-life situation, as opposed to contrived language that is often used for educational purposes.

The second meaning of ‘discourse’ has its roots in Foucault’s theorisation of the various ways of talking about the world which are closely connected to the ways in which people perceive and comprehend it (O’Halloran 2001). Here discourse is seen as having the ability to constrain possibilities of articulation in any given situation. Thus, it is closely linked with Fairclough’s view of discourse as a social practice. As a result, language cannot be considered neutral since it is implicated in political, social, economic, religious and cultural formations and institutions. Based on Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), CDA believes that language basically is a response to the functions of language use and that language has different functions to perform (Rogers 2004). This means language users choose from an array of meaning-making potential that are available to them in the process of

representation in dialogue, (Rogers et al 2005). As a result common links can be established between SFL and CDA. These include the view of language as a social construct, language as dialectic and an emphasis on both the cultural and historical acts of meaning-making.

### **3.3.3 Analysis**

Being a multi-faceted paradigm, there are a number of approaches to analysis that the analyst can take when carrying CDA research. Rogers (2004) notes that the different approaches are contingent to the discipline in which the research is carried out. That is whether it is linguistic or not. Linguistic research in CDA has mainly been influenced by Fairclough's (1992,1995) textually-oriented approach to discourse analysis.

Carvahlo (2008) makes the observation that Fairclough's approach is predicated upon the view that discourse is a type of social practice. This implies that each discursive event is dialectically tied to society insofar as it both constitutes and is constituted by social phenomena. This implies that in any society the way people construct discourse is both influenced by society and, at the same time, influences or shapes social activities and structures. Analysis of discourse therefore means that the analyst is obliged to be alert to power relations being exercised through discourse and 'aims to overcome the normal opacity of social practices' (Fairclough, 1995: 54).

Fairclough (1992) proposes a three-tiered framework for analysis in the CDA paradigm. The framework is aimed toward the analysis of three separate 'entities', namely, an analysis of texts, of interaction and of social practices. The term 'social practice' is a general one as social practices can be carried out at various levels. When carrying out a critical discourse analysis of texts, it is important to unbundle the term and focus on the three levels on which

they can be practiced. Resultantly, analysis of social practice necessarily compels the analysts to focus on the three levels that are the local, institutional and societal levels. Fairclough's three-tier framework, therefore, consists of description, interpretation and explanation.

The first level of description deals with the rigorous analysis of formal properties. This involves the identification and 'labelling' of the formal features of the text. Taylor, Quigley, Kajganich and Kraglund-Gauthier (2011) trace the process of identification and labelling of the texts' formal features to Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which is oriented to the social character of texts. Fairclough (1995: 25) points out that SFL stresses the view that texts are multifunctional, in the sense that apart from always simultaneously representing the world (ideational function) and enacting social relations and identities (interpersonal function), they are built out of choices from within available systems of options in vocabulary, grammar, and so forth. He adds:

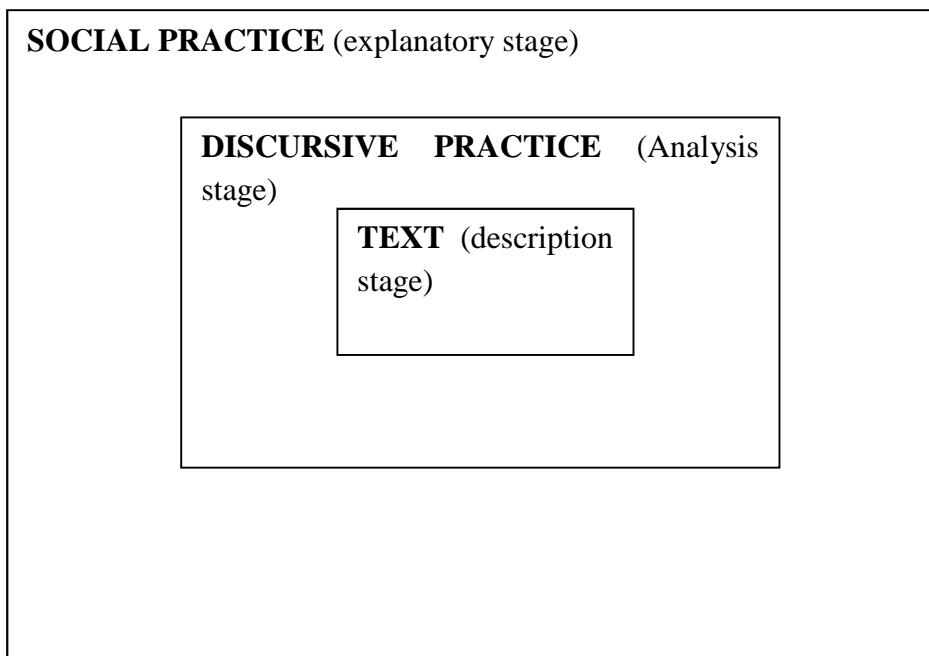
A basic assumption is that ... texts do not merely 'mirror realities' as is sometimes naively assumed; they constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them. They do so through choices which are made at various levels in the process of producing texts, (Fairclough, 1995: 103).

To Fairclough (1995) discourse is a field in which both ideological processes and linguistic processes operate. Thus, the description level of Fairclough's framework is pre-occupied with the identification and enumeration of the linguistic processes that operate in any given discourse. It is then the analyst's prerogative at this stage to look at the choices that people make when interacting in any given discourse. This implies that people are faced with choices insofar as the representations they make in graffiti practices in Zimbabwe's urban areas are concerned. The question then is what choices do they make and to what ends are those intended to be put?

The second level of analysis in Fairclough's framework is an analysis of discursive practices. Fairclough (1995) defines the term discursive practice as the processes of textual production and text consumption. This implies that various aspects of the processes of text production and text consumption may have a more or less routine and/or institutional character. In some cases some of these aspects may be manifested more or less as discourse processes. This might, crucially, involve an analysis of whether a particular discourse is relatively homogenous or heterogeneous in its form and meaning. Fairclough (1995: 61) points out that 'the general point to emphasise is that creativity in the discursive practices is tied to particular social conditions – conditions of change and instability.'

In carrying out analysis, the critical discourse analyst may be compelled to carry out an intertextual analysis whereby he/she seeks to unravel the genres and discourses that are drawn upon in the production of texts under analysis. The question that the analyst will be seeking to answer is 'what genres and discourses were drawn upon in producing the text, and what traces of them are there in the text?' (Fairclough, 1995: 61). It is this intertextual analysis that makes this second level of analysis in Fairclough's framework an interpretative one.

In the third and final level of analysis in Fairclough's framework the analyst is mainly concerned with an analysis of social practices. Fairclough (1995: 57) defines social practices as 'the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is a part of.' Figure 3.1 below illustrates Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse and its three levels of analysis.



**Figure 3.1:** Fairclough's three-tier analysis model (adapted from Fairclough, 1992: 73)

Depending on the specific type of context that the analyst is basing their analysis on, analysis at this level may be carried out at different abstraction levels: ‘it may involve its immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices the event is embedded within, or the yet wider frame of the society and culture’ (Fairclough, 1995: 62).

It is important to note that all of these three levels of context abstractions may be relevant in the appreciation of the particular communicative event or text. Using these three different abstractions of contexts leads to the appreciation of why this level of analysis is regarded as the explanatory level of analysis in CDA. Thus, the researcher will not only describe how language is used to signal, naturalise or neutralise power relationships, but explanations will also be provided to account for the recurrence of particular terms, meanings or structures in the linguistic contests of power.

### **3.4 Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis**

Being a multidisciplinary theory and methodology it is not surprising that there are a number of different approaches that can be taken when carrying out a CDA. There are a number of potential approaches but only the three major approaches will be discussed in this chapter. These are Wodak's discourse-historical approach, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Fairclough's discourse as social practice.

#### **3.4.1 Fairclough' discourse as social practice**

Rahimi and Riasati (2011) consider Fairclough as the most significant contributor in the area of critical discourse analysis in the sense that he was the first to create a theoretical framework, which provided guidelines for future CDA research. Fairclough (2001: 121) states that:

CDA is in my view as much theory as method – or rather, a theoretical perspective on language and more generally semiosis (including ‘visual language’, ‘body language’, and so on) as one element or ‘moment’ of the material social process (Williams, 1977), which gives rise to ways of analysing language or semiosis within broader analyses of the social process.

Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis conceives language as an integral element of the material social process, (Fairclough, 2001: 122). This stems from the fact that every form of semiosis, language included, is regarded as an irreducible part of the material social process. Semiosis is, therefore, considered to include all meaning-making forms. These forms may also include visual images and body language. Social life, within Fairclough's model, is seen as an interconnected network of diverse social practices, with each and every practice having a semiotic element. The rationale for focusing and concentrating more on the notion of social practice is predicated on the fact that it enables the analyst to combine the perspective of structure and that of action. This is to say that, ‘a practice, on the one hand a

relatively permanent way of acting socially which is defined by its position within a structured network of practices, and a domain of social action and interaction which both reproduces structures and has the potential to transform them', (Fairclough, 2001: 122). As such:

his perspective is that CDA is a method of examining social and cultural modifications that could be employed in protesting against power and control of an elite group on other people (Ahmadvand, 2011: 3).

Social practices inherently contain within them a number of elements. These include social relations, social identities, cultural values, consciousness and semiosis. Most importantly, the elements are dialectically related to each other in the sense that although they are different elements they are not discrete or fully separate. In a sense there is level on which they internalise each other without necessarily being reducible to any one of them. CDA, then becomes an analysis of 'the dialectical relationship between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practices' (Fairclough, 2001: 123). The main concern in the analysis is how the process of semiosis figures within the process of change. What emerges from Fairclough's approach is that language (as well as any other form of semiosis) is an irreducible element of social life, (Rahimi and Riasati 2011). Rahimi and Riasiti further argue that the dialectical relationship between language and social reality is realised through social events, texts, social practices, orders of discourses and social structures.

Fairclough provides, as illustrated in section 3.3.3, a three dimensional framework for the analysis of texts and discourse;

- a. The linguistic description of the formal properties of texts.
- b. The interpretation of the relationship between discursive processes and the text.
- c. The explanation of the relationship between discourse and socio-cultural reality.

As pointed out by Rahimi and Riasati (2011), Fairclough's model goes beyond the 'whatness' (mere description) of the process of text description to the 'how' and 'whyness' (explanation and interpretation) of the text interpretation and explanation. This stems from the fact that meanings and propositions in texts and discourse are never value-free. They are, rather, both ideologically driven and motivated. Thus, a critical analysis of language is most likely to reveal the social process and specific ideologies embedded in them. The fact that meaning in language is never innocent and value-free highlights the notion of the 'hidden agenda' of language.

In line with Fairclough's approach, graffiti is taken as a social practice. That is, it is taken as a relatively stable practice that people engage in and, like any other form of human practices; graffiti has its own conventions as well as type(s) of language. A social practice is both shaped by the people and, at the same time, helps to shape particular notions about the graffiti itself and the people who engage in the practice.

### **3.4.2 Wodak's discourse-historical approach**

Wodak's discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis is a paradigm that is committed to the 'socio-philosophical orientation of critical theory', (Wodak, 2001: 64). Ahmadvand (2011) makes the observation that Wodak's model is based on Bernstein's sociolinguistic tradition as well as Habermas' work in the Frankfurt school. According to Wodak (1995: 204) CDA:

involves the practical linking of 'social and political engagement' with 'a sociologically informed construction of society' (Krings et al, 1973: 808), while recognising 'that, in human matters, interconnections and chains of cause-and-effect may be distorted out of vision.' Hence, 'critique' is essentially making visible the interconnectedness of things (Fairclough, 1985: 747).

Opaque texts are, therefore, deconstructed and their underlying meanings are made explicit, (Wodak 1995). Following Fairclough (1995: 14), ‘discourse is conceived of as a way of signifying a particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective.’ In this vein written and spoken language is conceived of as a form of social behaviour. The approach assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive practices and specific fields of action in which they are embedded. In other words ‘discourse as a social act creates discourse and non-discourse behaviours and in turn is created by them’, (Ahmadvand, 2011: 10).

Wodak’s discourse-historical approach has a number of characteristics. Some of the most important characteristics of the discourse-historical approach are that:

1. The approach is problem oriented. It is not focused specifically on linguistic items. This is to say that the approach is not primarily on language per se. Rather, it is mainly focused on problems that are found in society and how language is used to enact or reproduce those problems.
2. The theory is abductive. This implies that there is need to constantly move back and forth or oscillate between theory and empirical data. As is stressed by Ahmadvand (2011), the analyst is always interested on the relationship between theory and empirical data.
3. The historical context is always analysed and integrated into the interpretation of discourses and texts. Wodak (1995) rightly makes the point that history is an essential and inherent component of interaction at any given level. A full appreciation of how discourse is used in society can only be best appreciated in the context of its historical background. Thus, it is the discourse-historical approach’s distinctive feature that it attempts to take into account all background information in analysing different

layers of spoken or written text (Ahmadvand, 2011: 9). This also necessarily involves the relating of the analysed texts to other, ‘connected, discourses and to historic and synchronic contexts’, Wodak (1995: 204).

4. The importance of practice. Critical discourse analysis is not analysis that should be perceived as that of analysis for analysis’ sake. Ahmadvand (2011: 9) notes that ‘the major goal is to put research into practice.’ Results from analysis should be availed to experts in various fields with the determining goal of positively transforming particular discursive and social practices.
5. Discourse is regarded as a form of social action that is ‘always determined by values and social norms, by conventions (as naturalised ideologies) and social practices, and always delimited and influenced by power structures and historical processes’, (Wodak, 1995: 206).
6. Meanings are a result of social construction stemming from the ‘interaction between readers/hearers of texts and the speakers/writers of texts’ (Wodak, 1995: 206).

### **3.4.3 Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model**

van Dijk (2001: 96) considers CDA discourse analysis with an attitude in the sense that ‘it focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination.’ Such analysis is done, wherever possible, in a manner that is consistent with the best interest of the dominated groups. This is done by seriously taking into consideration the experiences and opinions of such oppressed and dominated groups and overtly supporting their struggle against inequality. It is because of this ‘bias’ that van Dijk (2001: 96) characterises his approach as:

a ‘solidarity with the oppressed’ with an attitude of opposition and dissent against those who abuse text and talk in order to establish, confirm or legitimate their abuse of power.

The socio-cognitive approach is primarily fascinated in the socio-cognitive interface of discourse analysis. This interface comprises the triangulation of the three elements of discourse, cognition and society. In this triangle, discourse is regarded as both a cognitive phenomenon and a social phenomenon. It is approached in its broad and general sense of:

a ‘communicative event’ which includes, but is not limited to, conversational interaction, written texts, as well as associated gestures, facework, typological layout, images and other ‘semiotic’ or multimedia dimension and signification (van Dijk, 2001: 98).

‘Cognition’ is taken to include:

both personal and social cognition, beliefs as well as evaluations and emotions and other ‘mental’ or ‘memory’ structures, representations or processes involved in discourse and interaction (van Dijk, 2001: 98).

Society is taken to include both the local micro-structures as well as the political, social, and universal macro-structures which are characterised and defined according to individuals and groups and their relationships such as those of dominance and inequality. Of major concern in van Dijk’s model is the importance of context and context models. The context itself can be further distinguished into the micro and macro contexts. The former takes into consideration ‘the features of the immediate situation and interaction in which the communicative event occurs’, (Rahimi and Riasati, 2011: 8). The latter ‘refers to historical, cultural, political and social structure in which a communicative event occurs’, (Ibid). Context models, which are stored in long term memory – where knowledge is stored, refer to the mental representations that are responsible for controlling many of the features of discourse production and comprehension.

The socio-cognitive approach, according to Rahimi and Riasati (2011), does not consider the connection between social structures and discourse structures to be a direct one. Rather, the two structures are mediated with each other through personal and social cognition. Van Dijk

(1997) characterises discourse as being comprised of the three dimensions of language use, cognitive communicative beliefs and interaction in social situations.

The three approaches discussed focus on different aspects of language in the process of carrying out a critical discourse analysis of language. Fairclough and Wodak (1997), as summarised in Rogers et al (2005), outline the major tenets and principles of CDA as follows:

- a. Discourse does ideological work.
- b. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
- c. Discourse is situated and historical.
- d. Power relations are partially discursive.
- e. Mediation of power relations necessitates a socio-cognitive approach.
- f. CDA is a socially committed scientific paradigm that addresses social problems.
- g. Discourse analysis is interpretive, descriptive and explanatory and uses a ‘systematic methodology.’
- h. The role of the analyst is to study the relationship between texts and social practices.

Due to these common aspects of CDA, it then becomes difficult to solely or exclusively base one's analysis on only one of the three approaches discussed above to the exclusion of others. Their close association implies that they are aspects from the other paradigms that will be inherently included in whatever paradigm will be chosen by the analyst to base their research. Be that as it may, the present research is mainly based on Fairclough's perception of language as a social practice. This is due to the fact that perceiving discourse as a social practice best captures the social nature of discourses constructed through graffiti. It also enables an exploration of how other social variables, including other discourses and genres,

impact on the construction of relationships of inequality. However, aspects from van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Wodak's discourse-historical approach will be incorporated wherever possible.

In sum, CDA approach to the analysis of discourse and language is grounded in the view that language is a social practice. This entails a focus on the investigation of the discursive relationship between discourse and the notions of power, dominance and hegemony. The theory is predicated on the notion that human interaction is inherently constrained by the nature of power relationships that are prevailing in any given social milieu. One basic assumption made by critical discourse analysts is that since society is inherently structured and hierarchical, the way people use discourse in their day to day interaction reflects such structures and hierarchies. Use of language is, therefore, not taken to be equal nor neutral. Language is perceived as being highly inflected from an ideological point of view which in turn means that communication is by nature inherently a battlefield of these ideologies. Thus, CDA makes the crucial argument that the use of language in any given situation is never innocent or impartial. Discourse is thus just one out of a variety of communication tools that have been employed by human beings to serve in a variety of ways in their interaction. CDA argues that the choice of medium is not innocent and impartial. Choice of medium is guided or informed by the ends to which the communication is meant to serve. This means that the choice of the medium is guided by considerations of the extent to which it can best serve the interests of its users. This implies that discourse cannot be fully appreciated without putting into consideration the medium that has been chosen as its vehicle. That is, unauthorised writing on public and private property is inherently a deviant and subservient activity. Resultantly, the starting point in the analysis of discourses emerging from graffiti writing is

to establish ways in which they either seek to naturalise or neutralise dominant and/or hegemonic discourses.

### **3.5 Social Constructionism**

The preceding section revealed that CDA is mainly predicated on the notion of language as a social practice. This assumption about the nature of discourse reveals that language is the product of society, is shaped by this society and, in turn, shapes society; hence the dialectical relationship that exists between language and society. This idea is explicitly at the heart of social constructionism (SC). SC is used in this research to complement the tenets of CDA in revealing that language, being a social practice, is not universal. Rather, it is shaped by the society in which it exists and the fact that there are potentially many different ways of expressing the same ideas and propositions in several societies is evidence of this.

Burr (1995) characterises social constructionism as a social psychology perspective that draws its influences from a number of disciplines which include psychology, sociology and linguistics. According to Boghossian (2001), to say that something is socially constructed implies that it is contingent on aspects of social life. That is, that social aspect would not have existed outside society. The social constructionist perspective argues that there is no privileged relationship between the world and the word (Gergen, 1999). For any given situation there are multiple descriptions that are potentially possible, and there is no upper limit to our forms of description. The meaning of our world is generated through the way we use words together.

Social constructionism itself is premised on two major notions of social constructs and the understanding of social reality. A social construct is defined as anything that is in existence as

a direct or indirect result of social interactions. Such things or notions as graffiti and language are aspects that are in existence as integral parts of our social functioning. Their existence is contingent upon social interaction. Berger and Luckmann (1971) argue that social constructs are both epistemologically objective and ontologically subjective. Their meanings are inextricably tied onto their context of production and consumption. They cannot be fully understood or appreciated outside their socio-cultural environment. Social constructs can be, therefore, perceived as artefacts in the sense that they are objects that are produced and comprehended only within the background of the social reality in which they exist. Raskin (2002: 9) states that ‘social constructs are constituted within the boundaries of culture, context and language.’ Transported into another social milieu they may, at best, mean something totally different or, at worst, may not carry any meaning at all.

Language plays a very critical role in the social construction of reality. Wilkinson (2001) argues that all knowledge is both mediated and constructed through inherent language properties. This is a fact that is further reinforced by Raskin (2002) who contends that the way people talk about themselves and their world in general plays a very big role in determining the nature of their experiences. Of interest to social constructionists is the role played by language in the institutional formulation of social problems, (Sandstrom, Martin and Fine, 2001). The institutional formulation of social problems entails that ‘there are many different ways of talking about the world within any given society’s many subcultures’ (Raskin, 2002: 10). Raskin further states that there are some ways through which reality is constructed by language which become dominant over others. In any given society or context there are some accounts that become dominant whilst others become either ignored or suppressed. Thus, power relations become a central concern of the analyst within the social constructionist paradigm.

There are basically two versions of social constructionism. These are the weak and the strong versions. The former, according to Siebers (2001: 738), ‘posits that dominant ideas, attitudes, and customs of a society influence the perception’ of social phenomena. Proponents of the weak version of social constructionism ‘accept the existence of objective conditions, while focusing on the social processes through which these conditions enter public debate’ (Sandstrom et al, 2001: 223). Society, in this regard, is constructed on the basis of facts or beliefs that are seen as primitive in any give society. Owing to the fact that this version of constructionism assumes some pre-condition on which reality is constructed, it is also referred to as ‘contextual constructionism or cautious naturalism’, (Sandstrom et al, 2001: 223).

Strong constructionism makes the claim that sociological knowledge is just as constructed as the rhetoric or ideology of any social group (Sandstrom et al. 2001). It relies ‘on a linguistic model that describes representation itself as a primary ideological force’ (Siebers, 2001:738). This is to say that everything that is referred to or regarded as ‘reality’ is in itself also a social construct. The current research follows the claims by proponents of the strong social constructionist movement and argues that our language and social practices, to a greater extent, determine how we perceive and make sense of what we refer to as reality. Similarly, Berger and Luckmann (1967) make the observation that reality is actively constructed as a direct result of the creation and shaping of the world in social interactions. They regard language as an essential tool in this social construction of reality in the sense that it influences our understanding of what we regard as real, possible or impossible. Burr (1995) provides four key assumptions on which SC is founded. These broad tenets are as follows:

- a. Social constructionism is a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. That is, reality should not be taken to be a product of a nature which people have no control over. This entails the questioning of the view that knowledge is built upon objective and unbiased observation of the world. What is regarded to be in existence is what people have actually perceived to exist.
- b. Analysis in the social constructionist perspective should be predicated on historical and cultural specificity. How one perceives social phenomena is based on where and when in the world one lives. This implies that ‘all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative’, (Burr 1995: 4).
- c. Knowledge is sustained by social processes. The process of social interaction is the one that is responsible for the construction of knowledge. Burr (1995:4) assets that ‘it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated.’ It is important to note that there are many ‘versions’ of knowledge and that people ‘fabricate’ this knowledge to various ends.
- d. Knowledge and social action go together. Burr (1995) stresses the point that some social constructions are aimed at sustaining some patterns of social action while excluding others.

In this line of argument, graffiti, because it is taken as a social practice, is regarded as a social phenomenon that exists as a direct result of human interactions. The language that is used in, or to talk about, graffiti is also by implication also taken to be a social construct in the sense that it is the people who actively decide the language to use in ‘practicing’ graffiti as well as deciding what to and what not to discuss in it. This would obviously call into question claims made by scholars such as Othen-Price (2006) and Ouzman (2010) who characterise graffiti as a predominantly adolescent male activity and as the modern language of the underprivileged and peripheral, respectively.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The chapter outlined the major tenets and principles of CDA. It was established that the theory is premised on the notion of language as a social practice and that it is mainly interested in the dialectical relationship between language and society. Of major interest to critical discourse analysis is how language figures in notions of power, inequality, hegemony and ideology. The social practice aspect of CDA is complemented by the theory of Social Constructionism which views language, and indeed the practice of graffiti itself, as a social construct. That is, both the social practice of graffiti and the language that is used in and to talk about graffiti is as a result of social interactions.

# **CHAPTER 4**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter explored the conceptual framework underpinning this research. It discussed the CDA and social constructionist frameworks which are used in the explication of graffiti messages. That is, concepts of power are perceived by the researcher to be a central concern in graffiti writing. These theoretical paradigms were used to investigate how power relations are practiced in the socially constructed practice of graffiti. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the methodology that was used in the current study. Research methods, Denscombe (2006: 325) observes, are comprised of

a factual statement of how the research was conducted. The design of the research, the methods of data collection and the techniques of data analysis need to be described. They also need to be justified as appropriate in relation to the research questions and the broader social, ethical and resource issues.

Research methodology is mainly concerned with the specification of the two related aspects of research design and research methodology that underpin the study. Equally important when talking of research methodology is the aspect of validity. This chapter, therefore, outlines how the researcher ensured the validity of the findings. This includes both external and internal validity. The research's methodology, which includes the sampling techniques and data-collection procedures, is informed by Maxwell's (1996) interactive model of research design. It is an interactive and flexible model which is founded upon a dialectic relationship existing among its five components; namely: purposes, research questions, contextual context, methods and validity.

#### **4.1 The research design**

Kumar (2011) defines a research design as a plan that is adopted by the researcher to answer the research questions in a manner that is valid, objective, accurate and economical. As such, the research design is the aspect of the research process that ensures that the approach taken to, among other things, identify the population to be studied, the sample to base analysis on and the techniques of data collection and analysis is the correct one for the study. A research design is therefore taken to include both the actual methods and techniques that are employed by the researcher as well as the underlying principles and hypotheses regarding the use of those methods and techniques. Maxwell (1996: 2) stresses that a research design is ‘plan or protocol for carrying out or accomplishing’ an academic research. Literature on research designs identifies three broad research designs; namely, quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches. Babbie and Mouton (2001) propose a participatory action paradigm as a third approach after the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The current research adopts a qualitative research design. Because the main source of data that is subjected to analysis here is predominantly textual in nature, the qualitative design becomes the most appropriate methodological approach. Locke, Silverman, and Spirduso (2010) reiterate the fact that the most common form that is assumed by the raw data in qualitative research is words rather than numbers. O’Leary (2010) goes on to state that qualitative data is presented through words, pictures, or icons and analysed using thematic exploration.

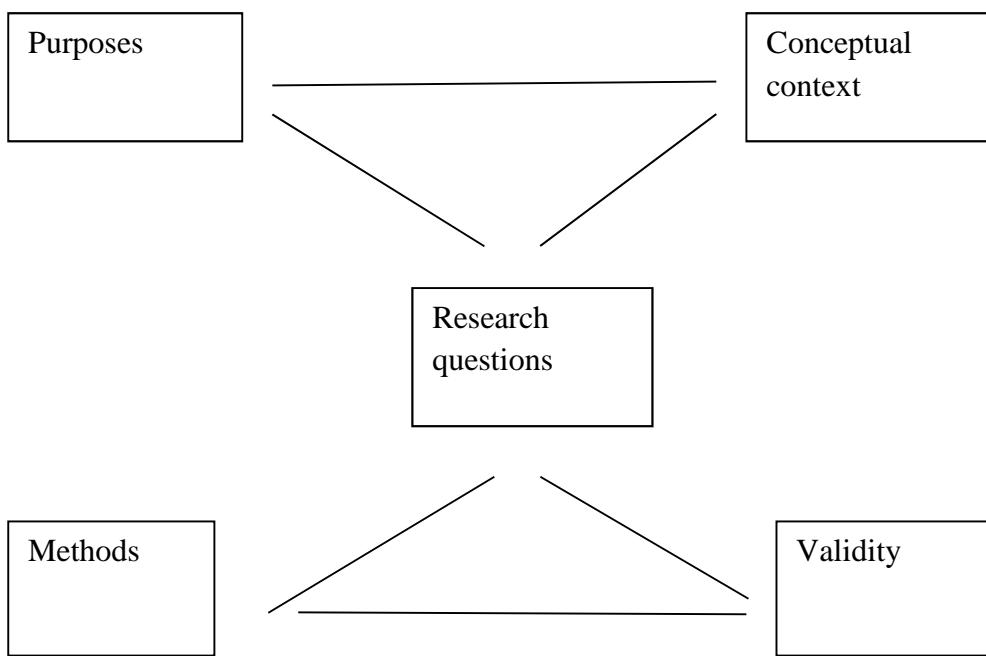
Babbie and Mouton (2001) argue that all empirical researches conform to a standard logic which is captured by the acronym ProDEC. This refers to the specification of the research

problem, of the research design, of how the empirical evidence (data for the research) is to be gathered and the conclusions of the study. It is important to point out that some of these aspects are more pertinent to research design whilst the others are to research methodology.

The research design is informed by Maxwell's (1996) interactive model. It is a model of qualitative research design that is characterised by an interconnected and flexible structure. This model consists of five key components, namely, purposes, conceptual context, research questions, methods and validity. As is suggested by its nomenclature, the five components are not treated as separate or discrete and independent components of the model. Rather, they have an 'innovative' relationship in that they form an 'integrated and interactive' link in which 'each component [is] closely tied to several others, rather than being linked in a linear or cyclical sequence' (Maxwell, 1996: 5). The relationships among the key components of the interactive model are shown in the hour glass figure in Fig 4.1 below. It is interesting to note that the lines connecting the various components 'represent two-way ties of influence and implications' (*Ibid*). The dialectic relationship between the components suggests that the components simultaneously impact upon each other. The model itself is hinged on the study's research questions. It is these research questions which ultimately guide the purposes to which the research seeks to serve, the theory and body of knowledge that can be used in the explication of the phenomenon under investigation, the best methods to be employed in the research and the various ways of dealing with plausible validity threats to the answers offered. This brings to the fore measures put in place by the researcher to ensure the validation of analyses made. It necessarily involves the conducting of informal focus group discussions with randomly selected participants so as to complement textual analysis.

The model itself can be divided into two. The top half of the model (containing purposes and the conceptual context) can be taken to represent the external aspect of the research. This part of the model ‘includes the goals, experiences, knowledge, assumptions, and theory’ that the researcher brings into the research situation (Maxwell, 1996: 6). It is this part which influences the overall design selected by the researcher and the direction in which the research itself should take. For example, since the present research involves the analysis of data that is predominantly textual, it inherently predicts that a qualitative approach is to be taken. The bottom part, on the other hand, represents the internal aspect which includes ‘the actual activities that you will carry out and the processes that you will go through to develop and test your conclusions’ (*Ibid*). The research questions are therefore the centre of the model which is responsible for connecting the two halves of the model. The interactive nature of the model also entails that the different connections of the model are not rigid rules. Rather, they allow for a certain amount of ‘give’ and elasticity in the design. I find it useful to think of them as rubber bands. They can stretch and bend to some extent, but they exert a definite tension on different parts of the design, beyond a particular point, or under certain stresses, they will break (Maxwell, 1996:7).

This particular model of qualitative research design is both flexible and capable of imposing constraints on its various components.



**Fig 4.1:** The interactive model of qualitative research, (Maxwell, 1996:5)

#### 4.1.1 Purposes of the research

The purposes of carrying out any research, according to Maxwell (1996), can be taken to include, in a broad sense, aspects such as motives, desires and goals. Research seeks to achieve three main functions. It aims to be exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. The current research is exploratory mainly because it explores the nature of graffiti that occurs in Zimbabwe's urban areas. It examines the functions or roles of graffiti used as a communicative medium through which discourse is constructed and negotiated, as well as the social formation of attitudes towards graffiti. Consequently, the research adopts a cross-sectional approach in which the phenomenon of graffiti is studied at one period in time (Babbie and Mouton 2001; Mouton 2001).

#### **4.1.2 Conceptual context**

The conceptual context includes the ‘underlying context of assumption’ (Maxwell, 1996: 25). It can be characterised as the system of ‘concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform’ a research (Maxwell 1996: 25). In the conceptual framework, the researcher formulates what is assumed to be going on with the phenomena under study. It is this assumption that then informs the rest of the research design. Graffiti is conceived as a social construct in the sense that it is brought about by people’s interactions. It reflects societal conventions owing to the fact that people, social beings, shape graffiti practices and therefore its communicative goals. It is not enough to assume that graffiti is always tagger graffiti as is the case with Apple (2006), Pietrosanti (2010) and Barnet-Weiser (2011), among others, who narrowly trace the roots of graffiti to tagging traditions of New York and Philadelphia. It is not uncommon for graffiti researches to regard graffiti as essentially an art or creative practice aimed at reinventing the writers’ identity on the various surfaces on which graffiti is inscribed (Taylor and Marais 2009; Barbour 2013). Graffiti, in Zimbabwe, is conceptualised as serving a utilitarian function that goes beyond issues of art. It is an alternative discourse constructed to negotiate power relations produced and maintained by dominant institutional discourses propagated in educational, health and religious circles. As such, it is imperative to focus on how social factors shape its discursive practices.

#### **4.1.3 Research questions**

The research questions spell out what the research specifically aims to achieve. Due to the fact that they are the one component that has a direct link to all of the other components in the model, research questions are at the heart of the interactive model. The research questions, as Maxwell (1996) specifies, are however modelled or formulated only after the

purposes and conceptual context have been formulated. The research questions guiding the research, given in section 1.2.2 above, and restated below, are:

- What are the people's multiple reactions to graffiti?
- What is the nature of urban street graffiti in Zimbabwe?
- What themes dominate socio-economic issues in Zimbabwe's urban graffiti inscriptions?
- How does political graffiti in Zimbabwe manifest a multi-nuanced dimension?
- How are issues of sexuality and gender negotiated in toilet graffiti in educational institutions?

These questions in turn influence the choice of instruments used in the data collection process, as discussed below.

## **4.2 Research methodology**

Research methodology is concerned with the strategies the researcher uses to obtain the data needed for analysis. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), research methodology is concerned with issues to do with methods and techniques of sampling, data collection procedures and data analysis. The methodology, as pointed out by Maxwell (1996), is dependent on the purposes of the study. As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of this research is the analysis of the sociolinguistic usage of graffiti in selected urban areas of Zimbabwe. The data collection methods entailed the establishment of the sections of the population which are more actively engaged in the social practice of graffiti. Once the data had been collected, the researcher proceeded to do a thematic analysis of the graffiti content.

Since graffiti is a practice that is generally frowned upon in Zimbabwe, the researcher first had to carry out a preliminary survey aimed at establishing the prevalence of graffiti in the

urban areas selected for the study. The researcher was very much conscious of the broken windows theory which states that once instances of graffiti occur and are seen in the community, ignoring them is tantamount to relaying the message that the community does not care (Graham, 2004). This is especially the case in schools where any graffiti in the institution is taken as a massive undermining of school authority as well as a reflection of the perpetrators' moral and ethical standing. Any graffiti that is seen in such institutions is immediately erased as a way of sanitising the walls from unruly elements. Therefore, the researcher had to only consider the institutions that indeed had graffiti at the time of data collection (August 2012 to November 2013).

#### **4.2.1 Data collection procedures**

Data collection procedures refer to methods and techniques the researcher uses in obtaining data for analysis in the research. Data collection procedures can be perceived as a generic term subsuming the sampling techniques, the data collection tools or instruments and methods of data analysis. These three aspects will be separately looked at in the sections below.

##### **4.2.1.1 Sampling techniques**

Sampling techniques refer to the method that was used by the researcher in the selection of the urban areas within which the data were collected as well as the actual locations where the data were obtained. The study population consisted of two distinct discourse communities who practice graffiti depending on the context in which the graffiti is found. The first community of practice comprises participants who are involved in the formal education system context. This group is made up of people who practice their graffiti in formal education institutions such as government and private secondary and high schools, private

colleges, universities, teachers' colleges and polytechnic colleges. The other group comprises people who practice graffiti outside of these institutions. This kind of graffiti is herein referred to as 'community-based graffiti.' This derives from the fact that it is graffiti that is found in the larger community, outside the formal education system. Due to the differences in the two distinct contexts, the researcher used two separate sampling techniques to cater for data collection.

#### **4.2.1.2 Stratified random sampling**

This sampling technique was used for the collection of graffiti data from secondary and high schools. Due to the fact that the three urban areas of Harare, Chitungwiza and Gweru selected for study in the research have a large number of formal education institution, the researcher had to come with a relatively small sample from which the data were collected. This led to the separation of the institutions in different strata based on the level of education and location. In so far as level of the school is concerned, the researcher only considered secondary and high schools for sampling and study. The researcher chose to focus on these higher levels of education in Zimbabwe's education system because of two major assumptions. Firstly, the researcher hypothesises that the primary school discourse community is likely to construct a different kind of discourse that is bound to be distinct from that constructed by secondary, high and tertiary level communities of practice. In other words, primary school graffiti discourse is assumed to be 'less mature' than the discourse the researcher intends to sample for analysis. Secondly, most researches on the linguistic analysis have concentrated on either high or tertiary level graffiti discourse. A continuation of focus on this level education can enable the making of more accurate comparisons of how discourse is constructed, as well as how power relations are structured, in the social practice of graffiti in different social milieu. Secondary and high schools in Zimbabwe's urban areas generally

offer formal education from forms one to six. In Zimbabwe, tertiary institutions are generally divided into three broad categories, namely, universities, teachers' colleges and polytechnic institutions.

#### *4.2.1.2.1 Harare*

Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe. It is the largest city, in terms of physical size and population, in the country. It is the heartbeat of urban life in Zimbabwe. An analysis of graffiti in Harare is likely to produce a reflection of urban and contemporary life. Since it is the largest city, it follows that it has the biggest number of schools in the country. According to the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, Harare has a total number of 72 schools. This number includes government, church and trust schools. Due to the large population of Harare schools the researcher used the disproportionate sample to take the greater majority of the sample from the city.

Zimbabwe's urban residential areas can generally be classified according to an area's residential population density. It gives rise to three broad classifications of low, medium and high density suburbs. Most of these residential areas have formal schools which cater for their population's, as well as other areas', educational needs. Schools in Harare urban were stratified according to their location and population density. The researcher used the three broad categories in which schools are physically distributed, namely, low, medium and high density residential areas. Putting the schools into these three distinct population density zones required three distinct sampling frames from which the sample was chosen. From these sampling frames, three schools were selected from each frame. As a result, a total sample of nine schools was selected from Harare urban alone. The resultant sample gave a cross-section which captures the general character of graffiti written by the school-going population in both Zimbabwe's the urban areas in general and also specifically in Harare. Two tertiary

institutions were sampled for data collection. In sum, nine schools and two tertiary institutions were selected for sampling in Harare.

#### *4.2.1.2.2 Chitungwiza*

Chitungwiza is an urban area which is widely regarded as Harare's satellite town. Most of the population in this urban area either work or go to school in Harare and can as such be considered as an extension of the capital city. However, unlike Harare, which has distinct population density zones, Chitungwiza does not exhibit such variation in population densities and profiles. This factor, along with the town's intrinsic link with Harare, was mainly considered in purposively selecting Chitungwiza for study. The town itself is divided into distinct areas of Seke and Zengeza. Seke is a predominantly high density area with Zengeza being a predominantly medium density area. As a result, the researcher came up with two sampling frames comprising of eight high schools in Seke and six high schools in Zengeza. Due to the insignificant difference in the number of schools in each respective frame, two schools each were selected from Seke and Zengeza, respectively. Chitungwiza also has two tertiary institutions (Seke Teachers' College and Chitungwiza central Hospital Nursing Training Centre). From these two the former was chosen. This resulted in a sample of four schools and one tertiary institution.

#### *4.2.1.2.3 Gweru*

Gweru is a city that lies in the middle of Zimbabwe. This urban area represents a demarcation of the two major ethnic regions of Zimbabwe (Shona and Ndebele). This presents a unique culture that is influenced by the confluence of Zimbabwe's two major ethnic groups. It is because of this factor that the urban area of Gweru was purposively selected for study in the research. Gweru has a total of 11 high schools. Just like in the case of Harare urban, the

schools in Gweru were categorised according to the area's population density. Thus, the researcher came up with three sampling frames constituting three (3) low density, two (2) medium density and six (6) high density schools. Using a disproportionate sample, one school each was selected from the low and medium density schools while two were selected from the high density schools. One tertiary institution was selected from the urban area's three tertiary institutions. The resultant sample from which graffiti inscriptions were collected comprised four schools and one tertiary institution.

All in all, the total sample considered for the research was made up of seventeen (17) high schools and four (4) tertiary institutions. Stratified sampling was used in this research to ensure that the total sample selected for the research contained the necessary characteristics that are representative of the formal educational institutions in Zimbabwe's urban areas. Table 1 below summarises the sample size in terms of total number of schools and tertiary institutions from which data were collected from each urban area.

Urban area	Total number of schools	Total number of tertiary institutions
Harare	9	2
Chitungwiza	4	1
Gweru	4	1

**Table 4.1:** Urban area total sample size for schools and tertiary institutions.

#### **4.2.1.3 Urban street protest graffiti**

The term urban street graffiti is used in this research to refer to graffiti that is inscribed mainly on surfaces that are visible from the streets. This is distinct from inscriptions made in toilets which are accessible only to the toilet users. Inscriptions accessible to street users underline the significance of streets in urban public spaces. Nissen (2008) characterises streets as urban areas' most vital organs thereby underlining their significance as public spaces. Urban street graffiti is most commonly inscribed on solid walls of structures along the streets that are made out of either brick or concrete panels as well as on roadside signs or advertising billboards. Walls made of concrete panels are commonly referred to as durawalls in Zimbabwe. The researcher observed that a common characteristic of graffiti written on such walls is that it is seldom written on residential walls. Rather, it is commonly found on durawalls of mostly public institutions and inside toilet walls. These include churches, stadia, educational facilities as well as government and municipality facilities. Figures 4.2 below is a illustration of graffiti inscribed on durawalls:



**Figure 4.2:** Graffiti inscribed on a durawall.

It is also not uncommon to find graffiti inscriptions on electricity sub-stations as illustrated in figure 4.3 below:



**Figure 4.3** Graffiti inscribed on an electricity sub-station

Since urban street graffiti is mainly distributed on walls of public institutions, the researcher had to drive around the urban areas looking for such institutions on which the graffiti is written. From the preliminary sampling carried out by the researcher, it was observed that street graffiti is mainly found in medium to high density areas of urban areas. As such, most of the graffiti data were collected from medium and high density areas of the three urban areas under study.

### **4.3 Research instruments**

The researcher made use of three research instruments, namely, a camera, focus group discussions and reader feedback columns in two daily newspapers in Zimbabwe (*The Herald* and *Newsday*). The three instruments complement each other in the sense that they form a three-pronged data collection method in which the camera constituted the primary data collection instrument on which the other two were based. Inscriptions captured by the camera

were thematically analysed and categorised according to the central issues they addressed. These themes were then used as the basis on which reader feedback messages (SMSs) were sought in the daily papers. Likewise, the direction of the focus group discussions was determined by the themes emerging from the thematic classification of the captured inscriptions.

#### ***4.3.1 Camera***

The main research instrument used in the collection of the graffiti texts was a camera (a 14-megapixel Kodak Easyshare with 5X wide zoom). The camera enabled the researcher to collect inscriptions as they were in terms of both style of writing and other nuances that can potentially be missed or distorted during the copying and transcription processes. Capturing graffiti texts by camera has the added advantage of ensuring validity in the sense that the researcher can use the images captured as proof that the data used in the research are not fabricated (Jupp, 2006). However, due to the nature of some of the walls on which the graffiti was written, some graffiti texts could not be captured clearly by camera. This was worsened by some of the writing instruments that were used in writing the texts. Such problematic writing instruments include pens and pencils especially when used on shiny walls or surfaces. For such graffiti inscriptions that could not be clearly captured by camera the researcher had to write them down in a separate data-collection counter book. The graffiti inscriptions were then subjected to thematic analysis resulting in distinct categories. These thematic categories were then used as the bases for the focus group discussions as well as the eliciting of appropriate contributions from the feedback sections of the daily newspapers.

#### ***4.3.2 Informal focus group discussions***

The researcher used focus group discussions to elicit people's reactions towards the practice of graffiti writing. This instrument was used to provide insights on the nature of reactions people have when confronted by graffiti inscriptions. The sociolinguistic nature of the research influenced the researcher to select three groups of participants on the bases of factors such as age, level of education and occupation. Resultantly, three distinct groups of four participants each were selected. These groups consisted of high school students, tertiary education students and officials (adults in formal employment and positions). The high school participants were randomly selected in town. For validity purposes, the researcher selected students with different uniforms, as these represented different schools and guarantees of possible differences in perspectives, so as to get views from different types of schools, thereby enhancing the chances of differences in perspectives. In order to balance the views, mainly on a gendered basis, two boys and two girls were selected for participation in the discussions. The selected four high school participants were made to pick numbered papers from a hat and were coded Participants 1-4 according to the number the respective participant picked for him/herself. For the tertiary students and official participants, the researcher randomly selected from Midlands State University (the researcher is currently a lecturer at this institution). Snowball sampling was then used in asking the randomly selected students to identify a tertiary student from a different institution. The identified student in turn identified their own until the group was fully constituted with four members. The tertiary students focus group ended up with two university students, and one each from the polytechnic and teachers' colleges. Again, just with the high school students' group, it was constituted along gender lines and the participants were made to pick up numbers from the hat. Resultantly, the participants were coded 5-8. The same procedure was repeated in the selection of the official participants with the selected participants being coded 9-12. Suffice

to mention that the official participants were selected on the rationale that their age and/or maturity bring in a different perspective to the relatively younger high school and tertiary student participants. Furthermore, they were regarded as gatekeepers of some sort and their views were interpreted from that perspective. Resultantly, there was a total of four (3) focus groups with a total of twelve (12) participants equally divided on a gender basis. The focus group discussions were held separately so as to minimise potential cases whereby particular individuals may feel intimidated or patronised by the presence of certain types of individuals during the discussions. For instance, the students may have found it difficult to express themselves honestly in the presence of apparently more ‘mature’ and ‘intelligent’ participants. This was also complemented by the fact that the researcher did not base the discussions on predetermined or structured questions. Instead, an informal approach was employed to ensure the full participation of the participants in a relaxed atmosphere. The discussions were used to elicit participants’ perceptions on graffiti writing in general. They were meant to measure participants’ attitudes towards the medium of graffiti. This instrument was mainly used to establish whether the general urban populace in Zimbabwe think graffiti is an acceptable medium for the discussion of socio-political issues and whether they pay any attention to the issues raised in graffiti. These perceptions were then used to make a comparative analysis with the issues that are raised in graffiti. This data enabled the judgment of whether the social reality constructed in graffiti is the same as that constructed by the participants.

#### ***4.3.3 Reader feedback columns in The Herald and Newsday***

The Herald and Newsday are representative of the widely-read and popular daily publicly and privately owned newspapers in Zimbabwe’s print media terrain. Reader feedback columns in daily newspapers provide readers with the opportunity to make their contributions on issues

without necessarily providing their full identity particulars. The contributions are mainly in the form of the cell phone short message service (SMS) and letters to the editor. In most cases contributions made to these columns are either made under an assumed name and/or the city of origin, a pseudonym and/or a place of origin, or even just written as anonymous. The complete or relative anonymity offered by these sections is perceived by the researcher as providing factors that may allow the contributors to the sections a relative sense of freedom and security which may result in discursive practices that are tangent to ‘everyday’ or ‘normal’ discourse on the same issues. Consequently, opportunities provided by such spaces in the more public media such as the print media are perceived by the researcher as opening new vistas for the construction of discourse with participants not having the pressure of revealing their actual or full identities. Particular attention was paid on the reader feedback contributions in line with the themes emerging from graffiti inscriptions. The researcher then transcribed and analysed the focus group texts in terms of the extent to which they agreed and/or were at variance with issues emerging from graffiti inscriptions. Just as in the case with the focus group discussions, the collection of texts and subsequent analysis of themes emerging from reader contribution was based on the extent to which these contributions were in line with those issues raised in the graffiti inscriptions. After all the data was collected the researcher then sorted the data according to the themes that predominantly featured from the overall three-tier methodology.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The chapter presented the methodology informing the research’s data collection procedures. Data collection methods were informed by Maxwell’s (1996) Interactive model which specifies that the research process does not proceed in a linear or cyclic manner. Rather it is a constant interaction where external and internal parts of the research are hinged on the

research's questions. Resultantly, it is the research questions which informed the data collection methods and the sampling procedures. Due to the fact that the research is on graffiti writing, the collection of inscription from various surfaces formed the foundation of the data collection and this was then complemented by focus group discussions and contributions from reader feedback columns of *The Herald* and *Newsday*.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **5.0 Introduction**

The study examines the discursive (re)construction of power in graffiti writings in Zimbabwean urban areas. It explores how social variables shape and condition discursive uses of language in graffiti. The research methodology used in the present research was discussed in the previous chapter. It was revealed that the present research is underpinned by Maxwell's (1996) interactive model of qualitative research. A three-tier system of data collection which consisted of the collection of graffiti inscriptions from various public surfaces, focus group discussions and attending to reader feedback columns in two daily Zimbabwean newspapers (*The Herald* and *Newsday*) was used. The choice of the specific reader feedback contributions was informed by themes emerging from the categorisation of graffiti inscriptions.

The sections below present the major themes, and concerns, emerging from the analysis of the graffiti texts, as well as the extent to which they were supported by results from the analysis of focus group and individual interviews and contributions in the reader feedback sections of two daily newspapers. For each section, the researcher selected typical graffiti texts to illustrate the realisation of the theme and/or concern. Reader feedback contributions as well as focus group discussion texts are also given where applicable. The rest of the graffiti inscriptions falling under the same issue or theme are presented in the appendix section.

## **5.1 Participants' attitude towards graffiti**

Due to the unique nature of the methodology used by the researcher in data collection, there were three types of participants from which data for analysis was collected. From this three-tiered methodology, graffiti inscriptions collected from various surfaces provided textual evidence of the content of the social practice of graffiti in general. Informal focus groups held by the researcher with various participants provided a glimpse into the attitudes a cross section of people have towards the graffiti writing. Lastly, people's participation on the reader feedback sections of two daily Zimbabwean newspapers provided the researcher with the opportunity to compare and contrast how the issues coming out from graffiti inscriptions were perceived on a platform that also provided participants with the opportunity to voice their concerns on an equally anonymous and public manner. Data collected reveals that attitudes on both participants and content of graffiti were mainly found from the graffiti inscriptions themselves as well as from the informal focus group discussions held by the researcher.

The researcher started off the focus group discussion with a question on the participants' perceptions of the social practice of graffiti. This necessarily included their attitudes towards the writers, the location of graffiti as well as the content of those inscriptions. Data collected from these informal focus groups reveals that these attitudes can be categorised into two broad types, namely, those who found the practice a negative one and those who perceived it in a positive light. Those who perceived graffiti writing in a negative light did so mainly based on supposed or assumed background of the writers. However, to best capture the social constructed nature of the attitudes, the data is presented according to the groups from which it was collected. That is, findings on participants' attitudes are presented according to the groups from which the attitudes emerged. Therefore, attitudes towards graffiti of high school

students, tertiary students as well as those of the officials are presented separately for a better appreciation of how these separate social categories can shape attitudes in distinct ways.

### ***5.1.1 Attitudes of high school students towards graffiti***

All the four high school student focus group participants were unanimous that the practice of graffiti on various surfaces is generally a negative one. They felt that the practice represents norm-violation and should therefore be classified as bad. In example (1) Participant 1 summarily characterised graffiti writing as a practice in which:

1. *Hapana panonyorwa zvakanaka* (Nothing good/positive/constructive is ever written in/through graffiti).

The participants regarded the content of graffiti as trivial:

2. *Zvingori zvinhu zvisina basa* for example *kutuka maticha* (The issues raised through (toilet) graffiti are trivial, for example the rebuke against teachers).

As a result of such perceptions of graffiti as characterised by ‘trivial’ content, the participants developed antipathy towards the writers of graffiti. They used the content to make value-laden judgments about the writers as is the case with Participant 3, in (3) below, who said:

3. *Vanonyora havana kutombokwana. Vane musikanzwa. Havana njere vanonyororei?* (Graffiti writers are not sane. They are naughty. They are unintelligent. Why do they write?).

The participant brings to the fore three common assumptions about people who engage in graffiti writing. The first is that people who inscribe graffiti on various surfaces are mentally unstable or insane. The assumption is that no sane or mentally stable person has any reason to engage in graffiti. The second is that graffiti writing is associated with delinquency. Morally upright people are not expected to participate in the writing of graffiti. The third assumption made about graffiti writers is related to their intellectual capacity. The general sentiment was that it is only those students who are intellectually challenged who engage in graffiti. Graffiti writing was seen by the high school students as an activity for the intellectually challenged.

Attitudes from the high school students, therefore, were basically characterised by intolerance in the sense that they only considered one side of graffiti. They were not willing to look at potential positives that can come out of the practice. The general sentiment was that the writing of graffiti is a serious norm-violating practice which is preoccupied with trivial or unconstructive issues. Resultantly, they associated the practice with mental instability, delinquency and low intellectual capabilities on the part of those who inscribe graffiti on various surfaces.

### ***5.1.2 Attitudes of tertiary students towards graffiti***

The attitudes of tertiary students revealed some degree of pragmatism lacking in the attitudes by the high school students. Tertiary students were not quick to unilaterally label the practice as an inherently bad one. Whilst they pointed out some negative aspects of graffiti writing, tertiary students were also quick to consider some of its positives.

The participants were generally unanimous on the point that graffiti should be a more recognised platform as it serves a very important ‘enlightening’ or expository function. They regarded the inscriptions as a source of interesting information, as captured by Participant 5 in example (4) who declared:

4. I love it. It's a source of information that you would not otherwise find anywhere else.

In example (5) Participant 7 elaborated on the nature of the information one can potentially get from inscriptions by remarking:

5. *Dai zvichitenderwa nokuti panobuditswa masecrets asingatozivikanwi.* ([Graffiti] should be allowed because it exposes unknown secrets).

The contributions by the two participants highlight the significance of notions of scandal or controversy and how a number of media are especially designed for their exposure. Graffiti is regarded as serving such an expository function by the participants.

Another positive point cited by the participants is the that graffiti writing can be regarded as a therapeutic exercise in the sense that it enables individuals to unreservedly express themselves on any issue. Participant 8 characterised graffiti, in example (6) below, as:

6. A platform on which one expresses what they can't say out in the open

Participant 6 concurred with this sentiment and in example 7. She was quick to add:

7. graffiti is the only way they can express themselves and maybe discuss burning issues affecting society. *Vanhu vanenge vachitya kutaura* openly *zviri* within without any fear of retribution. (graffiti is the only way they can express themselves and maybe discuss burning issues affecting society. People will be afraid to express themselves openly without any fear of retribution).

It is apparent that the participants were of the opinion that graffiti writing has an empowering and/or liberating effect on its writers. The cathartic effect of graffiti was, as illustrated by example (8), also reinforced by Participant 8 who added:

8. Some have something *chinovarwadza* deep inside (Some have something that pains them deep inside).

Graffiti writing was seen by the participants as performing the diary function in that individuals can lay their pains and aspirations on the surfaces.

The participants' attitudes also brought out some negative sentiments against graffiti writing. Firstly, they strongly felt that graffiti writing does not respect spaces and their functions. For example, they pointed out that writing graffiti on toilet walls is reflective of inappropriate use of spaces that are considered private. Participant 5 was of the opinion that graffiti writing:

9. [...] is abusing the toilet as you cannot use it for communication.

This sentiment reinforces Young's (2000) observation that bathroom etiquette does not allow for dialogue or the construction of discourses. The sentiment therefore brings to the fore notions of (ab)use of space and how space itself is a constructed phenomenon. In line with the 'abuse' of the space offered by the toilet, for instance, the participants felt that the writing of graffiti is symptomatic of one's mental faculties. As highlighted by example (10), Participant 6 opined:

10. *Zvinotaridza* primitiveness especially *muZimbabwe* it shows that your standard of education *inenge ichiri* low (It shows primitiveness especially in Zimbabwe. It also shows that your standard of education is still low).

Participant 6's sentiment in example (10) invokes behaviourist notions whereby one's environment is taken to be reflected in an individual's worldview. The sentiment also reinforces similar ones raised by high school students associating graffiti with low intellectual capability.

Another significant attitude that came out from the tertiary students is the lack of artistic value of Zimbabwean graffiti. The inscriptions in Zimbabwean urban areas were regarded as rustic and too simplistic by Participant 8 who, is reflected by example (11), bemoaned its unimpressive nature stating:

11. Zimbabwean graffiti is nothing like *yekuStates*. Had it been art it would have been better. (Zimbabwean graffiti is nothing like that from the [United] State [of America]. Had it been art it would have been better.

As far as Participant 8 is concerned, the value or appeal of graffiti lies in its aesthetic or artistic quality and not on its utility from a functional perspective.

The tertiary students' sentiments on graffiti are therefore pragmatic in comparison with those by the high school student participants. They reflect an attempt to consider both sides of the argument instead of a wholesale adoption of one particular point of view.

### **5.1.3 Attitudes of officials towards graffiti**

The officials, just like the tertiary students, showed evidence of a more pragmatic approach towards the characterisation of graffiti. Their views included both the positive and negative aspects of graffiti. As such, they were not too quick to label the practice as unilaterally a good or a bad one.

The officials appreciated the existence of stressors in life and how these may be exacerbated by the absence of social groups to alleviate them. As is highlighted in example (12) Participant 11 pointed out:

12. [Writers of graffiti] are undergoing serious depression *iri kunganisa* mindset [yavo]. (They are undergoing serious depression that is ... [their] mindset).

Participant 11 considers graffiti writing as a viable option of dealing with stressors in life. Participant 9, in response to whether there are alternative avenues to deal with some of the issues, stated that she did not think they were any whilst in example (13) Participant 10 opined:

13. Problem ndeyekuti vanenge vachida kunzwikwa [kasi ivo] vasina platform. *Unogona kumupa mhosva yekusvibisa [madziro asi]* ingadai vaiine mukana wekutaura vaiushandisa (They need to be heard [but they] don't have the platform. You might hold them responsible for dirtying [the surfaces but] if they had opportunities to express themselves they would take them)

These sentiments also highlight a certain level of empathy lacking in high school students' attitudes towards writers of graffiti.

There is also an extent to which the participants demonstrated a level of acceptance which almost bordered on resignation. In example (14) Participant 9 explained that she was not really bothered by the inscriptions because:

14. It does not really matter. Maybe I am used to it [Participant 9].

Participant 12 however thought there are some spaces that should never be inscribed with graffiti by clarifying:

15. [kunyora] pamapublic durawalls hapana bassa. Kuzonyora pamadurawall edzimba dzevanhu hakuite ([Writing] on public durawalls does not matter. Writing on residential durawalls is unacceptable) [Participant 12].

Participants 12 draws a line on the nature of surfaces that can be acceptably inscribed. Participants 9 nad 12 both agree that graffiti inscriptions are a matter of acceptability in that it is the people who choose to acknowledge them or not.

Another perspective highlighting positive notions of graffiti was the simple factor that no one can just waste their time writing useless things on walls and other surfaces on which graffiti is inscribed. In (16) Participant 9 argued:

16. The message must be taken seriously. No one would waste their time and resources for nothing. People should take time to understand what is written maybe meaning *inozowanikwa* (will be found).

This implies that graffiti is considered to serve a specific social function. Participant11, captured by (17) below reinforced this point by stating:

17. *Pane masentiments avonoexprasser ari* serious *zvokuti* you may get something *chiri* genuine. *Kumaschools nhingi* versus *nhingi* is serious (There are some sentiments they express that are serious such that you may get something that is genuine. In schools this and what's-his-name versus what's-her-name is serious).

Graffiti writing is thus taken to be an essential tool at the people's disposal.

However, there were negative aspects that were highlighted by the official participants. The question of the writer's mental state was also seen as a significant factor. As captured in example (18) Participant 12 stated:

18. *Handifunge kuti munhu akakwana chaiko anoita zvakadaro* (I don't think that a very sane person will do something like that).

In example (19) Participant 11 went to wonder:

19. Brain *dzake hadzisi* normal. *Haafunge kuti zvandiri kunyora hazviite paari kunyora* (The writer's brain is not normal. S/he cannot judge the appropriateness of writing during the process).

Thus, the major issue is on the graffiti writers' failure to realise the inappropriateness of their actions. The participants also associated graffiti writing with poor intellectual capacity. Asked on the apparent contradiction brought about by the presence of graffiti in tertiary institutions, Participant 12 was quick to point to the massification policy adopted by the government which increased enrolment in tertiary institutions. She believed:

20. The lack of bottleneck in colleges means that every Dick and Tom come [sic] when they have no right to be there.

Implied in example (20) is that there are people who do not deserve to be in tertiary institutions and that those are the ones responsible for the prevalence of graffiti in tertiary institutions. However, some attributed graffiti writing not to intellectual factors but to inhibited mental disposition. Participant 10 captures the link between the writer's mental disposition and the likelihood of participation in the practice in example (21) by stating:

21. Vamwe vanotora zvodhaka zvakaita seglue nekranko ndozvezvava kumukunda kufunga oita zvisingatarisirwe muhupenyu (some of them take intoxicating substances like glue and kranko which influence their thinking and result in deviant behaviour).

The others attributed graffiti writing to familial factors where they regarded individuals from dysfunctional families as the most probable category to engage in the writing of graffiti. This is captured in example (22) by Participant 11 who reasoned that:

22. *Vanhu vanogara mumastrets or mudzimba dzisina mai kana baba ndivo vanonyora graffiti.* They lack guidance. (Street kids or individuals from single-parent families are the ones who write graffiti. They lack guidance).

The attitudes on graffiti by the three focus groups highlight the social nature of attitudes. Their variation is evidence that there is no single or universal reaction to graffiti writing.

There are multiple reactions which, in part, are dependent on one's age, occupation or worldview. Furthermore, data presented shows that these attitudes are never value free. They are always inflected with a lot of ideological and associated issues. For instance, references to issues such as mental state/disposition, intellectual capacity, primitiveness as well as familial background invokes a fight not just of the recognition of graffiti but reveals a bigger picture involving ideological wars fighting to define the 'centres' and 'margins' through discourses. The attitudes are not shaped along the traditional motif of vandalism-art dichotomy. Although to some extent, the negative perspectives regarded inscribing graffiti on public or private property as a form of vandalism, they did not link it with criminal deviance as is the case in the graffiti research. These studies have used the Broken windows theory to predict the occurrence of other more serious forms of crime if graffiti is left unremoved (Cresswell 1992; Halsey and Young 2000; Bandanaraike 2001; Graham 2004; Snyder 2006; Morgan and Louis 2009). Halsey and Young (2000) point out how the effect of associating graffiti writing with other crimes has the effect of suggesting that 'the person who engages in graffiti may move to other activities [...] as if on a slippery slope into criminality.' The participants' attitudes towards graffiti, though unanimous on the perception that it is a form of vandalism, do not link it to any form of criminal activity. Instead, it is used to make assumptions about the general immorality and inadequacy of the graffiti writers. On the other hand, whilst research on graffiti has regarded the practice as art, the participants actually found it lacking any aesthetic value. In fact, Graham (2004: 3) defines graffiti as 'stylised writings or marks on the wall using mediums such as spray paint and stencils, [...]' Taylor-Myra, Cordin and Njiru (2010: 137) observe how graffiti writers and a small section of the taxpayers perceive graffiti as a practice 'that transforms otherwise sterile urban space into contemporary public spaces.' Its utility, as established by the participants' attitudes, lies in the various functions it serves. These include serving cathartic, expository as well as informative functions.

## **5.2 Thematic presentation of graffiti inscriptions**

The inscriptions were categorised according to their spatial distribution. Two broad categories were established, namely, urban street protest graffiti and toilet graffiti. Thematic analysis of the inscriptions collected from the various surfaces revealed a preoccupation on a number of issues by the graffiti writers. The themes emerging in each category are presented below.

### **5.2.1 Urban streets protest graffiti**

The term urban street protest was coined in this research to refer to the unique nature of street graffiti in Zimbabwe. Whilst in western countries street graffiti is mainly realised as artistic tags, throw-ups or murals, Zimbabwean graffiti is mainly textual in nature and protest in tone. The rationale underpinning the characterisation of Zimbabwean street graffiti as street protest graffiti is explored in more detail in chapter 6 below. Analysis of street protest graffiti revealed a number of issues the inscribers found relevant. The inscriptions were categorised into socio-economic and political themes. Under the socio-economic theme the researcher only focused on those inscriptions related to the operation of Zimbabwe's power utility, commonly referred to as ZESA, as well as those which made references to the country's present high rate of unemployment and also to the presence of Asian actors on the country's economic recovery initiative brought about by the Look East Policy. Political inscriptions were further separated into anti-hegemonic and pro-hegemonic inscriptions on the realisation that graffiti can be employed in the services of both these crucial political functions in Zimbabwe. The findings are presented below.

### **5.2.1.1 Socio-economic graffiti.**

This section presents data that make both explicit and implicit reference to the social and economic state of affairs in the country. Analysis of the inscriptions collected from the various public surfaces indicate that the majority of the inscriptions are pre-occupied with the operations of the country's power utility company (commonly referred to as ZESA) and the country's high rate of unemployment as well as the presence of Asian economic actors.

#### **5.2.1.1.1 Protests over the operation of ZESA**

The rationale for focusing on ZESA inscriptions is that such inscriptions represent one of the rare cases where inscriptions concentrate on a single institution, albeit a parastatal, and not necessarily a political establishment. The inscriptions regarded ZESA as a distinct institution which is held accountable for its own operations. The findings show that there is widespread disgruntlement in the administration and distribution of Zimbabwe's power utility company. Zimbabwe's electrical energy is exclusively supplied by a parastatal, the Zimbabwe Electricity Distribution Company (ZEDC). However, the company is still referred to by its former name, Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA), by the general public. In fact, the people even refer to the electricity supplied by the company as ZESA. As such, ZESA has semantic free variation in that it refers to both the company and the electricity it provides. It is for this continued use of ZESA by the people in Zimbabwe that the researcher adopts it in reference to both the institution and the electricity they provide. These kinds of inscriptions were mainly found on public institutions' durawalls mainly in the high density suburbs. Data about the power utility company was further categorised according to the specific concern voiced by the texts. Analysis of the inscriptions revealed the emergence of two consistent themes, namely, concerns over load-shedding and the billing system. These are presented below.

### *Load-shedding concerns*

The power utility company has been facing massive power shortages. As a result, ZESA has been conducting load-shedding which involves temporarily or intermittently cutting off electricity in residential areas, industrial and business districts. However, in some instances these power cuts are too long for people to cope or bear. Concerns over load-shedding were found in graffiti texts collected from durawalls in high density suburbs. The data revealed two major themes regarding the load-shedding issue. The first issue is that ZESA needs to cease its load-shedding exercise with immediate effect. This is captured in Figure 5.1 below:



**Figure 5.1:** ZESA stop shading (sic).

Figure 5.1 above implies two propositions. The first is that load-shedding has become excessive and/or has become unbearable. The second is that the load-shedding exercises must be stopped with immediate effect. However, inscriptions on load-shedding did not adopt the militant approach epitomised in figure 5.1 above. Others were more pragmatic in the sense that they called for an alleviation of the problem of load-shedding rather than demanding its

elimination. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 below capture this different middle-of-the-way approach to solving load-shedding problems.



**Figure 5.2:** Too much loadshedi (sic).



**Figure 5.3:** ZESA proper sccedure on load shadin (sic).

The inscriptions in Figures 5.2 and 5.3 can be read as complementing each other. The first inscription observes that load-shedding has become too excessive. This suggests that there is an extent to which load-shedding as a solution for solving electricity problems is acceptable. Load shedding becomes a problem only when it exceeds a certain point. The writer is

therefore opening up chances of negotiating the duration of load-shedding. The second (in figure 5.3) implies that the load-shedding exercise might be lacking consistency in that it has no proper timetable. This might mean people could be more understanding if load-shedding proceeded on a definite and known schedule. Sentiments on excessive load-shedding and the possibilities for a negotiated solution are supported by Participant 7 who appreciated the rationale of the load-shedding exercise but went on to suggest:

23. *Inofanirwa kuita time yekuziva kuti anoenda musi wokuti nguva dzakati* (It must have a time/schedule where one knows that electricity will be cut on a specified day for a specific duration).

In the reader feedback section of *The Herald* one contributor opened up room for negotiation by stating that:

24. We know that Zesa is experiencing problems but the situation in Mkoba and Mambo is way too much. (Tee, 2012).

The general idea is therefore that the rationale of load-shedding is not in question. It is the apparently excessively long, and by extension unjustified, duration that is being questioned.

#### *Concerns over ZESA's billing system*

This theme covers issues to do with the billing system used by the power utility company. Until 2011, the parastatal was predominantly using an estimate-based billing system. Being based on estimates, there were a variety of problems associated with the billing. It is no surprise therefore that graffiti texts focused on the issue of the power company's billing system. Data collected from the three media revealed a variety of issues that are related to the billing system.

Firstly, there were a significant number of inscriptions protesting against high electricity bills.

Figure 5.4 demands the reduction of [high] electricity bills.



**Figure 5.4:** Zesa cut bills

Some inscriptions suggested that the power company's billing system is unfair on the general populace. Figure 5.5 cries out for the need for more fair and favourable electricity bills:



**Figure 5.5:** Zesa we want fair charges

The data collected suggested that the high bills charged by the power utility are a direct result of ZESA's reliance on estimates rather than on actual meter readings. Inscriptions reveal that people are charged based on what they are assumed or expected to have used rather than on what they would have actually used. Resultantly, the inscriptions demanded actual meter readings as illustrated in Figure 5.6 below:



**Figure 5.6:** We demand actual readings.

The participants also expressed concerns over the estimate-based billing system and went on to point out how the very high bills are not reflective of the extent of load-shedding that is happening on the ground. In example (25) Participant 9 bemoaned:

25. *Ndinobhadhara* but I don't get to use *magetsi acho*. (I pay but I don't get to use the electricity I pay for).

The same opinion was expressed in the *Newsday* of the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2011 where one contribution, in example (26) below, complained:

26. There is too much load-shedding in Glen Norah and Highfield. We don't expect Zesa to subject us to such misery and overcharge us every month end (Ngove, 2011).

The sentiments complement the graffiti inscription by emphasising the need for ZESA to reconcile the nature and extent of load-shedding with its billing system.

A significant point to note from the inscriptions on ZESA above is that they can be classified into two distinct categories on the basis of their tone. The first is the overtly militant ones which do not allow for any dialogic possibilities with ZESA. These inscriptions have the overall effect of foreclosing dialogue with ZESA. The second are more pragmatic in that they

open up more room for engagement with the power utility. They presuppose a degree of acceptance of the power problem at hand and seek for a concession on both parties involved.

Inscriptions on surfaces also made commentary on the current state of high unemployment as illustrated by Figures 5.7 and 5.8 below:



**Figure 5.7:** Work



**Figure 5.8:** *Hurovha hatichadi. Mugabe taramba.* (we no longer want unemployment. No to Mugabe)

Figure 5.8, by making allusions to Mugabe, explicitly places the blame for the current high rate of unemployment on the government. The inscriptions imply that it is the government's duty to ensure that all sectors of the economy are viable enough to absorb the country's employable population.

Other inscriptions made references to the presence of the 'Chinese' people in the country. This category of inscriptions is appreciated within the context or framework of the government's Look East Policy adopted at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, around 2003. The inscriptions highlight a hostile attitude towards the 'Chinese' and significantly call for their departure, if not expulsion, from the country. Figures 5.9 and 5.10, exemplify this category of inscriptions:



**Figure 5.9:** *Machina go back to China (Chinese go back to China).*



**Figure 5.10:** *Machina must go. Muda kutiurayisa* (the Chinese must go. You want to have us killed).

### 5.2.1.2 Political graffiti

Political graffiti is arguably one of the most universal and open forms of graffiti (Alonso, 1998). It can be considered as the epitome of street protest graffiti in Zimbabwe. Political graffiti was found mainly on durawalls, roadside signs as well as electricity substations. There was also a fair amount of political graffiti inscribed in public toilets, especially in tertiary educational institutions. Preliminary analysis of the themes emerging from political inscriptions suggested two types of political graffiti, namely, anti-hegemonic and pro-hegemonic inscriptions. Further analysis suggested that anti-hegemonic graffiti manifests variations as a result of the many nuances that characterises it. The presentation of the data is therefore done under the headings anti-hegemonic and pro-hegemonic graffiti.

#### 5.2.1.2.1 Anti-hegemonic political graffiti

Anti-hegemonic graffiti inscriptions showed a number of nuances that have not been hitherto highlighted in studies of political graffiti. The tendency in this research tradition is to assume that the inscriptions speak as a united voice. The inscriptions collected from various surfaces

suggest that anti-hegemonic graffiti is multi-layered. There are inscriptions which simply call upon reader to vote for a particular opposition party, as in Figure 5.11 below:



**Figure 5.11:** Vote MDC

Other inscriptions simply stated the name of the opposition party without necessarily including the ‘vote’ part. Although the phenomenon was absent in the print media, the participants indicated that the inscriptions of the opposition parties on the walls is a practice they considered as very practical in the current political climate. In example (27) Participant 5 explained that writing names of political opposition parties on durawalls and other surfaces:

27. *Zvinoshanda* since people need the moral support. *Saka umwe akazvinyora* you feel *kuti ndotori* right *kusupportawo* that party. *Ende hapana ari kuzvirabha*. (works since people need the moral support. So is someone writes it you feel that I am justified to also support that [particular] party. Also there is no one rubbing [the inscriptions]).

Participant 5’s comment highlights the spiral of silence effect whereby popular opinion is shaped by the issues that can be explicitly stated in public spaces without any risk of suffering socio-political isolation. The fact that the inscriptions are not rubbed off is taken by the participants as indicative of the general public support of the propositions advanced by the inscriptions.

### **5.2.1.2.2 Pro-hegemonic political graffiti**

It is not always the case that political graffiti is employed for anti-hegemonic purposes. Jena (2012) outlines how political graffiti can be used to further pro-hegemonic interests. One such instance involves the ‘marking’ of one’s residential property with the name of an opposition party. On residential durawalls, the MDC party name is the most common.

Political inscriptions have also been used to highlight the inadequacies of MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai as suggested by the example (28) below:

28. *Bofu haringatungamiriri amwe mapofu* (A blind person cannot lead other blind people).

Example (28) above makes implicit references to Tsvangirai’s perceived lack of education. This however has overtones of the assumed nature of the led. Participant 7’s remark implies that the led, or general populace, is by nature not learned such that it takes only a learned leader to assume political office. This proposition in itself can be taken as advancing hegemonic relations whereby the leader is set apart as a luminary thereby justifying their actions and decisions in office.

### **5.2.3 Graffiti in educational institutions**

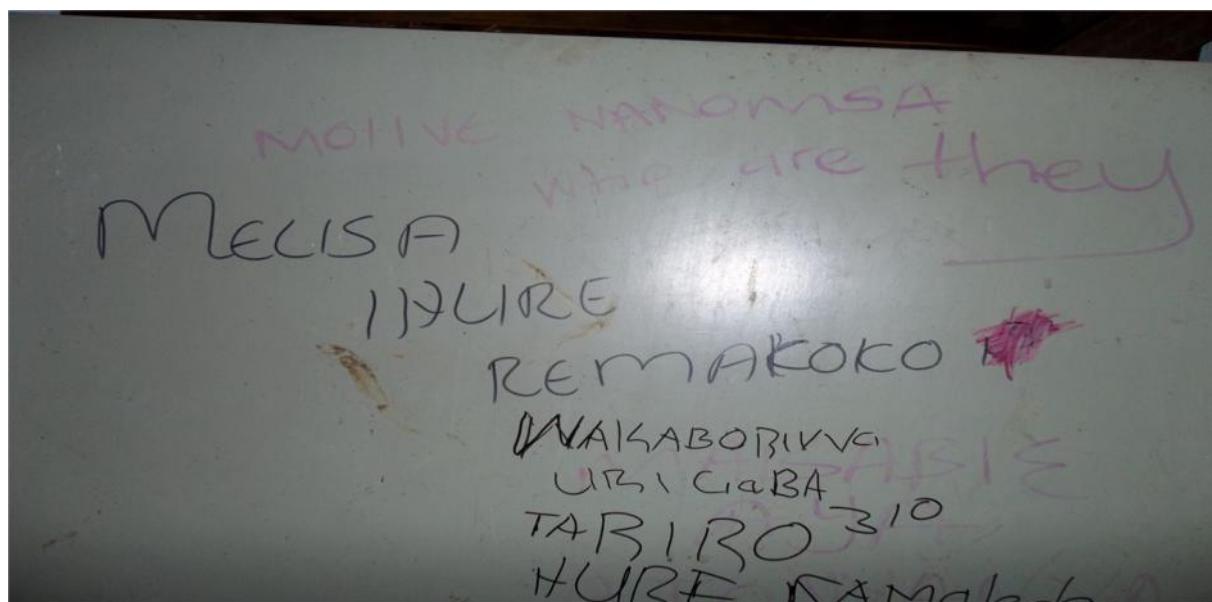
Educational institutions provided the researcher with a rich corpus of data. High school and tertiary institution toilets provided the richest quality of data. The gendered set up of the toilets enabled the collection of inscriptions on a gender basis. A significant finding was the paucity of graffiti inscriptions in female toilets in tertiary institutions. This finding parallels Ruto’s (2007) observation on the non-involvement of female students in Kenyan tertiary institutions. Another finding was that the majority of the inscriptions in the toilets were sexual in nature. There were other inscriptions on other themes/issues such as religion and presence. However, the prevalence of sexual inscriptions as well as space considerations

demands that this research focus on the inscriptions of a sexual nature alone. The sections which follow therefore present findings on sexual inscriptions collected from male and female toilets in high schools and tertiary institutions.

A gendered analysis of the sexual inscriptions found in the toilets illustrated major differences in female and male writings. As such, the findings are presented on a gendered basis.

### 5.2.3.1 Sexuality graffiti in female toilets

Sexuality inscriptions in female toilets in high schools betrayed a desire to control or police sexual behaviours and attitudes of other students. There was an interest in the virginity status of fellow students. Any female members who were thought to have lost their virginity were verbally attacked as illustrated by Figure 5.10 below:



**Figure 5.12:** Melisa ihure remakoko wakabobiwa uri gaba (Melisa is a great prostitute. You were fucked you are a tin).

Three observations can be made from the inscription in Figure 5.10 above. Firstly, female students show great interest in other girls' virginity status. The word *wakabobiwa* ('you were

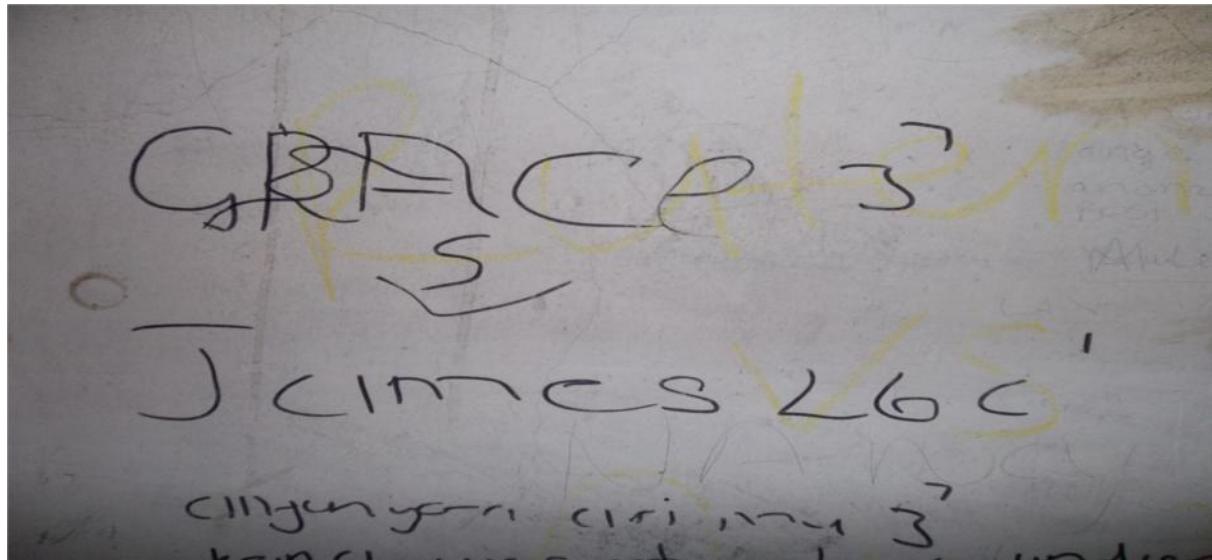
fucked') presupposes that the girl in question is no longer a virgin, hence the emphasis placed on that part. Secondly, there was a tendency in Shona culture to use the social corrective label *hure* to refer to individuals who were perceived as sexually deviant. *Hure* proved to be a label that is employed in reference to individuals who overtly exercise or practice their sexuality. This implies that sexuality, on the part of the female students, should never be flaunted. The label *hure* is seldom used to refer to boys. It is almost exclusively used in reference to deviant girls. Thirdly, there is an associated interest in the 'quality' of female genitalia, especially for those who are labelled 'prostitutes.' The label *gaba* ('tin') is used to refer to individuals who are perceived to be sexually active. The interest in female virginity status as well as the use of *hure* and *gaba* as social corrective labels epitomises conformist tendencies to hegemonic educational and religious discourses which discourage sexual activity outside marriage. It is imperative to note that the social corrective label was almost exclusively employed by females against fellow females. In example (29) Participant 6 justified the discursive use of *hure* exclusively on females explaining that:

29. According to [Shona] culture *murume haahure*. *Tinoti ane muchiuno*. *Harituki* as compared *kunzi hure*. Even polygamy *inotenderwa kuvarume*. *Mukadzi akauya* as a second thought and is a helper *kuti murume angofara kana asiri satisfied anotora vakawanda*. (According to culture the man is not a prostitute. We say that he has a [loose] waste. It is not as derogatory or pejorative as prostitute. Even polygamy is allowed to men. The woman came as a second thought and is a helper the man happiness/satisfaction. If he is not satisfied he will get many more [women] ).

It is apparent that Participant 6's contribution invokes both dominant traditional and religious discourses to justify the subordination of female sexuality to male sexuality.

Female inscriptions are also characterised by declarations of one's, or someone else's, involvement in romantic relationships. Such types of inscriptions were almost exclusively modelled along the formula X vs Y whereby the X represents the name of the female and Y

represents the male in the couple. Significantly, the name of the girl is invariably presented first in female romantic inscriptions of this nature. This is captured below in Figure 5.13:

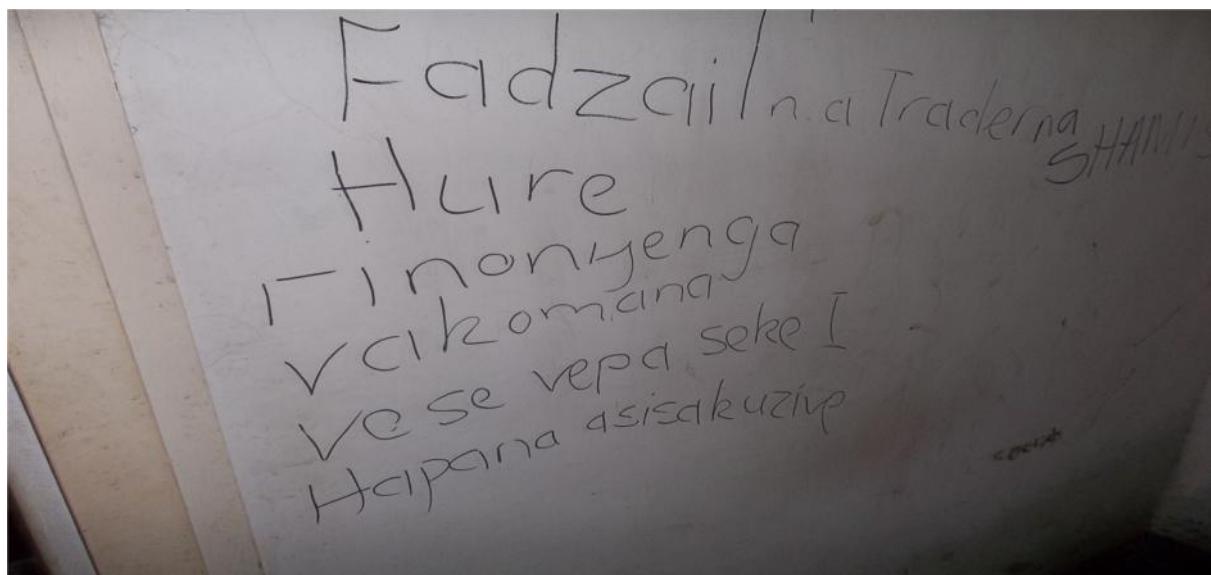


**Figure 5.13:** Grace 3<sup>7</sup> vs James L6C<sup>1</sup>

The formula in Figure 5.11 is consistent with findings by Tagwirei and Mangeya (2013) who also observed a similar pattern in inscriptions by primary school girls. The occurrence of the female's name on the initial position in the formula is taken to signal a construal of the female as the primary participant in cross-gender romantic relationships. Such representations of the female's name in the initial position differs from findings by Texeira et al (2003) who maintain that the universal pattern declaration of involvement in romantic relationship is whereby the name of the male appears in the initial position.

Female inscriptions also served as points where girls were discouraged from asking boys out. Girls who ask boys out are regarded as too forward and are labelled prostitutes. The participants just saw these as ways of declaring romantic relationships and they postulated that it was the younger girls in schools who are responsible for such inscriptions. The

phenomenon of declaring cross-gender romantic relationships was therefore reduced to an immoral practice, as illustrated by Figure 5.14 below:



**Figure 5.14:** Fadzai hure rinonyenga vakomana vese vepa seke1 Hapana asisakuzive.  
(Fadzai is a prostitute who asks all the boys at Seke 1. There is no one who doesn't know you).

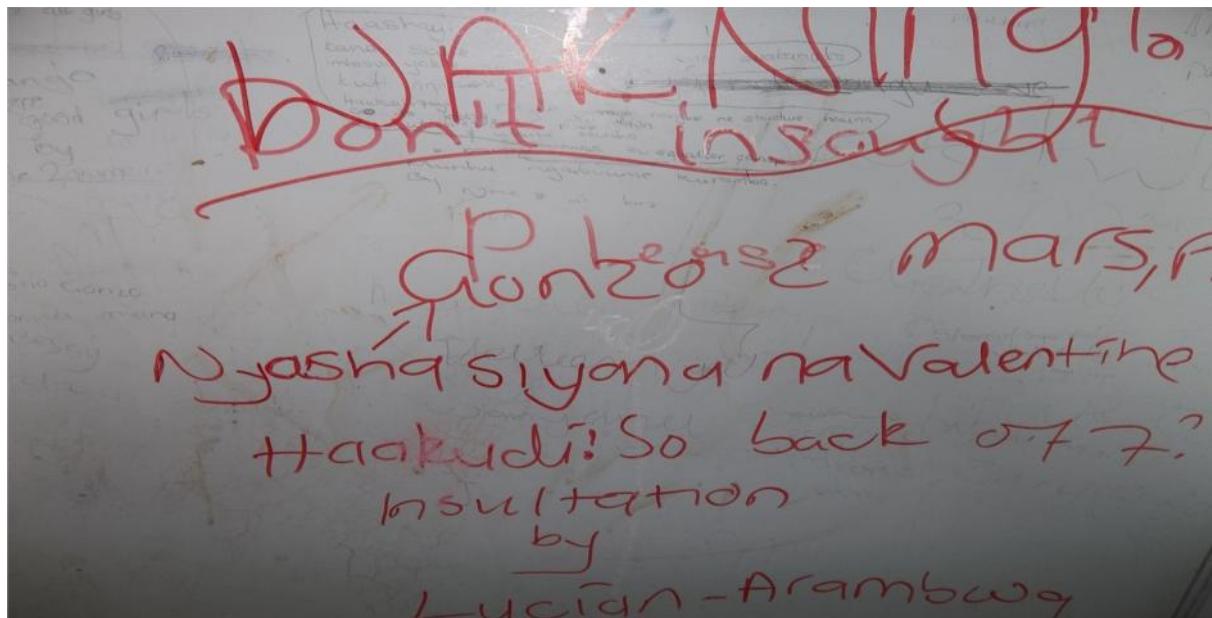
The inscription in Figure 5.12 suggests an association between a female who is in the habit of asking boys out and prostitution. As such, there are some inscriptions which warn such kind of females on the possibilities of 'contracting' AIDS, as captured by the example (30) below:

30. *Uchafa neAIDS hameno hako hure remakoko chinyenga vakomana* [sic] (You will die from AIDS beware of your [habit of] courting boys)

The direct and explicit association of the 'habit' of asking boys out with development of AIDS is typical of common tendencies regarding the sexualisation of the AIDS condition (White and Carr, 2005). In example (31) Participant 6 supported the notion that females should not 'chase after' males:

31. *Kuzvitambisira nguva* (wasting one's time). Women should accept the fact that *waunoda haakudi*. ([It is] wasting your time. Women should accept the fact that the one they love does not love them in return).

Another notable observation made from high school female inscriptions is the tendency to use a language which seeks to discourage the practice of lover-snatching by fellow females. Evidence from the inscriptions indicates that females consider their boyfriends, or wives, as personal territory which should be defended from other females who may potentially ‘snatch’ them away. Figure 5.15 typifies such inscriptions:



**Figure 5.15:** Nyasha <sup>gonzo</sup> siyana na Valentine haakudi! So back off! (Nyasha <sup>Gonzo</sup> leave Valentine [alone]. He does not love you! So back off!)

Inscriptions from high school female toilets suggest that their major focus is that of policing the sexual behaviours of fellow female students. In the process, sexuality and gendered identities are defined in line with hegemonic educational, health and religious discourses. There is no attempt to break away from definitions of female sexuality according to heteronormative expectation. Resultantly, the inscriptions confirm Arluke et al's (1987: 5) conclusion that “the potency of roles” apparently extends itself even to settings where anonymity is assured contrary to expectations.’ A significant difference is that whilst the language noted in Arluke et al (1987) indicated that women are still bound by notions of conventionalism, restraint, conformity and passivity, inscriptions by Zimbabwean female high school students suggest a breakaway from conventionalism as evidenced by the

proliferation of taboo or coarse language in their inscriptions. Female participants also regarded men as their property which fellow females must respect. Participant 6, reflected in example (32) below, was of the opinion that the female partner in cross-gender romantic relationships:

32. *Anoprotector mukomana wake*. *Musikana* always forces herself on the boy. *Saka musikana* is just guarding her man (Protects her boy/man. The [other] girl always forces herself on the boy. So the girl is just protecting her man).

It is apparent that the females regard their male partners in cross-gender romantic relationships as their own property or as representing a territory which they have to defend against fellow females. Texeira et al (2003) suggested the same phenomenon in European and American cultures whereby female university students declared their partners through graffiti so as to ensure that they were marking the men as already taken.

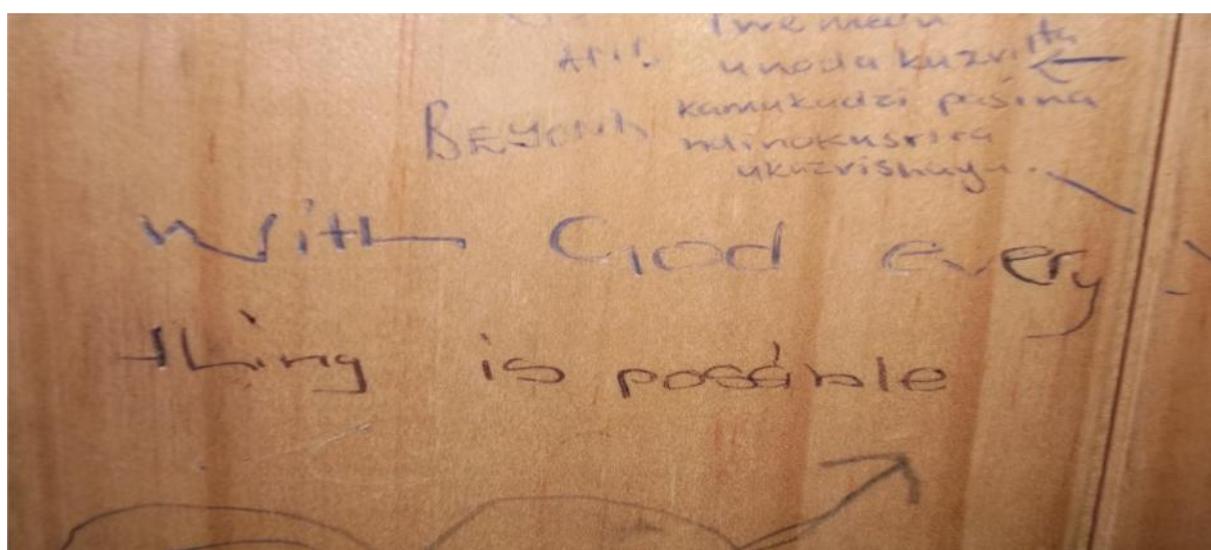
### **5.2.3.2 Sexuality graffiti in male high toilets**

This section presents findings from the data collected in male high school and tertiary institution toilets. The presentation, as well as the analysis in the next chapter, is done in one section on the basis of the similarities in inscriptions from both high school and tertiary institution toilets. The inscriptions in the male toilets indicated a big interest in heterosexual intercourse as indicated in Figure 5.16 below:



**Figure 5.16:** *Mhata hupenyu vakomana pasina mhata handirarami* (the vagina is life boys. Without the vagina I won't survive).

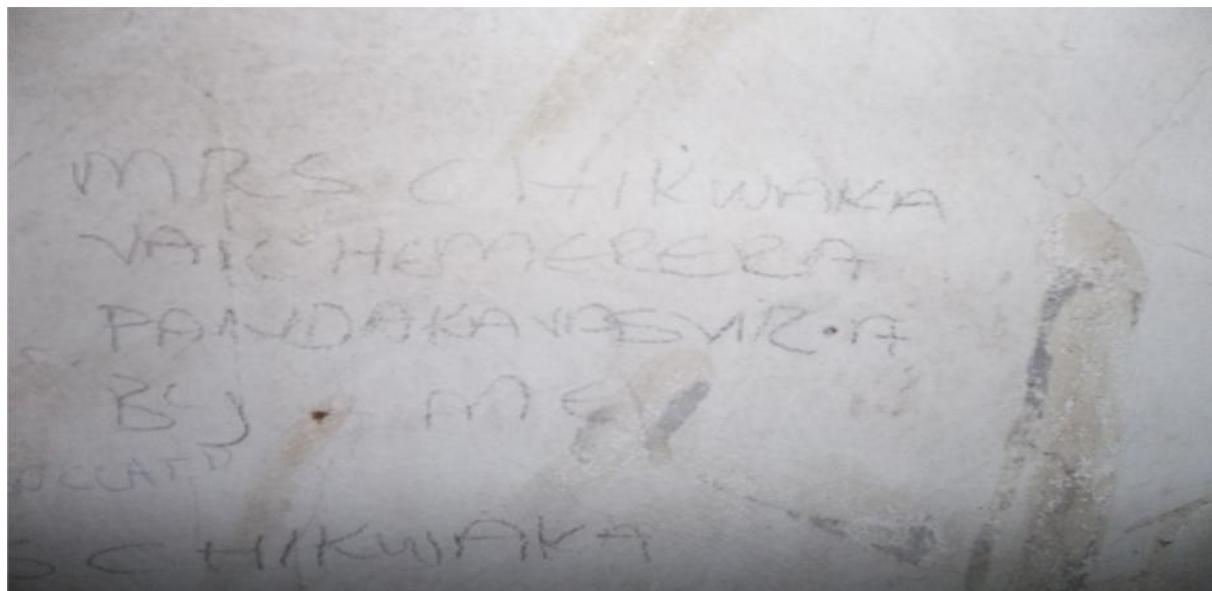
The inscription in Figure 5.14 regards having sex with girls as the writer's 'mission' or 'calling.' The inscriptions highlighted the fact that males use sex to achieve different social goals. One such function of sex is as a weapon for disciplining wayward individuals and as a sign of domination of a particular group as illustrated by figure 5.17:



**Figure 5.17:** *Iwe meda unoda kuzvita kamukadzi pasina ndinokusvira ukazvishaya* (Hey Meda you want to make yourself a woman for nothing. I will fuck you silly).

The inscription in Figure 5.17 suggests that ‘unleashing’ sex on the wayward individual is an intervention that is guaranteed to set him/her straight. Thus, sex is construed by the writers as serving a corrective social function.

The inscriptions from the male toilets also show a tendency by writers to create fantasies involving female teaching staff. This tendency is typified in Figure 5.18 below:



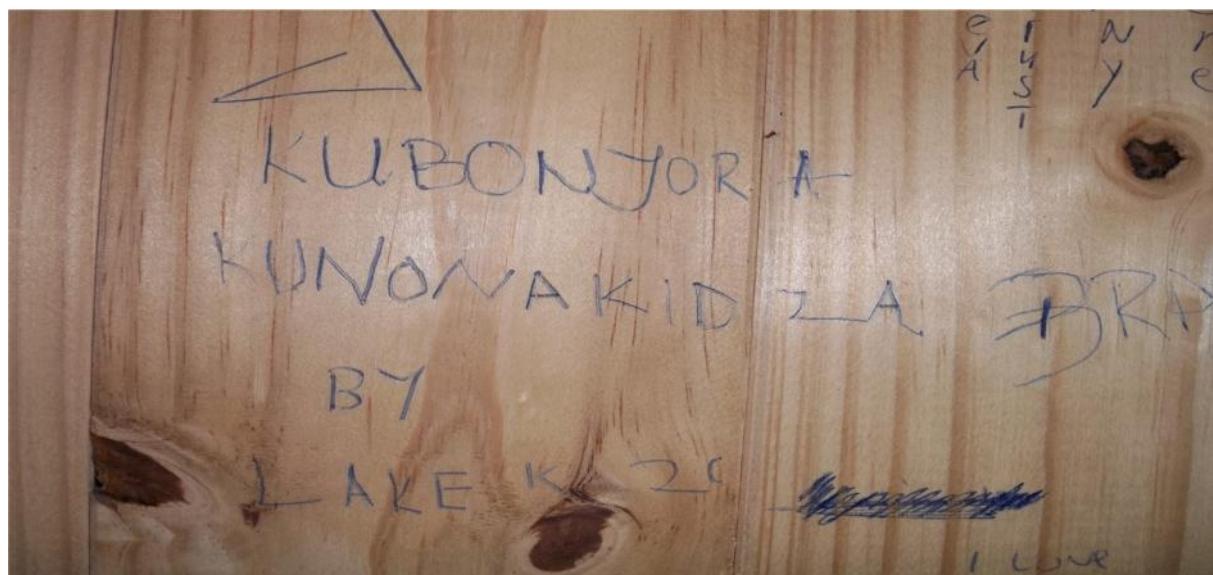
**Figure 5.18:** Mrs Chikwaka *vaichemerera pandakavasvira* by me (Mrs Chikwaka was moaning when I fucked her, by me)

The inscription illustrates that males actively use their imagination to create sexual fantasies involving female teachers.

Male toilets are also used as sites for the exploration of new sexualities. The inscriptions by males highlighted a debate on homosexuality and masturbation as alternative and viable forms of sexuality for men, as is captured by Figures 5.19 and 5.20 below:



**Figure 5.19:** *Ndiri kutsagawo [sic] mukomana wekusvira kumanyowa* (I am looking for a boy/male to fuck in the ass).



**Figure 5.20** *kubonyora kunonakidza* by Lakek (masturbation is pleasurable/enjoyable by Lakek)

There is a sense in which the alternative sexualities are not forced upon any individual group. They are regarded as constructs in that the other party has to consent. The inscriptions in Figures 5.19 and 5.20 can be read as an attempt to ideologically reposition and redefine the centre and margins of sexuality discourses. There is an attempt to move homosexuality and masturbation from the margins of dominant patriarchal heterosexuality.

The high school and official participants were unanimous in characterising homosexuality as an unacceptable sexuality which should never be tolerated under any circumstances. Participant 1's contribution in example (33) was typical of this sentiment when she commented that:

33. *Hazvitomboiti . Hazvitombotenderwi nyangwe nemubhaibheri* (It's impossible. It's not allowed/permited even by the Bible).

Whilst the two groups of participants were very conservative in their attitudes towards such new forms as sexualities as homosexuality, the tertiary participants were a bit pragmatic about their practice and possible legitimacy. Participant 5 advised people to:

34. Just accept it. Male ladies are actually better than actual women.

Participant 5 in (34) above regarded gender relations in homosexual relationship just as performed as in heterosexual relationships. The only distinction between the types of sexualities is that she regarded 'male ladies' better at performing their duties in comparison to 'actual women.' Female tertiary student participants were also more pragmatic in so far as masturbation was concerned as typified by Participant 8's remark in example (35):

35. *Zvinoitwa nevakomana*. At times those people vanenge vari right. Ini hangu ndowona sekuti zviri nani. Mafeelings agara ariko kuvanhu . Pamwe musikana wake haapo. Zviri nani pane kubuda. Ini semusikana I will understand (It [masturbating] is done by the boys. At times those people would be justified [to masturbate]. Personally I think it is better. Feelings are natural in people. Maybe his girlfriend would not be around. It's better [to masturbate] than to go out [looking for prostitutes]. As a girl I will understand).

Inscriptions from male toilets demonstrate a double-edged attempt to reinforce dominant patriarchal gendered identities and behaviours (through the expression of preferences of heterosexual sexual intercourse) and an attempt to explore new sexualities (through the expression of preferences of homosexuality and masturbation). These inscriptions subvert dominant educational, health and religious discourses which call for responsible sexual

behaviour, no sexual activity outside marriage and abstinence. Resultantly, a significant difference between female and male inscriptions is that female inscriptions tend to conform to the dominant discourses whilst male graffiti writings subvert these normative expectations on sexuality.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter the research findings were presented. Findings on the participants' reactions to graffiti writing indicate the constructed nature of attitudes towards the practice. The attitudes show variation on two broad levels. The first is that these attitudes vary according to social factors such as age, level of education and life experiences. Thus, whilst the high school participants rigidly regarded graffiti writing as an inherently negative practice, tertiary students and officials were more pragmatic in that they tried to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of the practice. They were therefore more empathetic with the writers than the high school student participants. The second is that the social milieu in which the graffiti is written helps to shape attitudes towards graffiti. For instance, whilst the attitudes associate graffiti writing with notions of vandalism, the participants did not go on to link it with other forms of criminal behaviours, as is the case in the Western countries where the Broken Windows approach has been used to associate graffiti with other more serious forms of crime. Instead, the participants associated graffiti vandalism with notions of delinquency, one's background as well as intellectual and mental challenges. Presentation of findings on the spatial distribution of graffiti as well as its content indicated that there are two major types of graffiti, namely, street protest graffiti and toilet graffiti. Protest graffiti can be taken as graffiti that underline the human indomitable spirit whilst toilet graffiti is more inclined to notions of sexuality, among other interests. A significant finding is that female inscriptions illustrate a failure to break away from hegemonic patriarchal discourses of heteronormativity.

Male inscriptions, on the other hand highlighted tendencies to explore new sexualities in a bid to redefine and renegotiate the centre and margins of sexuality.

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **6.0. Introduction**

The preceding chapter presented data collected by the researcher towards the study. Graffiti inscriptions, as well as inscriptions collected from two Zimbabwean daily newspapers and focus group discussions, were thematically presented according to their spatial and thematic distribution. The graffiti inscriptions revealed two broad types of graffiti in Zimbabwe. The first occurrence of graffiti, which is the most visible, is that which is written mainly on durawalls of public institutions such as schools, stadia, and government as well as council/municipality buildings. Some were inscribed on durawalls of private institutions. The most extreme occurrence of the inscriptions was on residential homes. The occurrence of inscriptions on walls led to the classification ‘street protests’, in dialogic response to the western classification of urban graffiti as street art. The second occurrence, by far the most prevalent, was on toilet walls in educational surfaces. The analysis of graffiti inscriptions presented in this study was based on these two broad spatial distributions. The present chapter analyses data presented in chapter five from two theoretical paradigms, namely, the social constructionist perspective and critical discourse analysis (CDA).

The analysis presented in this chapter follows two distinct but interrelated forms. First, from information gathered through focus group discussions, the chapter explores the interplay between notions of public urban spaces and normative questions on legitimacy in so far as the construction of discourse is concerned. In this section the researcher explores how attitudes regarding the (in)appropriateness of graffiti are predicated on a number of social factors such as age, perceived intellectual capabilities as well as one’s upbringing. These are all key factors in the social construction of perceptions towards both the content and writers of

graffiti. These social factors have been actively used to construct, shape and perpetuate stereotypes about certain aspects of society thereby actively participating in the ‘politics’ of the day and at times influencing social power dynamics.

Secondly, a reading of selected graffiti inscriptions pays attention to the notions of power, domination and control; questions which are never far from articulation in the modern (especially postcolonial) state. Regarding graffiti as offering discursive spaces on which discourses are constructed necessitates the need to examine the relationships that subsist among several factors such as location (space), time, subjects (participants), utterances and the broader issues that graffiti grapples with. This analysis proposes a reading of graffiti inscriptions as 1) subversive codes operating alongside institutional (as in the case of the schools, universities and ZESA) and state power, what Mbembe calls the ‘master codes’, in order to undermine and render them powerless and 2) pro-hegemonic codes contributing to overall state and institutional hegemony. In this case graffiti is considered in relation to institutional and state power, one whose discourses simultaneously refuse or consent to be co-opted into the services of the master code.

## **6.1 The social distribution of attitudes towards graffiti**

It is apparent from the two broad traditions discussed above that graffiti is viewed from two broad or extreme positions. This gives the impression that society is neatly divided into people who either perceive graffiti as a form of cultural expression and art or those who see it as a form of vandalism that heralds other and more serious forms of crime. This questions the kind of social categories that make up urban populations. Urban areas, as well as society in general, are made up of different social categories which, in turn, possess different viewpoints as a result of their social and cultural diversity. The temptation is high to place

every reaction and attitude towards graffiti within these broad traditions, but not without missing the nuances that characterise individual and group attitudes in culturally specific environments such as high schools and tertiary institutions in ‘third world’ countries such as Zimbabwe. There is, therefore, need to investigate how different social groups react to graffiti and establish the multiple attitudes they hold towards graffiti without necessarily pigeon-holing these attitudes into one of either traditions of graffiti perceptions. Focus group discussions held with participants revealed multiple responses and attitudes towards graffiti. These reactions and attitudes, discussed below, are categorised into three: attitudes of high school students, attitudes of tertiary students and attitudes of officials.

### **6.1.1 High school students**

Four high school students held informal focus group discussions with the researcher in which various issues were discussed in relation to the occurrence of graffiti both in educational institutions and in the community. It is interesting to note that a number of potential high school informants approached by the researcher were quick to declare the absence of graffiti especially at their schools. Some of these participants refused to participate in the focus group discussions based on the declared absence of graffiti in their schools. In fact, this reaction was also typified by some of the school heads who were keen to disassociate their schools from graffiti while grudgingly proceeding to grant the researcher permission to collect data from their schools. This attitude almost encapsulates the ‘official’ stance governing the school’s attitude towards graffiti. Implied in these reactions is the fact that graffiti is something that brings shame to people around it thereby necessitating the denial of its existence in particular environments, in this case the high school. However, the researcher managed to convince some of the individuals to participate in the focus group discussions despite the declared absence of graffiti at their respective schools. The same situation had

occurred with some school heads who only, in some instances reluctantly, granted the researcher permission to collect data from their schools after explaining that the existence of graffiti was neither a reflection on their persons nor their schools and they would not therefore be judged on the basis of its existence.

Those who participated in the informal focus group discussions revealed interesting attitudes towards those who write graffiti, its content and its spatial distribution. First, the general sentiment was that graffiti writing is a bad and norm-violating social practice. Commenting on the kind of issues raised on the walls, Participant 1, in example (36) below, summed up by saying:

36. *Hapana panonyorwa zvakanaka* (Nothing constructive/positive is ever written in/through graffiti).

It is apparent from such a response that one predominant feeling is that the toilet walls in high schools are mainly used as platforms where issues that are by and large inconsequential or trivial to society are inscribed. The feeling is that the school, or society in general, can do without the kind of ‘nonsense’ that is written on the toilet walls. This was further supported by Participant 2, in example (37), who pointed out:

37. *Zvingori zvinhu zvisina basa* for example *kutuka maticha* (The issues raised through (toilet) graffiti are trivial, for example the rebuke against teachers).

It was indeed established that there is graffiti directed at the teaching staff. Almost every one of the schools from which graffiti was collected had hostile inscriptions directed at members of staff (see figure 6.1 below). Such kinds of inscriptions are taken by the participants as evidence of lack of respect towards the teaching staff and a general lack of morality on the part of the graffiti writers. It is on the basis of such inscriptions that some participants develop antipathy towards graffiti; resultantly seen as a medium which carries a discourse that is not worthy of any real and serious attention. The participants used inscriptions that

insult the teaching staff as the basis on which to make judgments about the writers' characters. Participant 3, captured in example (38) below, had this to say in that regard:

38. *Vanonyora havana kutombokwana. Vane musikanzwa. Havana njere vanonyororei?* (Graffiti writers are not sane. They are naughty. They are unintelligent. Why do they write?).

At least three things can be discerned from participant 3's remarks. The first issue concerns the question of sanity. From discussions with participants, it emerged that the toilet is perceived as a mono-functional space where people relieve themselves of body waste. To do anything else in the toilet was regarded as symptomatic of insanity. Some pointed to the general condition of the toilets (most of them are not cleaned on a daily basis) and wondered how someone can brave those conditions to take more than five minutes writing and raising inconsequential issues. That some are accused of using faeces to write on the walls only cements the suspicions of insanity. The second issue has to do with the question of intelligence. Because the subject of graffiti is regarded trivial, it is considered to reflect an unintelligent mind. Of course the triviality of graffiti inscriptions is also a question of attitude. The subjects of graffiti, as one can imagine, are broad and multiple. Participants also pointed to poor spelling, ungrammatical constructions and shabbiness of the inscriptions to further support their argument about the diminutive intellectual capacity of graffiti writers. Lastly, graffiti is associated with general naughtiness. All the schools visited by the researcher have very strict policies and rules against the writing of graffiti on any surface. Indeed on more than one occasion authorities ordered students to clean the walls of graffiti as soon as the researcher left. In some cases, an attempt was made to find culprits who might have written on the walls.

Attitudes held by the high school students towards the function of the toilet as a public space and graffiti writers are indicative of how this social group has constructed the two notions.

The toilet is conceived of and constructed as a private space that should not be used for any public purposes. Stereotyping of those who write graffiti as people who are both mentally unstable and unintelligent; and a blanket dismissal of all graffiti inscriptions as ‘*zvinhu zvisina basa*’ (trivial or useless issues/matters), as demonstrated by Participant 3 above, shows a general intolerance towards graffiti in high schools. Questioning the mental and intellectual capabilities of graffiti writers has the effect of excluding people who are labelled as such from mainstream educational, political and sociocultural discourses. If graffiti is indeed “better conceptualised as a form of aurality (Ouzman 2010:5), as consisting of dialogues in solitude (Whiting and Koller, 2007) which form ‘essentially a communication medium’ (Petrosanti 2010:1), the perceptions of graffiti by high school students as trivial, meaningless and useless has far reaching implications on general communication in educational institutions. For instance, who is to decide what constitutes ‘important’ subjects? What standards or benchmarks are used in making such choices? What happens to the discourses excluded from such normative definitions? How much will be lost to communication in the process? It is mostly likely that students, as well as the staff in high schools, will end up silencing or muting the graffiti ‘voice.’ Graffiti, both as a discursive space and content, would just end up being repressed and ignored. Whilst Heider (2012) notes the universality of personal graffiti and Texeira et al (2003:5) see the restroom as a ‘small urban contemporary cave ... reflecting current social issues’, the lack of recognition of graffiti in Zimbabwean high schools potentially becomes an issue of major concern. Indeed, there is nothing universal about regarding graffiti in general as ‘bad’ especially in the school set-up. Heider’s (2012) research reveals how graffiti is considered as authentic teaching material in the foreign language classroom in Egypt. Conceptions of graffiti, its content and writers are, therefore, nothing more than social constructs. These constructs are based on complex values, rules and beliefs which are culturally specific. It follows that dismissing the

writers of graffiti as ‘abnormal’ in one way or the other may have the net effect of marginalising the content of graffiti before it is subjected to analysis. Marginalising the content also has the effect of brushing aside the concerns raised by the largely supposed ‘unstable, dull and delinquent’ writers. Consequently, whilst research on graffiti has largely established a correlation between graffiti and violence, in Zimbabwean high schools graffiti is associated with mental instability and general unintelligence. This runs contrary to Collinson, Jones and Higginson (2008) who have shown that graffiti writing is not restricted to any social factor or boundary.

Discussion on the character of the graffiti writer brings to the fore issues to do with agency. Agency in graffiti pertains to the people who are actively and volitionally involved in the practice of graffiti writing. Ouzman (2010) argues that graffiti is most often a statement made by individuals, or social groups, who are perceived as belonging to the societal margins. The case of graffiti in Zimbabwe’s urban schools falls short of validating this supposed link between the production of graffiti and social inequity. What is clear is the fact that graffiti is indeed being produced in these institutions. It remains a matter of debate and controversy to categorise the producers of this graffiti as belonging to any naturally predetermined distinct social category with distinct characteristics. Research carried out by the Salt Lake City police Department and the New Zealand Police has revealed that ‘there is no one type of teen who vandalises. The producer of graffiti might be the smartest kid in school or the kid who is always in trouble’ (<http://slcpd.com/c0ntent/uploads/Vandalism.pdf>) and that the practice of graffiti writing is not constrained by such categories as religion, socio-economic status and culture (Collinson, Jones and Higginson, 2008). In light of this, it is impossible to conclusively establish who exactly is involved in the act of graffiti production. Claiming absolute and sure knowledge of who writers of graffiti are is a social constructionist process

conveniently stigmatising certain groups on the basis of myths about both people and graffiti. Assigning the responsibility of graffiti inscription to individuals of a particular type can further alienate these individuals from dominant discourses in the school, thereby ensuring that they remain far removed from the centres of ‘serious’ discourses. It is also possible that some groups or individuals may be wrongfully accused of writing on walls because they are seen as exhibiting characteristics of delinquency and unintelligence associated with graffiti. Already, this stereotyping appears to be on the increase as instances of graffiti increase in schools.

Questioning the seriousness of issues raised in restroom graffiti on the basis of its location has the effect alienating graffiti discourse from the centre of educational discourses. Cresswell (1992) establishes the link between place and ideology. The restroom is a place that is highly accessible to a large number of people. The restroom walls can potentially be regarded as public space. Whilst the business of the toilet is seemingly private, what is inscribed on the walls is fairly visible to all toilet users. One could therefore argue that anything that is written on toilet walls is accessible to a lot of people. Graffiti writers take the privacy offered by the stalls to freely inscribe messages but, as the participants’ attitudes reflect, readers’ uptake of the information is not as automatic as the writer might hope/intend. Inscriptions on the restroom are, therefore, stripped of any social currency due to the wholesale dismissal of graffiti as a trivial discourse. Thus, following Tonnellat’s (2010) assertion that public spaces are judged on the basis of their accessibility, the restroom is not regarded as a prototypical public space for what society considers meaningful construction of discourse. As a result, the restroom ceases to be a shared space for ‘collective well-being and possibility’ (Amin 2008:5). Thus, it does not matter that the content includes powerful philosophical or political statements; it will just be dismissed because of locational issues.

This negative correlation between the location of graffiti (what Cresswell (1992) refers to as ‘the crucial where of graffiti’) and the so-called trivial content of graffiti (what may be called ‘the crucial what of graffiti’) leads to the exclusion of graffiti from mainstream discourses at schools and the larger society. Whereas Wales and Brewer (1976:115) rightly point out that ‘the content of [graffiti] reflects areas of conflict or popular preoccupation’, high schools, and the societies in which they exist, are failing (if not refusing) to capitalise on such practices thereby ignoring pertinent issues and disadvantaging specific social groups in the process.

It can be concluded that the high school student participants take toilet graffiti as the representative of all the other forms of graffiti. Their responses were mainly constructed around inscriptions that are made in the context of the toilet. It is on this spatial distribution of graffiti that their attitudes towards graffiti, its writers and content, are mainly predicated. The writers of graffiti are labelled insane and intellectually challenged on the basis that they are writing in toilets. In the same vein, the content is disregarded because of the environment in which it is found. The space itself is taken to represent the discourse of graffiti. The fact that this particular discourse is constructed in the toilet makes the topics raised in graffiti likewise dismissed as unimportant and ‘disgusting.’ The discourses constructed in toilets are dismissed as subordinate discourses. Resultantly, they are ignored or/and silenced. Easily, space, content and writer become entangled in the sense of ‘being twisted together or entwined’ (Nuttall 2009:1). Also apparent in these attitudes is a gesture of refusal; refusal to judge the three variables in their individual rights.

### **6.1.2 Tertiary students**

Discussions held with tertiary students revealed attitudes that were more balanced in that they manifested both positive and negative attitudes towards graffiti. There was a certain degree of empathy towards both the content and writers of graffiti accompanied, nevertheless, by a measure of intolerance towards graffiti in general.

The college students are generally unanimous on the perspective that graffiti should be a more recognised communication platform as it serves society in very important ways.

Commenting on the social role of graffiti, Participant 5, as illustrated by example (39), stated:

39. I love it. It's a source of information that you would not otherwise find anywhere else.

Participant 5 finds graffiti valuable in keeping readers informed about issues that do not lend themselves to other more conventional media, that is, information that one would not get from other communication platforms. The student went on to draw similarities between graffiti and wiki-leaks, an internet grapevine network which is characterised by the unlawful dissemination of individual and government secrets hidden from public scrutiny. This perspective is highlighted in example (40) by Participant 7's contribution who remarked that:

40. *Dai zvichitenderwa nokuti panobuditswa masecrets asingatozivikanwi.* ([Graffiti] should be allowed because it exposes unknown secrets).

Similarly, the internet which is seen as a medium awash with sites that are keeping people updated with 'juicy' stories and information, graffiti is considered an effective whistle blower, albeit at a more provincial level. While the internet is international, graffiti is local. The local character of graffiti is considered an advantage in that the messages it carries are more likely to be about the audiences that can identify with it. Writers of graffiti are most likely to be among the audiences, thereby contributing to the perceived 'authenticity' of the medium itself. The participants pointed out how graffiti always seems to invoke people and

issues that are already familiar or close to the audience thereby seemingly actively involving the readers in the construction of discourse

Another positive attitude that is derived from the social practice of graffiti, as cited by the college participants, is the fact that the medium of graffiti acts as a ‘liberating’ and ‘equalising’ platform whereby disadvantaged participants can voice their concerns in a ‘public’ manner. Critical discourse analysts have argued that communication is much more than the airing of one’s views or contributing one’s opinions to society. Communication is about controlling the channels or media of communication and seizing the right to communicate. More so, it is not any topic that can be publicly communicated. Some social groups control what one can publicly communicate and the extent to which those particular issues can be communicated. It is this ability to be heard in any given community which gives individuals in any given society or culture a sense of belonging, and by extension, a source of power. Commenting on the liberating and equalising role of graffiti in example (41), Participant 8 described graffiti as:

41. A platform on which one expresses what they can’t say out in the open

This is a point that Participant 6 concurred with. In example (42) she declared:

42. graffiti is the only way they can express themselves and maybe discuss burning issues affecting society. *Vanhu vanenge vachitya kutaura* openly *zviri* within without any fear of retribution. (graffiti is the only way they can express themselves and maybe discuss burning issues affecting society. People will be afraid to express themselves openly without any fear of retribution).

Power in discourse can derive from the ability of one to freely participate in any forum without fearing any negative social sanction. This provides another psychodynamic perspective to the understanding of graffiti. Solomon and Yager (1975) establish the link between graffiti writing and the release of repressed impulses whose ties can be traced to authoritarianism. Othen-Price (2006:13) reveals that the social practice of graffiti is

predominantly a male adolescence activity whereby male graffiti writers ‘unconsciously explore forbidden notions of intimacy with each other.’ A common denominator in the views above is the link between graffiti and repressed sexuality. Graffiti is seen to ‘facilitate’ the ‘release of repressed impulses’ (Solomon and Yager, 1975:150) especially in relation to sexual feelings and/or aggression and hostility. It should be noted that in environments where speaking out, particularly against established norms and values, is forbidden, graffiti may serve as a safety valve through which bottled-up emotions and truths are released. College students were quick to allude to sex scandals, such as those involving top management, junior staff, lecturers and students (in the case of tertiary institutions) as ready material for graffiti and no other internal/conventional medium. In this regard, graffiti may serve as a watchdog against corrupt tendencies and may actually signal that underhand dealings are not as private as the concerned parties may assume. The students also revealed that the duty of letting things known through graffiti is done by a special kind of individual. Example (43) captures sentiments made by Participant 7 who said:

43. *Vanhu vanozviita vane I don't care attitude. Vanenge vachiita kuti vanhu vazive.* (The people who do it have an I-don't-care attitude. They do it to make people aware).

It emerges that there are individuals who take it upon themselves to reveal particular issues in society that are either taken-for-granted or ignored due to reluctance or fear of victimisation. One has to feel empowered in order to reveal such acts and this may arise from the recognition of graffiti as a powerful medium. Alternatively, the individual must at least feel that the medium on which they are expressing themselves can empower them. Resultantly, the individual ends up saying it as it is, calling a spade a spade, regardless of the consequences that may befall them. In Shona folklore such a person is referred to as *Mafirakureva* (One who says something even if it exposes them to danger).

The participants also revealed that graffiti can have a cathartic effect. This would obviously place graffiti within the realm of scriptotherapy where writing is considered as a healing process. Commenting on this function in example (44) Participant 8 was convinced that:

44. Some have something *chinovarwadza* deep inside (Some have something that pains them deep inside).

This is slightly different from the point raised above on the function of graffiti as a valve to let out pent-up emotions. The girls were quick to point out how girls tend to bare their souls and hearts mostly on the washroom walls. In this regard, toilet surfaces are transformed into the proverbial shoulder to cry on.

Negative sentiments on the social practice of graffiti mainly focused on the inappropriate use of the ‘private’ space of the toilet and appropriating it as a ‘public’ space for communication and dialogue. Participant 5, in example (45) suggested that:

45. However, it is abusing the toilet as you cannot use it for communication.

This is in line with the sentiments expressed by the high school participants who questioned the appropriateness of using the toilet as a communication/discourse site. Also interesting is the association college students draw between writers of graffiti and low intellectual capability. In example (46) Participant 6 went on to explain:

46. *Zvinotaridza* primitiveness especially *muZimbabwe* it shows that your standard of education *inenge ichiri* low (It shows primitiveness especially in Zimbabwe. It also shows that your standard of education is still low).

Participant 6’s comments are better understood in the context of Zimbabwe’s standard of education. Generally, Zimbabwe is regarded one of the most educated nations in Africa with both high literary and ‘pass’ rates. The participant is of the opinion that being in a country with very high levels of education does not correspond with ‘uncultured’ practices such as the inscription of graffiti, particularly on toilet walls. Asked about the apparent ‘contradiction’ of

labelling a university student intellectually challenged, Participant 7 responded by declaring that:

47. [writing graffiti on toilet walls] shows that you come from a funny background

The phrase ‘funny background’ alludes to the suspected graffiti writer’s background such as place of residence or schools attended in mind. The tendency, usually, is to associate growing up in high density suburbs, derisively known as ‘*marocations*’ (locations) and/or rural areas, with uncivilised behaviour. People who grew up in locations are looked down upon in elite circles. Their attitudes and general conduct are perceived as too rudimentary and unrefined. This is held in contrast with the living conditions in the low density suburbs, affectionately referred to as *masabhabha* (suburbs), whose inhabitants are considered ‘civilised.’ As a result of their perceived bad manners people from locations who are imagined as the ones most capable of participating in graffiti. ‘Funny background’ may also be a statement against the schools one would have attended. In other words, the responses to graffiti at universities return us to the question of space, in particular, how spaces are inscribed with meanings and values. The assumption is that certain ‘kinds’ of people are likely to engage in certain behaviours and to have certain attitudes just by the mere ‘fact’ that they come from particular geographical points in the city. Dorling (2001) argues that children’s options in life are by and large determined by the spaces in which they are brought up. Their options have nothing to do with the actual ways in which they experience it (Seamon and Sowers, 2008). Buell (2001) explains how place is produced by the range of meanings people ascribe to space. Resultantly, place is understood as the various ways in which space is humanised. Space/location is used to explain and/or justify behaviour and hence (re)construct certain segments of the urban population in particular ways. The fact that one does not choose where they are born or where they grow up and/or reside is conveniently ignored. Neither is the fact that there is no way of scientifically or systematically linking one’s place of residence to their

attitudes or behaviours. However, college students just hold the belief that one's 'funny' background can be used as a variable directly determining the extent to which they are likely to be involved in equally 'funny' social practices like the inscription of graffiti. Just like the case of the high school participants, the 'subordinate' discourse of graffiti is used to further entrench and engender the marginalisation of populations who are known or perceived to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Associating people from certain geographical locations of the city with the proliferation of graffiti in universities is tantamount to gross oversimplification and systemic stigmatisation of already marginalised groups. Chagonda (2001) rightly pointed out that the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe was a major destabilisation of a latent discriminatory elitist colonial education system which predominantly aimed to screen and marginalise the black student. Chagonda (2001:50) explains:

The new black middle class were attending the university with children of the peasants and working class who benefitted from the expansion of primary and secondary school facilities [marking] a shift...from elitist institution to greater openness through massification...a decline in the standard of education and facilities.

Associating the production of graffiti in tertiary institutions with people from 'funny backgrounds' can be explained in light of the competition that arose once elitist levels of education became accessible to 'born-locations' - those with a 'strong rural background' and those from the farms. It is no longer just a competition to attain a qualification but that of attaining power to name and to define through discourse fortified by the attainment of a qualification. These attitudes transcend gender divisions. They are based on one's social class and, as Gaidzanwa (2001) observes, the dominant identity becomes that of the town-suburb-born students.

University participants also bemoaned 'the lack of artistic value' in graffiti found in Zimbabwe in general. In example (48) Participant 8 commented:

48. Zimbabwean graffiti is nothing like yekuStates. Had it been art it would have been better. (Zimbabwean graffiti is nothing like that from the [United] State [of America]. Had it been art it would have been better.

Participant 8 draws attention to one of the salient characteristics of Zimbabwean graffiti. It is highly textual in nature and mostly characterised by what can be referred to as amateur sexual drawings. Followers of Western graffiti would hardly classify this as art. In this regard, the concern is not so much about the ‘illegal’ nature of the practice but on its supposed non-artistic character. Implicit reference to the tags, murals and pieces that are associated with graffiti from the western world, whose roots are steeped in the late 1960s and early 1970s graffiti traditions of Philadelphia and New York City, are made. For Pietrosanti (2010:4), ‘when people refer to graffiti, they generally mean “tagging” graffiti.’ Daly (2013:7) is also convinced that ‘graffiti is possibly the most wide spread *art form* viewed in today’s culture due to its public nature (emphasis added).’ These observations seem to suggest notions about the ‘authenticity’ or ‘legitimacy’ of graffiti. Implicit in the comments made by the participants and the scholars cited above is the notion that tags, murals and pieces are the only authentic, ‘genuine’ or ‘legitimate’ forms of graffiti. Anything else is a shadowy form of ‘real’ artistic graffiti. Also suggested by this attitude is the ascription of authenticity and legitimacy on graffiti based on its perceived artistic value. However, two points can be made on these tendencies. The first is that the participants seem unaware of the natural progression of the graffiti subculture. Researchers such as Whitehead (2004) have chronicled how graffiti writing in the United States of America has evolved from graffiti to post-graffiti and neo-graffiti. The second is that the differences in the perceived artistic value of graffiti in different social milieu may be taken to represent different ideological views on the question of value. Critics such as Plekhanov (1912), Achebe (1988) and p’Bitek (1986) have insistently advanced the ideological position that there is no art for art’s sake. Any piece of human artefact must be of utilitarian value to society. This understanding can be extended to graffiti

in that it cannot just be considered for its aesthetic qualities at the expense of its content value. This viewpoint is encapsulated in a Shona proverb *Totenda maruva tadya chakata* (The beauty of anything lies in its utility). The flower on its own is considered of no real value to the Shona people. It might be very beautiful but its purpose, or value, lies in its ability to spawn fruits, which are of value to the people. Beauty, thus, must be utilitarian. It appears such views underlie the production of graffiti in Western countries whereby form takes precedence over content. In the production of graffiti inscriptions in Zimbabwe, content supersedes form. As a result, the form may still be perceived as ‘unartistic’ (if such thing can exist) while the subject may be of immense cultural value.

### **6.1.3 Officials**

Perceptions from adults revealed a more pragmatic view towards the social practice of graffiti. Official sentiments on graffiti were not too eager to label the practice as either good or bad. Views from officials had a certain ‘balance’ which was not really evident in those of tertiary students.

The officials acknowledged the fact that people generally have stressors that dominate their lives and because most urban relationships are cut off from larger social polities, most people may not find ready avenues to relieve themselves. Graffiti remains one of the readily available options for such individuals. In example (49) Participant 11 asserts that:

49. [Writers of graffiti] are undergoing serious depression *iri kunganisa* mindset [yavo].  
(They are undergoing serious depression that is ... [their] mindset).

What cannot be doubted is that individuals are amenable to general stresses and frustrations on a day to day basis, especially during political and economic crises such as was witnessed in Zimbabwe from the year 2000 (Bond and Manyanya, 2003); Raftopolous and Mlambo, 2009; Sachikonye, 2012). Thus, a number of factors, some of which are sexual, political,

economic and social may force or drive an individual to leave their mark on the walls. There seems to be a general consensus among the official participants that the political situation in Zimbabwe may have left people with no choice but to voice their sentiments on the walls. Example (50) from Participant 9 is typical of participants' sentiments on whether they felt that there are alternative avenues for raising the sort of issues that emerge through graffiti:

50. *Handifunge kuti dziripo* (I don't think there are any).

This sentiment was supported in example (51) by Participant 10 who pointed out:

51. Problem ndeyekuti vanenge vachida kunzwikwa [kasi ivo] vasina platform. *Unogona kumupa mhosva yekusvibisa [madziro asi] ingadai vaiine mukana wekutaura vaiushandisa* (They need to be heard [but they] don't have the platform. You might hold them responsible for dirtying [the surfaces but] if they had opportunities to express themselves they would take them)

Van Dijk (2001b) contends that differential power relations lead to or manifest in the differential control of various linguistic or communication media. What is regarded as public space, in a normal perspective, is defined by the dominant groups. Whilst the print or electronic media are controlled by the dominant groups and other people are 'allocated' public spaces such as parks and stadia, the lay person might not have spaces or media which they truly control.

Graffiti, as discursive space opened up by the dominated, can be used for so long to the extent that it becomes 'naturalised.' This is revealed by Participants 9 and 12, in examples (52) and (53) respectively who, when asked about their attitudes towards the places where graffiti is located, responded by stating that:

52. It does not really matter. Maybe I am used to it [Participant 9].

53. [kunyora] pamapublic durawalls hapana basa. Kuzonyora pamadurawall edzimba dzevanhu hakuite ([Writing] on public durawalls does not matter. Writing on residential durawalls is unacceptable) [Participant 12].

Participants 9 and 12 were referring to the writing of graffiti on toilet walls and durawalls, respectively. Their responses are indicative of how particular sites have become natural or normal locations for the inscription of graffiti. Such spatial naturalisations can, in turn, make it easy for the naturalisation of the ideologies inscribed on them.

Another positive perception of graffiti emerging from the discussions is the need to take some of the messages recorded via graffiti seriously. In example (54) Participant 9 emphasised:

54. The message must be taken seriously. No one would waste their time and resources for nothing. People should take time to understand what is written maybe meaning *inozowanikwa* (will be found).

This position was supported in example (55) by Participant 11 who advised:

55. *Pane masentiments avonoexpresser ari* serious *zvokuti* you may get something *chiri* genuine. *Kumaschools nhingi* versus *nhingi* is serious (There are some sentiments they express that are serious such that you may get something that is genuine. In schools this and what's-his-name versus what's-her-name is serious.

Participants 9 and 11 are both pragmatic about the content of graffiti in the sense that they are not too quick to dismiss everything that is written as rubbish and unimportant. They highlight the need to read the content of graffiti before dismissing it.

Some participants also questioned the mental or intellectual disposition of those who participate in the social practice of graffiti. Two perspectives emerged in relation to their mental and intellectual capabilities, or lack thereof. Apart from the already mentioned backgrounds of supposed writers, suggestions were also made that writers of graffiti operated under the influence of drugs or depressants. Furthermore the practice was characterised as an inherently adolescent one.

Participants questioned the mental capacities of the writers. Sentiments emerging from the participants were that individuals who inscribe graffiti on surfaces are insane. As illustrated in example (56) Participant 12 stated:

56. *Handifunge kuti munhu akakwana chaiko anoita zvakadaro* (I don't think that a very sane person will do something like that).

This sentiment was supported in example (57) by Participant 11 who declared that:

57. Brain *dzake hadzisi* normal. *Haafunge kuti zvandiri kunyora hazviite paari kunyora* (The writer's brain is not normal. S/he cannot judge the appropriateness of writing during the process).

The two participants question the mental disposition of people who write graffiti on walls. They see writing on walls demonstrating a lack of judgment attributable to someone who is not sane.

Secondly, the participants were of the opinion that it is only those with limited intellectual capabilities who actively participate in the social practice of graffiti. However, when asked what they thought of those who write graffiti in tertiary institutions they were quick to attribute the practice to some other factors. One such factor has to do with massified enrolling patterns in tertiary institutions which emerged in response government policies of black empowerment. Also, due to prevailing economic challenges, tertiary institutions are forced to prioritise quantity/expansion over quality which means entry qualifications for tertiary programmes have since been relaxed. Participant 11 in example (58) believed that:

58. The lack of bottleneck in colleges means that every Dick and Tom come [sic] when they have no right to be there.

Implicit in Participant 11's attitude towards tertiary institutions is that intellectually capable individuals do not waste their abilities on 'trivial' practices such as graffiti. Resultantly, it is only those individuals with low grades who benefited from the economically-driven enrolment patterns, who concentrate on writing on walls. This coincides with the views of the

high school participants who believed that it is not only the academically challenged students who practice graffiti. This is in conflict with Ruto's (2007) attribution of the participation of Kenyan university students in graffiti to the restrictive nature of the predominantly church-controlled school system. The lower-level students might want to explore particular topics, such as sexuality, but they lack the platform to do so. They can only do so when they go to the more liberal university systems. For Ruto (2007), it is therefore not a question of intellectual capacity but lack of alternative platforms for exploring topics regarded as taboo or sensitive.

Another factor attributed to the practice of graffiti, especially in tertiary institution, is the use of drugs and other depressants. In example (59) and (60), respectively Participant 10 and 11 stated,:

59. Vamwe vanotora zvinodhaka zvakaita seglue nekranko ndozvezvava kumukunda kufunga oita zvingatarisirwe muhupenyu (some of them take intoxicating substances like glue and kranko which influence their thinking and result in deviant behaviour).
60. Vamwe vacho they abuse drugs. I would not imagine someone in their rightful senses achinyora mutoilet (Some of them abuse drugs. I would not imagine someone in their rightful senses writing in toilets).

The participants made allusions to the abuse of substances especially by students in tertiary institutions. Whilst the sniffing of glue is not rampant in tertiary institutions, the taking of very cheap, but extremely potent spirits, such as Cranko alluded to by Participant 10 above, is a major problem in these institutions. A song, 'Mafirakureva', by Winky D associates Cranko with the young. As captured in example (61) the artist laments:

61. *Hobho vezera rangu tacherera*  
*Nekuda kwekirango misodzi tayerera*  
(we have buried [too] many of my age mates  
Because of Cranko tears are flowing)

The participants took this perceived knowledge of substance abuse by the youth to rationalise the prevalence of graffiti in tertiary institutions. Implied in their assumptions on the mental inhibition of the writer by such intoxicating substances is the fact that graffiti has no place in tertiary institutions. Its presence there is only as a result of individuals who are no longer in control of their mental faculties as a result of substance abuse. Graffiti is, thus, viewed as the preoccupation of drunkards which has no place in tertiary institutions. In example (62), Participant 11 insists on the adolescent character of graffiti:

62. Usually *vana vadiki vari maages ekusesecondary. Vekuprimary vashoma* (Usually writers are adolescents of secondary school age. There are very few writers from the primary [level]).

The secondary school period is perceived as the peak period during which individuals are most likely to take part in graffiti. Participant 11's assumes that primary-school going students are too innocent to be involved in the writing of graffiti. They can only 'wake up' from their ignorance and actively participate in graffiti writing during secondary school level. Also suggested in the comment is the idea that after secondary school the individual would have 'matured' and, therefore, grown out of the practice. These views seem to reinforce the marginalisation of graffiti discourse whereby it is relegated from mainstream institutional discourses. Again, this typifies the neutralisation of discourse in the sense that by questioning the mental faculties of its producers, graffiti is relegated from the mainstream institutional discourses. Resultantly, graffiti loses its voice in tertiary institutions.

The other factor identified to 'justify' the practice of graffiti is that of one's family background. Participant 12 questioned whether individuals who participated in the social practice of graffiti came from solid and sound social backgrounds. She identified one's family background as a predictor of the likelihood of one's participation in graffiti practices.

This is seen in example (63) below:

*63. Vanhu vanogara mumastrets or mudzimba dzisina mai kana baba ndivo vanonyora graffiti.* They lack guidance. (Street kids or individuals from single-parent families are the ones who write graffiti. They lack guidance).

Participant 12 reduced the ‘social problem’ of graffiti to a question of lack of sound guidance. She simply regarded the problem of graffiti as emanating directly from lack of moral guidance from parents. Graffiti is taken to be an indicator of moral decadence. Gelfand (1981:88) makes the correlation between how a person of good moral standing, who is referred to as ‘*munhu chaiye*’ ('the worthy man'), and the extent to which they are taken seriously in society. If the individual is not perceived as ‘worthy’, his/her ideas and actions are summarily dismissed. The ‘writing on the wall’ in Zimbabwe becomes an immoral discourse which is duly considered unworthy.

The participants’ attitudes reveal that graffiti writing is either seen as vandalism or utilitarian social tool. The former perspective is partly consistent with other research in graffiti. The slight difference in what the participants revealed with existing literature is the link between graffiti and potential criminal behaviour. Cresswell (1992), Lachman (1998), Bandanaraike (2001), Thompson et al (2012) and Haworth (2013), among others demonstrate how different societies have used the broken windows approach to predict the likely occurrence of more serious criminal behaviour developing from graffiti. The consensus in this research tradition is that ignoring the presence of graffiti is an indirect admission by communities that they do not care about the occurrence of deviant behaviours, thereby opening doors to the commission of more serious offences. Halsey and Young (2000:289) point out how the occurrences of graffiti in various Western communities have been used to ‘suggest that the person who engages in graffiti may move to other activities listed, as if on a slippery slope downwards into criminality.’ Although the participants’ attitudes characterise graffiti as deviant behaviour they however do not make any links, explicit or implicit, between the

social practice of graffiti and likelihood of criminal behaviour. Instead, graffiti is seen as deviant behaviour that is a direct result of lack of social mores, limited intellectual capacity, dysfunctional familial background, alcohol and/or drug mental inhibition as well as youth immaturity. Thus graffiti is seen as deviant behaviour which is regarded predominantly as nothing more than juvenile delinquency. The lack of its recognition as a ‘serious’ form of discourse is then predicated on these deviancy-related attitudes towards the social practice of graffiti. The other Western tradition on general attitudes towards graffiti regarded it as an art form. Whitehead (2004), Pietrosanti (2010) and Daly (2013), among others, observe how graffiti, especially tags, throw ups and pieces, are considered to be part of the post- and neo-graffiti movement which is seen as an art form. The attitudes of the participants towards graffiti show that graffiti is not remotely considered as an art form. Instead, they were quick to point to its utilitarian value in society whereby it can be used as a valve for pent up emotions, as a source of important information and for political engagement. According to this tradition, graffiti is regarded as a highly valuable linguistic resource to various communities. It can then be concluded that whereas the Western tradition regards graffiti as vandalism (which is then taken as a precursor of more seriousness criminal behaviour) and as art, the Zimbabwean and perhaps African tradition in general regards the occurrence of graffiti as vandalism (which is perceived as adolescent delinquency) as well as a utilitarian linguistic resource.

## **6.2 Graffiti as urban street protests**

Urban street protest graffiti is a description that is herein formulated in reference to graffiti which occurs on various surfaces mostly in and around Zimbabwe. It is mostly inscribed on durawalls and roadside signs. The term is employed differently from what is referred to as street art in the literature. Street art is heavily linked to the New York City hip hop teenage

subculture of the 1970s (Ferrel 1990; Powers 1999, Hookstra 2009; Ouzman 2010; Blomkamp et al 2014). Mrsevic (2012:9) characterises street art as a ‘hippie youth culture.’ The most common manifestations of street art are tags, throw-ups and (master)pieces. These forms of graffiti have common characteristics which include a search for individual recognition and creative self-expression. It is, however, the tag that has been traditionally perceived as the epitome of urban street art in the Western world. Ferrel (1990) reveals how tags and their more elaborate ‘throw-up’ versions became the initial focus of artistic innovation and social organisation whereby the tag became the unit of production and the basic measure of a writer’s fame. Due to the artistic nature of street art, Morgan and Louis (2009) also refer to it as urban art (the opening of graffiti galleries to showcase the most famous and accomplished pieces being a case in point). The consented focus on the artistic value of urban art results in less ideological interest in writers of street graffiti. In contrast, graffiti found in and around streets in high density areas is more functional than aesthetic. Whilst the tag or the masterpiece is mainly aimed at exhibiting the writer’s creative talent, Zimbabwean street protests serve more to communicate some functional message. The social context seems to have shaped the quality of the graffiti towards serving a more utilitarian purpose. Zimbabwean graffiti provides an opportunity to question assumptions that graffiti is practiced by mainly by young men ‘who lack positive connections with education, work and family’ (Blomkamp, Hager-Forde and Flemming, 2014:6). The major concerns of Zimbabwean street protest graffiti are more or less shaped by the major challenges faced by social groups living in difficult conditions. Hence this type of graffiti is referred to as street protest graffiti, in dialogic response to Western world’s notions of street art. It is a type of graffiti that is both shaped and responds to, mainly, the condition of the economically and politically disadvantaged urban populace.

Graffiti, as indicated by the participants in section 6.2 above, is a way of ‘equalising’ or levelling the inequities that exist in the control over spaces and the discourses that are constructed and disseminated from them. Graffiti, on toilet walls and durawalls, can be one way through which the dominated groups naturalise their own spaces which disseminate their own discourses. They become discourses they can control. Power or dominance over both the media and the discourses that can be constructed within and around them remain contested. The proverbial voice of the voiceless can still find their own media on which they naturalise and articulate their own ideologies outside of the hegemonic discourses. When authorities demand that the walls be cleaned in order to erase graffiti, we may perceive this as part of ongoing struggles for the control of spaces on which discourses are constructed and neutralised in society. Regardless, silencing or neutralisation of lesser discourses by dominant ones can paradoxically lead to their explosion. Foucault (1978) notes this paradox where, in Victorian society, authorities’ efforts to silence discourses on sex and sexuality enabled a proliferation of the same discourses in several institutions such as the church, the clinic and the school. Graffiti can be taken as a way of opening up new avenues of expression in which dominated discourses can be discussed. There is a strong correlation between street protest graffiti and major socio-economic as well as political issues of the day. Street protest graffiti can be construed of as a way of ‘taking to the wall’ (Peteet, 1996:142) as an alternative effort of being heard. Inscriptions collected from the three urban areas in Zimbabwe reveal a strong connection between the issues emerging in graffiti writing and the contemporary socio-economic as well as political issues of the day. Qualitative analysis of the inscriptions revealed a systematic concern on two issues of Zimbabwe’s electricity supply problems as well as on political issues. Analysis of these issues is done in the sections below.

### **6.2.1 Socio-economic graffiti**

Inscriptions collected from various surfaces revealed major socio-economic concerns. These inscriptions highlight two salient socio-economic concerns; the operations of Zimbabwe's sole electricity supplier, popularly referred to as ZESA, as well as the presence of Chinese people running businesses in the country. The two issues have a very significant bearing on the people's welfare in that any success or failure of ZESA, in its capacity as the country's sole electricity provider, has a direct bearing on the people's standard of living. In the same manner, the nature of businesses run by Chinese people in the country can be taken as insights into both racial or identity construction and the nature of the country's economic players.

#### **6.3.1.1 Concerns over the operations of ZESA**

Being the only provider of electricity for the whole country necessarily entails the formation of a unique relationship between ZESA and its domestic consumers. One would expect the people to be obviously subordinated in this monopolistic relationship. As a result, the people take advantage of the relative anonymity provided by the durawall and appropriate it as a medium through which they air their concerns over the operations of the power utility provider. Thus, the wall becomes a space on which people can (re)negotiate this relationship of inequality. Concerns raised in the inscriptions were categorised according to the specific power-related issues raised. The inscriptions under analysis are those that focused on load-shedding and a fraudulent billing system.

##### ***6.3.1.1 Load-shedding***

Load shedding is a solution devised by the power company to solve its problems of inadequate power supplies. It involves temporarily or intermittent switching off electricity in

residential areas. This ensures that the whole country is not heavily using electricity simultaneously. Of major concern is the fact that this solution is seen to be over-exercised by ZESA. The people then take to the wall to protest against excessive load-shedding. The inscriptions are written in very short phrases lacking any significant spatial and temporal qualification. Inscriptions on power issues were categorised into two broad areas based on the extent to which they allowed room for dialogue between the two parties (the writer, who represents the consumers, and the power utility). The first category consists of monologic statements which leave no room for a negotiated position between the two parties, as illustrated by Figure 6.1 below:



**Figure 6.1:** ZESA stop shading (sic)

This inscription is read as a ‘simple’ instruction to the power company to cease its load shedding exercise. It is read as a demand to the power utility. Its matter-of-fact tone allows for no negotiation in so far as its advanced proposition is concerned. Focus group discussions with the participants also highlighted this exasperation with ZESA’s load-shedding exercise. They questioned the rationale of load-shedding given the fact that people are paying for electricity. Participants 7 and 10, in examples (64) and (65) respectively, argued:

64. *Ingadai ndisingadi magetsi ndaisabhadhara* (If I didn’t need electricity I would not pay [for it])

65. *Ndinobhadhara* but I don't get to use *magetsi acho* (I pay [for the electricity] but I don't get to use the electricity I pay for)

It is apparent from the contribution that the general feeling is that payment for the service is taken as a performative act whereby the two parties, the paying consumer and ZESA, enter into a contract for the provision of electrical energy. It is in this light that the load-shedding exercise is considered unjustified since the paying for electricity is taken to signify the right to have electrical energy in one's home.

The unrealistic nature of the load-shedding exercise is captured by contributions in the reader feedback columns of *The Herald* newspaper captured in example (66) below:

66. Zesa are you still load shedding or you have decided to shed off Glen Norah? ...  
(Anonymous, *The Herald* SMS 17 July 2011)

Example (29) above is in line with Figure 6.1 above in the sense that they both point out the excessive nature of the load-shedding exercise, especially in high density areas like Glen Norah. The two are however different in force. Example (29) appears to be leaving room for dialogue with the party involved. Figure 6.1, on the other hand, is uncompromising. In this case it can be regarded as monologic, as opposed to the more dialogic proposition in (66).

The demand for electricity, it appears, emerges from the differential treatment of consumers by ZESA based on geographical location. Participants highlighted the fact that there are areas which rarely or do not experience the load-shedding exercise. This becomes an issue of marginalisation and exclusion whereby residents of particular areas feel that they are being made to bear the burden of other segments of the city which are favoured when it comes to load-shedding. Low density suburbs, as well as medium density suburbs, where particular segments of the urban population reside were said to rarely experience load-shedding. This is

evident in the comments made by Participants 8 and 12, in (67) and (68) respectively, who lamented:

67. *Kune malocations aunoziva kuti haaende magetsi* (there are some locations [read as residential areas] that you know do not experience any load-shedding).
68. *Glenview ne Budiro zvakaganurwane* road but Budiriro rarely has any load-shedding (Glenview and Budiriro are separated by a road but Budiriro rarely has any load-shedding).

When these sentiments are considered, one may understand the militant nature of the graffiti inscriptions demanding equal treatment regarding load-shedding. Thus, if there are sections of the city which do not experience any power outages, then everyone else should be treated in the same way. The inscriptions are therefore read not just as simple demands for the cessation of load-shedding but also as demands for equal treatment by the power utility.

The second category consists of inscriptions which are more dialogic in nature. These inscriptions tend to be more pragmatic than those in the first category in the sense that they concede the larger economic conditions of the day, as well as other social problems, to negotiate a middle position that is seen to work in the best interest of ZESA and the consumers. Figure 6.2 below is a typical position of a negotiated approach to the problems of load shedding:



**Figure 6.2:** Too much load shedi (sic)

It is apparent that the inscription in Figure 6.2 is not complete, although it is easy to discern that the writer wanted to say ‘too much load shedding.’ Compared with the first inscription in Figure 6.1, Figure 6.2 represents a negotiated approach to the power problems bedevilling the people and how they can be resolved. The focus of the inscription is on a workable solution. Implied in the inscription is that load shedding is both a necessary and unavoidable solution to the country’s power problems. It is in this light that the inscription focuses attention on the frequency and/or duration of the actual load-shedding. Participants in the focus group discussions noted the inevitability of load-shedding by ZESA and also went on to suggest that the exercise should proceed along a proper schedule so that people can better adapt to the solution. Participant 9 (69) below emphasised:

69. Handiti kunoitika load-shedding muZimbabwe? Inofanirwa kuita time yaunoziva kuti anoenda musi wokuti nguva dzakati (It’s a fact that there is load-shedding in Zimbabwe? It [load-shedding] must have a time [read as schedule] that you know electricity is shed-off on this particular day at such a [specific] time).

Participant 9’s comment brings to light the fact that people have come to accept the fact that ZESA’s load-shedding exercise is a practical, if not realistic, solution to the country’s energy crisis. What needs to be addressed is not its cessation but its regularisation so that there is a

proper and gazetted schedule so that people can efficiently readjust their lives to the load-shedding process.

This pragmatic approach to the appreciation of load-shedding also came out from the reader feedback sections of the daily newspapers, as typified by (70) below:

70. We know that ZESA is experiencing problems but the situation in Mkoba is way too much. (Tee, Gweru, *The Herald* SMS 9 March 2012).

Example (70) is a typical example of a pragmatic approach towards problem solving. The SMS begins by acknowledging the fact that the power utility is indeed experiencing problems. It then negotiates for a middle position whereby the load-shedding is not completely ceased, as demanded by Figure 6.1, but reduced for the benefit of both parties.

In spite of their differences in force and positions taken, the two inscriptions both recognise that the people are in dire need of electricity. Durawalls offer them spaces on which to renegotiate a relationship characterised by equity. The inscriptions are read as challenges to institutionalised power. Getting one's voice heard in bureaucratic environments such as in these institutions is never easy. Institutions like ZESA enjoy relative monopoly over load shedding discourse because they can use media at will. Their messages can easily become a society's dominant code. In such situations where open dialogue may be difficult to achieve, the walls are then used as viable spaces for recording one's voice. Writing on walls represents a refusal by consumers to be subordinated to the dominant code. It is a construction of subversive codes. The variation between the two inscriptions in terms of force can be read as representative of the way in which the respective writers perceive the extent to which they are able to influence their destiny. A major factor that determines the extent to which they can improve their condition is to a larger part depended on the perceived interplay between the prevailing economic conditions and how the economic conditions impinge on ZESA's

service delivery capabilities. If the writer considers that the economic situation does not to a great extent interfere with the power utility's service delivery, then the writers adopt a more militant approach whereby they demand what they consider their legal right. In this case, the writer constructs the consumers as victims of ZESA's refusal to respect the basic needs. If, on the other hand, they perceive the prevailing economic environment as hampering full service delivery by ZESA then the inscriptions become more pragmatic in search of possible redress. In this case the consumers, to a certain extent, share responsibility by acknowledging that both parties find themselves in a difficult situation thereby necessarily adopting a negotiated approach. Thus, inscriptions on ZESA's load-shedding exercise vary in accordance to force in response to how they construct themselves in relation to ZESA, in the context of prevailing economic conditions.

#### ***6.3.1.1.2 ZESA's 'fraudulent' billing system***

Prior to 2013, the power utility company had been operating sorely on an estimate-based billing system whereby it estimated the amount of electricity a particular household would consume on a monthly basis. Given that the power utility was carrying out massive load shedding and the estimate quantity was not revised downwards, the consumers were made to pay for much more than they used since the estimate system assumed that they were using their full estimated share. The inscriptions in response to the disparity between perceived power usage and the actual bill were militant in approach. Figure 6.3 typifies such inscriptions:



**Figure 6.3:** We demand actual readings

The inscription in Figure 6.4 above demands ZESA to base their bills on actual meter readings. ZESA is accused of short-changing its consumers in so far as fair payment of services rendered is concerned. It is important to note that graffiti writers are in this case protesting against ‘the bill.’ The bill, a piece of paper taken as an official record, reflects institutional power. Once the bill is delivered to a consumer, room for negotiation becomes minimal, or non-existent. The consumer is expected to honour the amount stated in the bill. The customer is bound by the piece of paper to pay any amount stated. The inscription in Figure 6.4 is therefore an attempt at subversion. It gestures towards a refusal to honour a bill which is not based on an ‘actual’ reading and is therefore fraudulent. Accusations of a fraudulent billing system are also highlighted and reinforced in Figure 6.4 below:



**Figure 6.4:** ZESA stop cheating (sic) us.

The inscription in 6.5 establishes ZESA's 'cheating' as habitual and calls for its end. In fact, there were a number of such inscriptions aimed at raising doubts on ZESA's transparency as highlighted in examples (71) to (73) below:

71. Zesa stop estimating
72. Actual bills
73. Zesa we want fair charges

Examples (71) to (73), combined with Figure 6.5, construct ZESA as an institution governed by fraudulent principles. The same idea was also highlighted in (74) below in *The Herald*'s SMS feedback section where a sceptical consumer opined:

74. I would like to think that the reason that Zesa would rather send estimated bills is that they know that they would get less through actually reading bills given the amount of loadshedding [sic] to its customers. Surely, they would get half of the revenue they are collecting now, (Rudo, Harare, *The Herald* SMS Wednesday 7 March 2012).

The reader feedback contribution suggests that the customers are paying for much more than they would have used. This is suggestive of the need for a better billing system. Taken together, the reader feedback contribution and the graffiti inscriptions, construct a 'reality' whereby ZESA is intentionally 'stealing' from its customers thereby paving way for a need

for behavioural change. Consumers, it seems, are also prompted to be more vigilant in so far as their acceptance of bills is concerned. The inscriptions on the billing system appear to be monologic in the sense that they do not assume a negotiated position. Their overt militant approach suggests that shortcomings of the billing system are an open secret and what remains is for the system to be improved upon. In this case, the durawalls serve to bestow power on a group of people who might have hitherto found themselves completely vulnerable to a large organisation that is, on the face of it, mightier than they.

Just with the load shedding problem, graffiti writers seem to come up with a solution for the problems arising from the estimate-based billing system. This solution lies in a pay-as-you-use pre-paid metered system, as suggested in the inscriptions. Although the reader feedback columns of the daily newspapers used did not explicitly capture the fact that the pre-paid meter system would be the panacea to ZESA's billing system, the complaints over paying for an untendered services seem to point to this system as a realistic solution. The focus group participants were more optimistic about the switch to the pre-paid meter system. By the time the researcher held the focus group discussions the power utility had actually begun installing the prepaid meters in customers' homes. The participants expressed frustration at the slow pace with which the power utility was effecting this new billing system.

An interesting characteristic of inscriptions on ZESA is the predominant use of the collective pronoun 'we' and 'us.' Examples (75) to (78) serve to highlight this linguistic trend

- 75. We need zesa
- 76. We want proper bills
- 77. ZESA stop abusing us
- 78. ZESA u [sic] are a danger to us

There seem to be a realisation that what is inscribed on the walls transcends the needs of the individual. The writers write for the whole community rather than for their own individual

gain. It is as if the ‘I’ carries a subjective opinion and impact while the ‘we’ carries an objective one. In this regard, graffiti writers protest *in situ*. They engage with the source of their problems in the very locale where the problem arises. Clearly, discourses constructed and developed from graffiti walls are most likely to have a more powerful effect on the intended audience, in comparison to those in the reader feedback columns, by virtue of their direct accessibility to the affected community and the sense of community inherent and implied in the discourse itself.

The inscriptions on the walls about the conduct of ZESA can be read as a refusal by the people to accept sub-standard services from a major and very powerful institution. On the surface the nature of the relationship between ZESA (which can be regarded as a monopoly) and its customers is characterised by unequal power relationships that the customer is expected to be run down or overwhelmed by the whims of the obviously more bigger and powerful institution. By turning to the walls, the apparently weaker customer makes a deliberate attempt to redress the unequal power relations. Importantly, the adoption of a negotiated approach as part of the redress of the problem is an interesting phenomenon that is perceived by the researcher not as a sign of a defeatist attitude on the part of the customers but as indicative of a pragmatic, and therefore, practical approach to solving a national crisis. That is, the inscriptions can be used as evidence of not only the indomitable spirit of the people but also as evidence of how reality is constructed differentially according to the social context.

The analysis of the inscriptions on ZESA can also be used by the utility as a reminder that it needs to conduct itself in a professional manner. Being the only institution providing electricity to the nation does not mean that it has to treat the consumers as desperate and

therefore provide shoddy services. Professionalism can involve the provision of load-shedding schedules to the consumers and, most importantly, adhering to those schedules so as to enable much easier and efficient adaptation to the energy crisis facing the region as a whole.

In light of the acute energy shortage facing the region, it may also be prudent for people to actively reorient themselves towards seeking alternative sources of energy so as to alleviate the energy crisis already identified. Turning to alternative sources such as solar energy and gas may go a long way in relieving unnecessary energy-related stresses on the part of the consumers. Over and above this, solar and gas energy sources are also more oriented to the green sources of energy which also help in saving the environment. The inscriptions can then be taken as a call for people to make a paradigm shift towards the adoption and adaptation of alternative, if not better, energy sources that are more suitable for the preservation of the environment.

#### **6.3.1.2 Concerns over unemployment and the ‘Chinese’**

There were some inscriptions which explicitly referred to the state of the country’s unemployment rate as well as the Look East Policy adopted by the government in 2003. Such graffiti were characterised by a very militant tone which does not allow for any possibility of a negotiated position. This category of inscriptions comes out as demands rather than requests for concerted efforts in finding a common solution. Figure 6.5, below epitomises this category by making a demand for the creation of employment opportunities:



**Figure 6.5:** Work

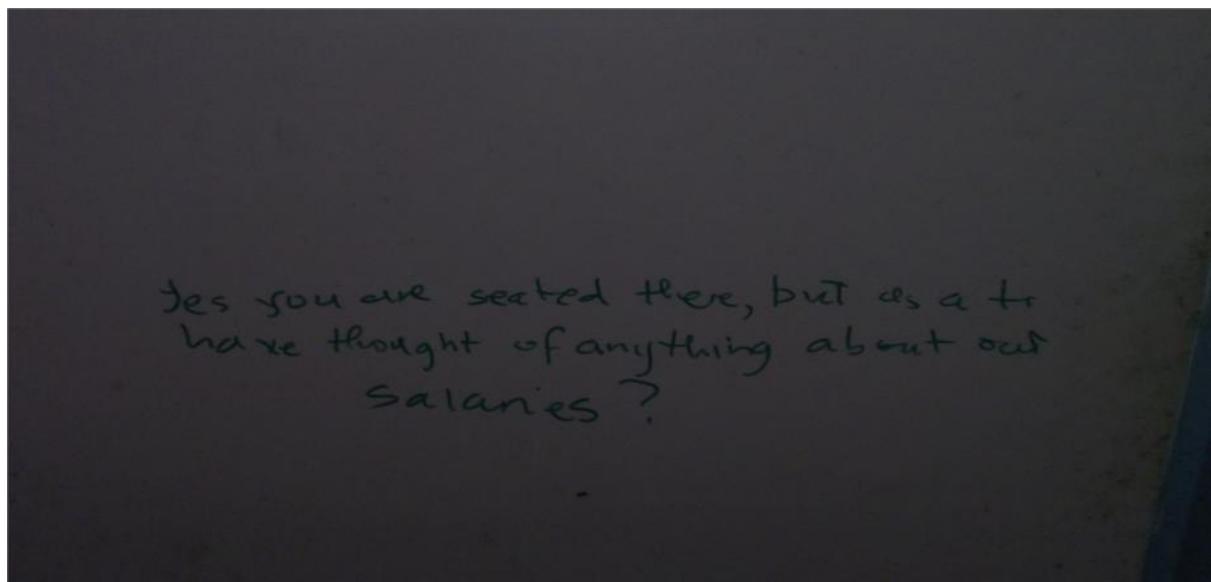
The inscription in Figure 6.5 is read in the context of a country facing severe economic challenges characterised, among other factors, by a very high unemployment rate. The word 'work' is read as synonymous with formal employment. The general tendency is to hold government responsible for the creation of a conducive environment enabling the creation of many employment opportunities. Resultantly, a government's success can be judged on the basis of a country's rate of unemployment. Such instances where government is held responsible for the people's unemployment is captured Figure 6.6 below:



**Figure 6.6:** *Hurovha hatichadi. Mugabe taramba.* (we no longer want unemployment. No to Mugabe)

The inscription in Figure 6.6 above is makes an implicit reference to Zimbabwe's economy meltdown which saw unprecedented rises in levels of unemployment. Sachikonye (2012:xiv) describes how 'towards the end of the third decade of independence, the economy has collapsed, transforming the country into a basket case.' Employment opportunities during this period (1999-2010) were bleak and, resultantly, life became unbearable as a result of the collapse of industry and commerce.

Graffiti inscriptions also provided an insight into the country's quality of employment. Johri (2005) characterises quality of employment as both a subjective and multifaceted concept that is not easy to accurately and satisfactorily define. He however cites the worker's subjective evaluation of their employment conditions as one of the key indicators and measurements of quality of employment. In this regard, Figure 6.7, below, can be taken as giving insight into the quality of employment:



**Figure 6.7:** Yes you are seated there, but as a tr [teacher] have you thought of anything about our salaries?

The inscription in Figure 6.7 above, written in a toilet at a teacher's training college, can be taken as highlighting a significant aspect of civil servants' salaries, in general and teachers'

salaries in particular. The writer believes that the issue of workers' salaries is something that needs to be thought about constantly. Civil servants' conditions of service are considered so poor that they need constantly attention from the responsible authorities.

The inscriptions in Figures 6.5 and 6.6 interestingly highlight a commonplace social construction of the notions of 'work' and 'employment.' The terms suggest a situation where an individual is gainfully engaged in an activity in which he/she is likely to get remuneration in one form or the other. The terms are however used as part of a discourse which defines notions of 'appropriate', 'proper', 'formal' as well as 'informal' economic-driven activities. Common discourses on employment have established the general white-collar and blue-collar job sectors as the epitome of employment such that discourses on 'work' and 'employment' gravitate towards and around such types of formalised economically-driven endeavours. Such formalised economically-driven activities are therefore taken to define and constitute hegemonic discourses on 'work' and 'employment.' These hegemonic discourses are then propped up and, in a sense, sanctified, by such rituals and instruments such as the monthly salary, pay day, the pay slip and the loan-lending system, among others. As a result, anyone who is outside these regularised rituals is summarily dismissed as without work or unemployment. Critical discourse analysis necessitates a paradigm shift in terms of narrowly defining work and employment from this reductionist view of withdrawing a salary, among others, to putting oneself in a position to viably engage in economic-driven activities. The Johane Marange Apostolic group are an epitome of a social group who refused to be tied down by narrow definitions of hegemonic employment discourses by coming up with a counter-discourse that enabled them to function efficiently within the bounds of their religious ideology.

Other inscriptions also provided insights on the people's sentiments towards the Look East Policy that was implemented by the government from 2003 after the imposition of economic sanctions by Western countries such as Britain, The United States of America, the European Union and Australia. The Look East Policy saw the government entering into 'closer co-operation with East Asian countries of China, Malaysia and Iran' (Chigora and Dewa, 2009:95). The inscriptions made reference to the 'Chinese' presence as captured in Figures 6.8 and 6.9 below:



**Figure 6.8:** *Machina go back to China*



**Figure 6.9:** *Machina must go. Muda kuti urayisa* (Chinese must go. You want to have us killed).

The inscriptions in Figures 6.8 and 6.9 above represent the ‘Chinese’ identity as dangerous and unwelcome. The presence of the Chinese in Zimbabwe was meant to alleviate the country’s ailing economy by unlocking investment opportunities in various sectors of the economy (Chigora and Dewa, 2009; Chigora and Chisi, 2009; Chingono, 2010). The inscriptions can then be read as a counter-discourse to dominant discourses on the Look East Policy as well as the utility of Chinese and Asian intervention in African countries, in general, and Zimbabwe, in particular. They however manifest reductionist tendencies in the sense that they conflate regional identities into one identity, conveniently and negatively stereotyped as a dangerous identity which is then dismissed. Again, it shows the social constructed nature of discourse whereby no attempt is made to unbundle the various Asian actors and identities interacting in the country’s various bilateral economic relationships. Participants in focus group discussions significantly bring out how these Asian identities, apart from being unilaterally referred to as Chinese, are also referred to as MaZhingaz (from the Chinese-sounding word Zhing Zhong). The term zhing zhong is a slang term used to refer to ‘merchandise made in Asia; cheaply made, inexpensive, or substandard goods’ ([www.waywordradio.org/zhing\\_zhong/](http://www.waywordradio.org/zhing_zhong/)). The term therefore carries with it connotations of

‘cheap’, ‘low-quality’, ‘less durable’, ‘fake’ and ‘suspicious/untrustworthy.’ The inscriptions against Chinese presence in the country are then read and appreciated as part and parcel of the discourse that feeds into other discourses on and about the presence of Asian economic players in most sub-Saharan African countries. Matahwa (2007) characterises these discourses as indicative of an undercurrent of disquiet against the Chinese as well as other Asians in the country. The discourses can be read as a slur against the Asian presence in Zimbabwe. The durawall is in this case as an avenue for confronting and dealing with the Asians in an anonymous but explicitly public manner. Matahwa (2007) sums up the objectives of such discourses as highlighting the salient challenges and obstacles the Chinese, as well as Asian, are encountering in their various relationships with African governments and states.

The inscriptions on and about the ‘Chinese’ presence are indicative of how identities are socially constructed through discourses and how the constructed identities are never stable. They are in a constant state of flux in that they vary and change in response to historical processes of change. An interesting aspect about the construction of ‘Chinese’ identities is the change from notions of ‘superior’ to those of ‘inferior.’ This transition is captured by the older official participants who recall a period when the word ‘China’ invoked notions of superior and guaranteed quality. As recounted by Participant 11, it was the pride of every woman to have a set of kitchen utensils, especially “*ndiro nematea set zvebhonzo*” (ceramic plates and tea sets). In this sense, the label ‘Made in China’ thus used to invoke ‘superior quality’, ‘expensive’, ‘reserved’ as well as ‘pride’, among others. The flooding of the market with cheap Chinese merchandise at the start of the century brought with it a change in the discoursal meaning of the word from the notions of ‘expensive and superior quality’ to contemporary notions of substandard and inexpensive. The younger, particularly the high

school and tertiary student participants, were convinced that the word ‘Chinese’ carries with it undertones of inherent dissatisfaction. As stressed by Ncube (2012):

The word zhing zhong is [now] part of Zimbabwean street lingo referring to cheap Chinese products that have flooded the local market ([www.allafrica.com/stories/201200077.html](http://www.allafrica.com/stories/201200077.html)).

This definition has served to ‘prove’ the prevailing truism that, on the one hand, all Chinese and/or Asian products are ‘zhing zhong’ and, on the other, quality goods are only found in the west. It is in this light that Chihuri (2009) expresses his shock at his discovery that:

Some of the best products on sale i.e. clothes, children’s toys, etc were actually Chinese.

Chakamwe (2014) demystifies Chihuri’s apparent confusion at encountering expensive and quality Chinese products by explaining:

High quality goods are plentiful in China. The problem is with people who go to China and import ‘rejects’ meant for China’s lower end market because they are cheap. [...] Just because Zimbabwean business people want to make short cuts to riches by importing ‘rejects’ should not be blamed on the Chinese ([www.thepatriot.co.zw/?p=4327](http://www.thepatriot.co.zw/?p=4327))

In this regard, historical circumstances have to a large part helped shape changing perceptions towards China, both the people and products. In this sense, the historical developments have to a large extent helped in the disempowerment of everything Chinese.

Inscriptions on and about the Chinese people are construed as having the double-edged function of providing insights into identity formation and a window into the contemporary economic landscape. From a social perspective, the inscriptions, in clamouring for the Chinese to ‘go back to China’, construct and position the Asian identities as unwanted and unwelcome. The use of the term Chinese is juxtaposed with that of ‘*murungu*’ (white person) which is used in Zimbabwean circle to connote notions of ‘sophistication’, ‘civilisation’, ‘employer’ and ‘rich/wealthy’, among others.

However, the present researcher argues that prevailing popular discourses on the presence of the Asian players in Zimbabwe tend to overlook one significant aspect. Global economic development trends suggest that relationship between African countries, in general, with Asia countries, and China in particular, were bound to happen at one point or the other. Chigora and Chisi (2007:150) observe how ‘Asia now controls close to 70% of the world’s foreign reserves and has advanced in terms of technology.’ The rapid economic development strides made by the Asian bloc has inevitably seen various nations, irrespective of economic size, scramble to forge bilateral relations with Asian countries. Chingono (2010:5) argues that:

At the same time, the rise of China as an economic powerhouse in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has attracted so many states – small, medium and super powers – to forge relations, relaying an impression that Zimbabwe LEP [Look East Policy] was inevitable [...] the adoption of the LEP [is] a transitional process marking the improvement of existing bilateral relations.

It is in this light that the presence of Asian economic players is seen as a logical development of bilateral relationships especially with the Chinese government.

### **6.2.2 The writing on the wall: Political graffiti and state power.**

This section focuses on graffiti inscriptions that make reference to Zimbabwe’s political situation. Political graffiti is not a phenomenon that is unique to Zimbabwe’s graffiti landscape alone. It is a worldwide phenomenon that has stood the test of time. Instances of political graffiti can be traced as far back as early as Babylonian political states/empires. The biblical passage in Daniel 5 is regarded as a typical instance of political graffiti as captured by the verses 5 and 27 in examples (79) and 80, respectively:

79. Immediately the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, opposite the lampstand; and the king saw the hand as it wrote (Daniel 5 verse 5)
80. TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting (Daniel 5 verse 27).

A number of researchers (Texeira et al 2003; Jena 2012; Daly 2013) make reference to the biblical passage in Daniel 5 as an instance of graffiti. This research does not intend to explore the extent to which this is a typical instance of graffiti. The biblical allusion is important in drawing attention to the history of graffiti writing and the relationship between these writings with state power. Tracing instances of graffiti as far back as biblical times establishes the social practice of graffiti as an enduring one. Of significance is the fact that it enables the scrutiny of the true nature of graffiti. It has already been pointed out that research on graffiti has narrowly traced the origins of graffiti to the tagging explosion which developed in response to TAKI's exploits in Manhattan (Powers, 1999). Truncating the history of graffiti in this manner has two major implications for graffiti research. The first implication is that it appears that graffiti writing is a new or emerging problem. Taking it as a contemporary problem partly explains why a host of city authorities across the world tried, in vain, to completely eradicate it. The protracted history of graffiti suggests that it 'will not go away' (Graham, 2004:1). Instead, the emergence of tagging, as well as other forms of post-graffiti, should be taken as evidence of how graffiti writing can adapt to different social and cultural contexts. The second implication is the close relationship between graffiti writing and state politics. The political context in which the writing was done is of great significance. The writing was done in a repressive political context in which King Belshazzar dominated the people of Israel. It is from this context that graffiti is read as the proverbial voice of the voiceless and, hence, its predominant association with marginalised and disenfranchised groups (Hanauer 1998). The public display of the writing itself lends itself to the association of graffiti with public surfaces in general. Also significant is the fact that it was only the hand that was seen doing the writing, pointing to both agency and its anonymity. Lastly, the candid nature of the message, as well as its interpretation in verse 27, is significant in conceptualising political graffiti as very serious political commentary which, at times, can

significantly contribute to the formation, maintaining and denial of political ideologies. Suggested in verse 27 is an active evaluation of political leadership's general conduct and how they can be oftentimes found wanting. It is from this perspective that graffiti adopts a crucial role of policing the political environment and how it can be utilised as a check and balance in the enactment and negotiation of power relations.

Political graffiti is perceived as having its genesis in the political environment, especially where there are gross abuses of power. Of equal importance is the fact that power is not perceived as concentrated on any one group. Power is generally regarded as ubiquitous and therefore socially distributed. However, the distribution of power among the various social groups is in varying degrees such that various groups take advantage of various platforms in trying to negotiate, or renegotiate, and, oftentimes, balance these power relations. Graffiti is one such platform on which political relationships are enacted and negotiated. Resultantly, rather than taking the phrase the 'writing [is] on the wall' in line with Jena (2012) who argues that it refers to its cryptic nature (she bases on the failure of everyone to decipher the message written on the walls by the hand), there is need to take into consideration the context in which the inscriptions are made.

Zimbabwean graffiti presents the researcher with a different kind of situation. It has already been noted that Zimbabwean graffiti is not entirely abstract. It is a highly textual type of graffiti that is at times too explicit for its audiences. In such a situation, the researcher is left to read this highly textual discourse from a particular theoretical standpoint. The researcher's problem is not that of deciphering per se but that of interpretation. Thus, the phrase 'the writing [is] on the wall' can be taken as a statement about deeds which have been noted and have been published for all to see. Although political graffiti is more often than not associated

with the dominated or the disenfranchised, this does not necessarily preclude its usage by other political participants. Such a narrow, or rather, a myopic conceptualisation of the role of political graffiti as an exclusive tool for the marginalised does not give a complete picture of how it can be harnessed as a tool for communication by competing political groups. The research argues that political graffiti is not only employed by the politically marginalised and disenfranchised groups as a dissident discourse, but also lends itself to utilisation by the dominant groups in support of state power and the entrenchment of the '*commandement*.' Political graffiti can therefore be used as a tool to maintain the political status quo. Analysis of political graffiti is therefore divided into anti-hegemonic and pro-hegemonic graffiti.

#### **6.2.2.1 Anti-hegemonic political graffiti**

Graffiti has long been associated with dissident codes. A number of scholars have explored how graffiti writers have taken to walls as a 'last-ditch effort to speak and be heard' (Peteet, 1996:142). Mbembe (2001) observes the general repressive nature of the postcolonial and how spaces for alternative discourses are generally repressed in such terrains. The closure of democratic spaces make graffiti a viable and attractive medium in environments which do not allow for the engagement of the individual's right to freedom of speech (Bolazzi, 2012:2). Approached from this perspective, political graffiti can be viewed as a renegotiation of the right to freedom of expression which subsequently offers a way of observing the political terrain from a different perspective. The existence of what Mbembe (2001:103) would refer to as 'master codes' – codes belonging to the centre – and dissident codes in the same environment, what Wright (undated) has referred to as contested terrains, enables the existence of a truly vibrant and complete political discourse. Political graffiti can, in this way, be read as 'interventions in a relationship of power' (Peteet, 1996:140). The nature of the intervention depends on the context in which such interventions are made and as such,

movement from one context to another lead correspondingly to different interventions in the power relations.

Political graffiti needs to be read as a heterogeneous medium manifesting varied political interests from an equally heterogeneous population with diverse political reasons for taking to the walls. Consequently, the unique discourse of political graffiti needs to be read as multi-nuanced, something that has hitherto not been captured in researches on political graffiti and its discursive role. This section explores the major patterns that emerge in Zimbabwean urban political graffiti.

Political graffiti in Zimbabwean urban areas reveals different modes by which individuals react to the same challenges resulting from the operation of state power in particular environments. One can identify the ‘campaigning’ mode as one of several modes. Most inscriptions of this type are biased towards opposition parties. These inscriptions are characterised by a simple formulaic statement VOTE X whereby X represents the party to be voted for. Figure 6.10 is a typical example:



**Figure 6.10:** Vote MDC

The inscription in Figure 6.6 above shows how surfaces can be used to drum up support for particular opposition parties in Zimbabwe. In some cases, the writers just inscribe the name ‘MDC’ on the wall without necessarily including ‘vote’ as if it is self-evident that people should vote for it. Two points of interest emerge from such types of inscriptions. The first pertains to their spatial distribution. This point concerns the proliferation of such inscriptions or slogans on public surfaces, especially on durawalls of public institutions and facilities such as stadia and schools, toilet walls as well as road signage. These slogans are written on almost every public space thereby creating a cacophony of slogans suggesting that the opposition party is very popular in both that locale and maybe even on a national scale. The proliferation of such inscriptions can have the effect of expanding the range of topics in potential discourses that the public can engage in, thereby giving some expressive power to the public. The discursive power of these slogans resides in their sheer numbers on the political landscape where they have the effect of contesting the dominant political discourses of the day. In the focus group discussions, Participant 5 in (81) said that writing names of particular opposition parties on public surfaces:

81. *Zvinoshanda* since people need the moral support. *Saka umwe akazvinyora* you feel *kuti ndotori* right *kusupportawo* that party. *Ende hapana ari kuzvirabha.* (works since people need the moral support. So is someone writes it you feel that I am justified to also support that [particular] party. Also there is no one rubbing [the inscriptions]).

On the one hand, Participant 5’s comments highlights the spiral of silence effect whereby popular opinion, and what can be publicly debated, is in part shaped by the topics that are visible in the various media. Graffiti inscriptions are thus perceived as a platform on which topics that can, or cannot, be openly discussed are discerned. On the other hand, the comments reinforce the idea that inscriptions stating opposition parties on various surfaces are there to contest the ‘*ZANU chete*’ (ZANU only) discourse. Thus, in a political environment where the ‘*commandement*’ (Mbembe 2001) may make it difficult to openly discuss political issues of the day, the explosion of these political inscriptions may set the

tone for discussion in political discourses (The *commandement* is taken to represent the ‘unconditionality and impunity’ of state master codes, Mbembe 2001:26). Thus, any claims by the ruling party that they are the logical and natural choice leads to the explosion of counter discourses proclaiming the availability of alternative choices and voices. This counter discourse can be read as a discourse that is effectively widening political choices for the general electorate.

Equally interesting is the fact that from the range of political parties in the country, MDC seems to attract a number of inscriptions on the public surfaces, especially in urban centres. The inscriptions do not distinguish between the MDCs that resulted from a split of the original MDC party founded in 1999 under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai. Regardless, the common-place reference of the term MDC is Morgan Tsvangirai led MDC-T formation. Such kinds of taken-for-granted assumptions are indicative of instances where language is used to legitimise one party faction as the default choice while at the same time discounting or dismissing the other as non-existent in an environment which does not really tolerate opposition politics (and any subversive discourses lead to punitive actions by the state machinery) the explosion of such slogans can be interpreted as a renegotiation and balancing of power between the state code and these subordinate or dissident codes. The writers take advantage of their deceptive simplicity motif by using simple statements to construct very loud statements about the nature and extent of opposition politics in the country.

Harare recorded the greatest variety in terms of the slogans inscribed on public surfaces. Unlike in the other cities, there were more variations in content with other relatively unknown political parties marking their presence on walls. In this sense, language is used to increase political choices in Harare compared to the other urban areas where it is used to

constrict or reduce these choices. One reading graffiti on the surfaces in Harare, for example, is presented with a variety of political parties to choose from whilst those in the other urban areas are presented with two choices (ZANU PF and MDC).

Other inscription found on a wall in a male university toilet made references to the perceived state of decay of ZANU PF. Example (82) below is typical of such inscriptions:

82. *zamu yaora* (ZANU has become rotten).

The inscription draws on the social significance of decay. By drawing on images of decay, the writer suggests that ZANU PF is no longer of utilitarian value to the people. By reinforcing the image of decay, the writer invokes such an image in the audiences' mind perhaps in order to influence voting behaviour. What remains is for people to vote it out of power. In line with the adage that one rotten apple may spoil the whole basket, the suggestion is that the party simply has to be 'thrown away.'

It is in this context that more militant inscriptions began to dominate various surfaces, as highlighted by Figure 6.11 below:



**Figure 6.11:** *Zvakwana*. Bob out” (Enough. Bob out).

Read together, the inscriptions in Figures 6.9 and 6.10 are declarations about Mugabe’s unsuitability to lead the country. The inscription in Figure 6.9 attributes the economic problems bedevilling the country (especially high unemployment) to the President who, as a consequence, ‘must go.’ The word *zvakwana* (enough is enough) is a statement against a perceived culture of political excesses and transgression that is considered to have reached a point beyond which the perpetrator can no longer be tolerated or forgiven. Intertextual links can be established between the discursive uses of the word *zvakwana* with the biblical notion of TEKEL alluded to in (80) above whereby the option of recourse is unequivocally denied. The second inscription, in Figure 6.10, carries the tone of one who is fed up and no longer wants anything to do with the perceived source of the country’s problems.

At another level, political graffiti may be understood in the context of traditional check and balance systems. Traditional cultural practices appreciated and recognised the fact that power cannot be vested in any one individual or social group. There was need to decentralise power so as to make it more ubiquitous in the society. As a result, there were various practices and customs that were meant to wrest power from the centre in an official and acceptable manner.

Tatira (2004:88) argues that ‘the Shona people realise that it is difficult to articulate certain feelings directly to other members of society, and as a result they articulate such feelings through the practice of dog-naming’ and the *bembera* (public complaint uttered by individuals who believe they were bewitched by another) institution. Practices such as *nheketerwa* (a distinct type of oral poetry) provided institutionalised outlets for grievances and complaints in an acceptable manner and register. Chiwome (1992) highlights how the culture realised that, at best, the relationship between the rulers (kings) and the ruled (the subjects) could be that of love-hate. The power vested in the king was moderated by the provision of opportunities for the subjects to voice their disgruntlements to the king through a type of oral poetry called *kutuka mambo* (correcting or admonishing a chief/king). Thus, the subjects were provided with spaces to constructively air out their grievances against political leaders such as kings and chiefs.

However, because this was an official practice or tradition conducted within the earshot of the king or chief the discourse used acceptable register. These checks and balances were also built into the philosophy of the Shona people, as captured by the adage *mambo vanhu* (a king is made by the people). This philosophy derived from the realization that power cannot reside in one individual and absolute power is potentially harmful to the subjects’ welfare especially in situations whereby a king or chief might be blood-thirsty (*mambo anotonga nedemo* – a king/chief who rules by the axe/sword). Thus, institutions such as *kutuka mambo* were built into the linguistic system as a way of diffusing or negotiating power relations in instances where power could potentially be abused. *Kutuka mambo* was used in instances where the people are confronted by a predicament of unusual magnitude and they fail to get guidance from their chief, they can express their displeasure about his failure to perform his duty. The poetry reconciles the chief and his subjects, modifying the love-hate relationship which is inherent in such a political structure (Chiwome, 1992:11).

It is apparent that the ruled/dominated were empowered through discourse which presented them with opportunities to negotiate situations of extreme abuses of power. Chiwome (1992:11) suggests the:

Greater literary freedom of expression after the attainment of Independence created more latitude for the use of this mode of expression and some post-Independence Shona novelists and poets have produced and continue to produce works within the traditional genre criticizing political institutions. Even if the art does not directly lead to any change in the status quo it nevertheless provides an outlet for a great deal of frustration, anger and disillusionment with the new order.

Chiwome emphasises that some of the efforts to reconcile and negotiate power relations in the new order are oftentimes futile. This may be as a result of the fact that in the modern political context alternative platforms for applying these checks and balances are either inaccessible or perceived as non-existent by the people. Indeed the adult participants in the focus groups were empathetic with people who write, especially political graffiti, since they saw no alternative means of airing their political concerns or grievances. This is particularly so in situations where public media is state-controlled. The absence of the regulative effect of checks and balances in the modern political environment might have resulted or seen the emergence of political graffiti, whose discourse apparently lacks the acceptable register characterising traditional institutions such as *nheketerwa*. Artists such as Leonard Zhakata express a longing for counter-discursive space in songs, for example in ‘Mafirakureva’ where the persona carries the burden of speaking out against political injustices on behalf of the people of Zimbabwe. Implied in the song is that avenues and spaces for airing out such concerns are, at best limited, or non-existent. The discourse or language used in political graffiti may appear extreme, but it is just in direct reaction to situations and conditions which are also perceived as extreme.

### **6.3.2.2 Pro-hegemonic political graffiti**

Research on political graffiti tends to consider inscriptions as homogeneous; a discourse manifesting the same fundamental qualities (Hanauer, 1998, 2004; Peteet, 1996). These studies imply that graffiti is mainly used by oppressed groups to voice their concerns on various public surfaces. Hanauer (1998) summarises the role of political graffiti and suggests that it can be seen as an entry into and within the public domain by marginalised groups and individuals. It is also considered to offer these marginalised people an opportunity to publicly express themselves. Peteet (1996) reveals how Palestinian graffiti in the Infantada showed the same qualities of unity against the Israelis, while Hanauer (2004) shows how graffiti was used as a mourning and unifying tool after the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In both instances political graffiti is used by marginalised and powerless groups to renegotiate existing power relations. This has created the impression that graffiti is only used in the service of the oppressed or marginalised. Implied in this research tradition is that political graffiti can only be used by these marginalised group as a way of ‘sticking it to the man’ or constructing representative identities for individuals who are oftentimes regarded as politically faceless or hooded (O’Doherty, 2012). There is however need to identify and highlight the nuances that characterise political graffiti and how its uses vary in several ways. The present researcher submits that political graffiti is not always employed in the service of the oppressed, politically or otherwise. Graffiti can be used as tool in the perpetuation of dominance or hegemony; just in the same way that it is used by the dominated. Data collected from various community surfaces revealed instances in which political graffiti was employed in what can be termed pro-hegemonic services. This raises questions on how political graffiti can be both defined and classified. As a result, this necessitates a rethinking of what political graffiti is capable of doing and its discursive functions in the socio-political environment.

Inscriptions collected from various public surfaces in the urban community revealed various discursive functions of political graffiti by writers who are apparently pro-establishment. The first discursive function is that of marking out or exposing supporters of the opposition party. This involves the simple inscription of the acronym of ZANU PF's major opposition political party. Thus, the inscription of the letters MDC on one's wall is seen to be a mark that people living on that property have the 'wrong' political inclination. This is a tendency that mostly appears in urban areas where the MDC formations are generally popular. ZANU PF is regarded as the 'people's party' and whoever does not support the party is dealt with accordingly. It is not however a simple case of not supporting the ruling party. In more cases than one, it is a case of one supporting MDC. Cases where supporters of the other parties have their homes marked are next to non-existent.

A simple act of labelling someone as a supporter of the opposition through graffiti can be a seal on one's political fate which may significantly change the course of his/her life. During informal focus group discussions, Participant 12 made allusions to the discursive use of the 'MDC party inscription' on residential homes owned by people perceived to belong to or support the 'wrong party.' It shows how people can keep tabs on the others' political affiliations and how these can be monitored or checked through such apparently simple acts as writing of a party's name on the walls of one's residential place. Such markings are better appreciated in the context of the formation of youth militia 'especially during election campaigns to suppress the opposition' (Sachikonye, 2011:41). The intense political challenge brought about by the MDC's formation meant that various technologies to deal with threat had to be sought. One basic technology for dealing with such threats is the simple inscription of the opposition's mark on one's place of residence. The marking of graffiti is one such way used to deal with the new opposition threat. The inscriptions, therefore, fit into a 'distinctive

[culture] of pre-election intimidation and violence and post-election witch-hunting' – a process which necessarily involves public denunciations and harassment, destruction of property and eviction from housing or neighbourhood (Sachikonye, 2011:19). Most crucial is the fact that politically marking people's residence can be read as reflecting an indirect admission that a ruling party would have lost popular support, hence resorts to terror and violence to compel voters to vote for it (Sachikonye, 2011:17).

The uses of graffiti in this form are significantly different from how graffiti is normally used. The first distinction is that normally graffiti is inscribed on public surfaces. Where it is used to mark that someone supports the wrong party this takes place usually on their durawalls or on surfaces in and around their home. Thus, this type of graffiti is moved from the public space to the private. Parallels can be made between this act of marking someone's home with the biblical Passover situation in which the Israelites' homes were marked by blood so that the angel of death will pass over them and not kill their first born children. Contrary to the motive behind the marking of doors during the Passover, in politically polarised environments, the mark on one's walls or door serves to interpellate one as a subject of victimization. During elections, youth militia are accused of targeting individuals with marked walls for attack. The residents are targeted for political violence and have their lives seriously put at risk.

Another interesting parallel between the two is the marking of inscriptions in red paint. More often than not the houses are marked in red paint, which, coincidentally or otherwise, is the same colour as the blood used to mark the doors of the Israelites. The red paint does not have the 'redemptive' power of the Passover blood. The discursive marking of people's houses as a way of inciting youth militia is an instance whereby language is employed to not only

terrorise the inhabitants but also potentially as a way of settling scores in a political arena. In extreme instances the mark can be read as equivalent to a ‘death sentence’ as it is mostly employed to weed out unwanted social or political elements.

The practice of inscribing ‘MDC’ on one’s property as a way of marking them out for victimisation has crucial implications on the general understanding of what is meant by the term opposition politics in Zimbabwe. One would expect that opposition generally refers to any party that does not share the same ideology with the ruling party (and therefore government of the day). Most crucially, the opposition party entertains aspiration of ruling the country. Considered in this light, any party that has its own distinct political ideology can be loosely regarded as the ruling party’s opposition. What is however interesting from the practice of marking people’s residential properties is the fact it has the effect of narrowly and exclusively referring to the MDC formations, particularly the MDC-T formation, as the opposition. In the process other opposition parties, such as United Parties (UP), NAGG, and Mavambo, are ignored or summarily dismissed. However, their omission is as a result of the fact that they do not really offer significant opposition to the ruling party. What appear to be random inscriptions of one’s political orientation can be perceived as a process involving the active construction of what people understand or take opposition politics to mean. Done over long periods of time (this practice can be traced as far back as 1999 when the MDC was formed and managed to field candidates across the country’s 120 constituencies), it becomes relatively easy for people to narrowly define opposition politics in relation to political orientation towards the MDC formations.

It is interesting to note that before the formation of the MDC party no other opposition party had managed to compete with ZANU-PF in all the constituencies. Over and above this,

Sachikonye (2011) notes how the period in and around the 1990 and 1995 election marked the height of ZANU-PF's popularity. The formation of MDC brought a different perspective regarding the understanding of opposition politics in Zimbabwe. In this sense notions and understandings of opposition politics are actively constructed around the MDC party formations. In recent times, it is the Tsvangirai-led MDC that has been seen as the opposition. Such narrow constructions have the effect of rendering the other opposition parties in the country trivial or impotent. In this regard, language serves to intentionally or unintentionally naturalise the legitimisation of one party as the country's only opposition party. ZANU PF and the MDC are then regarded as the default political players in Zimbabwe's political landscape.

Just as political graffiti was used as a subordinate discourse to attack the 'commandment' or dominant discourse; it can also be equally used in the service of dominant discourses seeking to eliminate subordinate discourses. There are instances in which political graffiti can be used in the service of the dominant to further entrench existing unequal power relations. This is generally done in one of two ways: attack on the leaders of opposition parties or explicit support for the party in power and its political leadership. Graffiti inscriptions against the leader of MDC-T, Morgan Tsvangirai question his ability to rule the country based on his lack of a higher educational qualification. Such inscriptions make reference to Morgan Tsvangirai's perceived lack of education and, by extension, his perceived limited intellectual capabilities. These perceptions are predicated on the inscription's reference to his level of education. In a country which prides itself on having one of the highest levels of literacy in Africa, one's exploits measured against education qualifications received from education institutions. Form four is considered a rudimentary qualification, one which falls far short of expectation. It is not uncommon for people to say that someone *akagumira* form four (only

went up to form four). This is a statement that is usually meant to highlight that someone is not bright enough to manage qualification or entry into higher and more productive levels. To say someone *muform* four (is a form four) can be taken to mean that they failed this very basic level. Implied in this statement is that this person cannot do anything of note, especially things that might involve intellectual exertions. Reference to Tsvangirai's perceived lack of adequate educational qualifications is a deliberate attempt to render him incapable of ruling the country. In example (83), Participant 7 echoed this need to have the country's president set apart on the basis of educational achievements by stating:

83. *Bofu haringatungamiriri amwe mapofu* (A blind person cannot lead other blind people).

Participant 7's comment carries with it overtones of the assumed nature of the led. The remark implies that the led, or general populace, is by nature not learned (represented by the metaphor *bofu* – 'a blind person') such that it takes only a learned leader to assume political office. This proposition in itself can be taken as advancing hegemonic relations whereby the leader is set apart as a luminary thereby justifying whatever actions and decisions they make whilst in office.

This correlation between one's level of education and their capacity to rule the country is one which is perpetuated in state media as highlighted by an SMS contributor, in (84) below, in *The Herald* who maintained that:

84. Academic qualifications for presidential candidates should be entrenched in our constitution. Those who aspire to be Zimbabwe's President should have at least a first degree – obtained after three years of studying not honorary...– Baroni, Harare (*The Herald* SMS Friday 2 March 2012).

Obviously, one of the possible outcomes of such a move would be to prevent some people from participating meaningfully in the country's politics. This would effectively make educational qualifications part of the country's highest code thereby becoming part of the

hegemonic discourse. Fairclough (1992) argues that hegemony can be achieved through incorporation of particular ideas and value positions into the ideology of a social group. The constitution can be taken as the reservoir for the enshrinement of political ideology. More significantly, the fact that it is some people who are driving for the legalisation of such a position shows a general acceptance which enables hegemony to thrive. Equally significant is how references to mental aptitude feed into colonialist discourses on racial competence where one's level of education is taken to be a reflection of what one knows and therefore one's suitability for a particular job. Such an obsession with one's educational qualifications and the attendant perceived suitability for participating and satisfactorily performing particular roles leads to constructions which ignore the fact that all socio-political positions are by and large performed. It may be argued that being a member of parliament or a political leader in general, is a performed role which is not entirely based on one's level of education. Example (85) below highlights how the idea of politics as a performed role is reinforced by a reader feedback contribution from the *Newsday* who argues:

85. Only fools can say Jacob Zuma is not educated but facts on the ground suggest otherwise: South Africa is in the G20 and Blocs of countries and since Zuma took over, the rand has been appreciating against all major currencies. On the Zimbabwean front where the leader has many degrees, the economic situation is dire and corruption is at alarming proportions. Zimbabwean leaders are schooled but not educated and survived to be in the current positions. For a fact, the wheel was invented by a non-degree holder (Nduku Nduna readers' letters, *Newsday* Friday May 2011).

It is apparent that the writer sets out to distinguish between schooling and education and, in the process, argues that being schooled and being educated are not mutually inclusive. Equating schooling and education is a typical case of naturalisation whereby socially constructed notions of reality are treated as if they are in fact transparent renderings of the external world (Carter, 2011:28). Education is seen deriving from what is akin to pragmatic competencies which enable performance of socio-political roles. One can conclude that

political graffiti can ultimately be used as an exclusionary political tool to further the ‘commandment’ or state code.

This section highlighted the discursive roles of political graffiti and how it can be harnessed in the political sphere to both engage one’s ideological inclination as well as take part in the contemporary political debates. It has been argued that political graffiti is not, as is claimed by Hanauer (2004:30), always ‘a very powerful mode of expression for groups that essentially feel disenfranchised by wider society.’ It is not only the marginalised groups, whose views and ideas are excluded in mainstream or hegemonic discourses, who take to the walls to advance their value positions. The walls are an open platform on which even perceived dominant groups utilise to advance and entrench the ‘commandment’ by twin processes of countering and naturalisation of subordinate discourses. However, regardless of which group is using it, political graffiti plays a crucial role in shaping political ideology by functioning as important ‘significations and construction of reality’ encapsulated in its ‘various discursive practices’ thereby contributing to the ‘production, reproduction or transformation [and resistance] of relations of domination’ (Fairclough, 1992:87). It is also interesting to note that in spite of the fact that the graffiti is used in the services of hegemonic discourses the writers still choose to remain anonymous. This might be used as further evidence that graffiti, by nature, is inherently anonymous and that this is a quality which is the major source of power for its writers.

It is important to point out that the inscriptions discussed above are not representative of the full range of political inscriptions collected from the various public surfaces. The research did not include extreme political graffiti inscriptions which were likely to be read as hate speech. This category of inscriptions consists of extremely vulgar inscriptions aimed at Mugabe and

Tsvangirai during a period when the nation is still finding its feet in a politically tumultuous period. Such inscriptions are perceived as more likely to exacerbate political polarisation, a notion which is most unlikely to be of any utility to the nation.

In conclusion, street protest has been used to characterise inscriptions mainly on durawalls of public and, in some cases, private institutions as well as on road signage. These inscriptions are mostly of a protest nature whereby they question various aspects of the urban and/national socio-economic and political reality. Inscriptions on ZESA show a unique, at times pragmatic, approach to solving what can be regarded as a national, or even regional, energy crisis. Some of these inscriptions propose solutions that are perceived to be best suited for the Zimbabwean economic context. Graffiti inscriptions were also used in the active social construction of racial identities. This is especially the case in the formation of social identities of the various East Asian nationalities ushered into the country as a result of the country's Look East Policy adopted at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Political graffiti inscriptions analysed reveal the multi-nuanced character of political discourse. Zimbabwean political graffiti is heterogeneous and multifaceted in the sense that it is used in the service of both anti- and pro-hegemonic purposes. Furthermore, it was also revealed that even in their respective functions, political inscriptions show differential reactions to a perceived repressive political environment. These reactions vary from defiant inscriptions of opposition parties, verbal assaults of ruling party officials and its supporters as well as the discursive construction of 'opposition' in specific reference to the MDC-T. Anti-hegemonic graffiti inscriptions likewise varied from their use in interpellating individuals as opposition supporters (in the process marking them as potential targets for political violence) and constructing Morgan Tsvangirai as an unfit potential President. Taken together with graffiti

inscriptions on ZESA, street protest graffiti is regarded as communication by individual(s) who refuse to accept the status quo.

### **6.3 The writing on the stall: Graffiti in Educational Institutions**

This section focuses on the significance of graffiti in educational institutions of Zimbabwe's urban areas. Educational institutions are very crucial in this research given their critical role as socialisation agents in society. Socialisation is defined as a process of inculcation of behaviours, values and beliefs that typify the individual's ability to conform and adapt to context-specific norms. What a social group believes, the values and attitudes it upholds are not inherent or genetically passed to its members. These behaviours, beliefs and attitudes are passed from generation to generation through an active process of social construction. Socialization agents are therefore major and vital sources through which individuals learn about their society and themselves. They influence a group's sense of self-concept, emotions, attitudes, and behaviour.

Whilst the family is regarded as the most influential and primary socialisation agent educational institutions constitute a significant part of the socialisation process and are as such considered as constituting the secondary socialisation process. The formal nature of the school entails that the socialisation process is itself predominantly formal by nature. Significance of the formalised school socialisation process lies in the sense that it offers two, almost parallel, socialisation processes which entail both an explicit development of technical and intellectual skills as well as, more often than not, an implicit or latent focus on the transmission of the society's cultural heritage to facilitate the individual's smooth integration into the society. The main focus of the research is on the latter role of transmission of culture to the individual and how it occurs alongside other non-formal processes, in this case graffiti

in schools. Du Guy (1996:43) argues that discourse plays an important role in society in the sense that it enables people to speak about particular topics as it consists of

... a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a topic and a way of producing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. Thus the term refers both to the production of knowledge through language and representation and the way that knowledge is institutionalized, shaping social practices and setting new practices into play.

Evident in du Guy's (1996) definition and characterisation of discourse are two major assumptions about both its nature and role in society. The first assumption pertains to the constitutive nature of language or discourse. That is, 'knowledge' in society is a product of people's active construction. It is in fact something that is manufactured by people. What is not clear, however, is the part played by conventions in the production process. The second assumption highlighted by the definition is that social constructs brought about by language then go on to shape social practices, and by implication, discursive practices. It is in this light that the role of ideology is considered crucial as it is inbuilt into these social practices and influences social relations. The fact that discourse can influence the emergence of new social practices means that ideology can actively be reshaped thus highlighting the significance of power relations in determining social practices. Discourse plays an integral part in shaping societal practices. Still, it should be emphasised that discourses are multiple and they are always competing. Choice of what is considered to be the dominant discourse – which automatically subordinates other discourses – shapes its ideology and therefore its practices.

The interest on graffiti within the context of the school lies in the fact that it is mainly used by the students in informal setups. Its spatial distribution (mainly within the context of the toilets) makes it a highly informal discourse constructed amongst peers. The importance of peer interaction as an informal socialisation agent is that they constitute the most influential socialization process outside of the family. Interesting is the fact that graffiti presents a

situation whereby discourses lie both physically and symbolically side by side. From a physical perspective, graffiti is spatially distributed in toilets which exist literally side by side with the classrooms in which the dominant discourses are imparted or constructed. Thus, the inscription of graffiti by students in the toilets enable sometimes conflicting discourses to exist side by side – a situation which can be used to highlight the competing nature of discourses. One may argue that high school graffiti is a choice by students, to borrow from Gaidzanwa (2001), to speak for themselves and, in the process construct discourses that are parallel to the institutional discourses of the formal school set up. Of interest is how ‘peer group interactions and the highly gendered culture of childhood’ (Stockard, 2006:220) contribute to the construction of parallel discourses in discursive spaces offered through graffiti, and the extent to which these constructions affirm, renegotiate or resist dominant cultural and religious discourses. However, before an analysis of graffiti inscriptions, it is imperative to discuss the notions of gender and sexuality and their point of confluence with the social practice of graffiti.

### **6.3.1 The confluence of gender, sexuality and graffiti**

In this research, it is postulated that gender, sexuality and graffiti are intricately linked to the extent that their interdependence, particularly in the school environment, cannot be ignored. The two notions of gender and sexuality are defined and then linked with the social practice of graffiti with the intention of drawing attention to their relationship. It is generally agreed that the notion of gender has its basis on physical and biological sex distinctions (Butler, 1990). Whilst sex is natural and inherent, gender is entirely a product of socialisation or social constructionism predicated on perceived biological differences. The term ‘gender’ refers to the socially and culturally ascribed notions of femininity and masculinity. Connell (2009) suggests that it is crucial to make a paradigm shift from a focus on sex differences to a

focus on social relations when defining and characterising the notion of gender. Conceptualising gender as an ascribed notion highlights the importance of the socialisation process in people's interaction. Stanley and Wise (2002) affirm that gender role socialisation is initially inculcated at birth and throughout childhood where individuals are assigned sex roles (or gender roles) based on their biological sex.

Gender role socialisation is a process involving the engendering of norms, values and behaviours, associated with one's sex, into the individual. It is a process that is 'part of an enormous social effort to channel people's behaviour [.... inculcating in them] ideas about gender appropriate behaviour' such that 'being a man or a woman is not a predetermined state, [rather] it is a becoming, a condition actively under construction' (Connell, 2009:5).

Active construction of gender entails what Butler (1990:140) refers to as 'gender performativity' where gender is considered 'an act', or what West and Zimmerman (2002:2) similarly characterise as 'doing gender' which 'involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as [an] expression of masculine and feminine natures.' It is from this perspective that Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (2006) consider gender to be an adverb rather than a noun in the sense that it is something one 'does' rather than what 'is.' Taken from the perspective of an adverb, there is then a sense in which there is judgment or evaluation of whether particular behaviours, values and norms are appropriate (notions of normalcy and acceptability have also been used) for a socially ascribed gender role.

Gender role socialisation is founded on a behaviourist 'system' whereby 'a mixture of positive and negative reinforcement' (Connell, 2009:95) helps individuals to know whether the identities they are 'doing' are appropriate according to their social or cultural contexts.

The behaviourist notion of positive and negative reinforcement, in the enactment of gender, implies gender accountability whereby individuals orient themselves toward expecting judgment of their activities (West and Zimmerman 2002). Gender accountability is an active process that proceeds throughout the individual's life. At no point will this process be considered to have ceased, even if temporary or otherwise. Accountability also entails that individuals are already conscious that their actions are continually being evaluated on one basis or the other such that they already expect pronunciations of judgments of their respective gender performances. Also implied by notions of gender accountability is the empowerment of other members of society with tasks to actively evaluate and categorise how other social actors are doing or performing their gender.

This means that the social acquisition of gendered identities is an ongoing process which does not cease after childhood. The Shona have an adage “*kudzidza hakuperi*” (learning does not cease) which captures the reality that socialisation is a process that continues well into an individual's old age. Educational institutions can be viewed as contexts in which gender identities are actively constructed and evaluated. Viewed in this light, it becomes imperative to explore how language is used to actively construct and negotiate notions of both appropriate and inappropriate gendered identities.

Sexuality is defined as both the reproductive mechanisms as well as the basic biological drive that is inherent in all species, which necessarily encompasses sexual intercourse and sexual contact, or relations, in all forms (Amanze, 2010). Sexuality can therefore be considered the predisposition of living organisms toward multiplying their numbers through sexual activity. Nganda (2007:4) narrows down the definition of sexuality to an African perspective where it ‘would mean the attitudes, values and relationships that we Africans attach to human

interactions according to our culture and knowledge.' Key in Nganda's (2007) definition is the notion of interaction, particularly when viewed from a gendered perspective necessarily governing how relations should proceed.

It is apparent from this definition that human sexuality is a social construct derived from how a group of people perceive and understand themselves from a variety of standpoints depending on their contextual environments. There is no single and universal way of attributing and interpreting human sexuality. Even within the same cultural or social milieu, individual groups may construct sexuality in fundamentally different ways. The ways in which the groups construct sexuality generally influences the kind of behaviours they would regard as either acceptable or unacceptable. The discourses constructed through interaction on toilet doors can provide evidence of how specific groups of people, in this case high schools students, construct sexualities and how they devise measures to put back in line individuals who are perceived to engage in inappropriate or risky sexual behaviours. It becomes apparent that each and every social group has its own perceptions of 'normal' sexual behaviour (Gilchrist and Sullivan, 2006). The researcher observes that since sexuality is common to all, adolescents included, it forms the basis of personal and interpersonal relationships amongst peers in various social forums, educational institutions included. Goetsch (1989) identifies norms, beliefs, values and behaviours as elements that underlie the discursive manifestations of sexuality and sexual activity.

The socially constructed perceptions of an individual's sexuality can strongly influence power dynamics in everyday interactions. Individuals who are seen as deviant attract, through the powerful process of gender accountability, the wrath of the group and risk being treated as social outcasts who are not accorded any status at all. Resultantly, a check on one's

sexuality is equivalent to checking one's power or influence on the group. In the same manner that Connell (1989:291) considered the school 'as a masculine-making' social apparatus, it can be, likewise, dialogically extrapolated, as a feminine-making agent. It makes it imperative to explore how students in general are constructing the notion of sexuality and how they are appropriating the space of the public toilets as both masculine- and feminine-making agents in so far as the construction of sexuality is concerned.

Notions of sexuality can highly influence the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships. Romantic relationships are defined as typically dyadic relations that are largely defined as 'mutually acknowledged on-going voluntary interactions...usually marked by expressions of affection and current or anticipated behaviour' (Furman and Collins, 2007: 3). It is crucial to acknowledge the centrality of romantic experiences in adolescents' lives, especially their centrality to social life during 'middle to late adolescence (ages 15 – 19)' (Sorensen, 2007). This period marks a time when the youth are actively constructing, reproducing as well as resisting gendered identities. The variations in the enactment and performativity of such types of relationships necessitates a detailed study to illuminate how various social factors more often than not result in contestations between dominant institutional discourses lying alongside each other in the peer socialisation process in high schools.

Gender and sexuality are not practiced in a vacuum. West and Zimmerman (2002) point out that gender is something that is 'done' or performed. This is where the element of a medium in which these concepts are practiced becomes crucial. Language, in general, is a very significant site for the practicing of gender and sexuality. Graffiti, in particular, can then be construed as providing discursive spaces on which the two notions can be actively

constructed, reproduced, negotiated or resisted. The majority of educational institutions in Zimbabwe have adopted the broken windows approach where any form of graffiti in and around the school premises is regarded as a precursor of more serious acts of deviancy or crime. Typically, most institutions, including Zimbabwean schools, fight graffiti mainly through ‘sanitisation’ whereby the affected surfaces, especially if they are walls, are washed clean and, whenever possible, the offenders are punished. The wiping off of graffiti from the walls is not by any stretch of imagination a practice that is only specific to the Zimbabwean context. Graham (2004), Snyder (2006), Collinson, Jones and Higginson (2008) as well as Blomkamp, Hager-Forde and Flemming (2014), reveal how various cities have adopted a zero tolerance on graffiti. It is apparent that spaces where graffiti is inscribed, such as the toilet walls, become what Alison Brown (2006) refers to as a contested urban public space.

However, in spite of the efforts by educational institutions to sanitise graffiti, writing on various surfaces, especially in the public space of the toilet continues to persist. Graham (2004:1) rightly observed that ‘graffiti [...] will not go away.’ Since graffiti is proving to be an enduring social practice, it is prudent that the social value of graffiti to educational institutions be recognised. The areas of adolescent gender and sexuality (and sexuality education), with their critical bearing on national development, are areas that need to respond to various social factors and issues. Brewer et al (2007) concede that sexuality education needs to evolve in response to the risks that adolescents are being continually exposed to. Graffiti provides society with the opportunity to understand and appreciate some of these risks and how they are being addressed by adolescents themselves. Thus, the school and graffiti discourse can complement each other in bringing about positive behavioural sexual change among the adolescent school-going group.

The social practice of graffiti has been narrowly characterised in the literature as a predominantly male activity. Othen-Price argues that graffiti writing is exclusively done by males reasoning that:

Whereas adolescent females create babies, adolescent males cannot create babies, adolescent males need to use their bodies in other ways to be more creative (Othen-Price, 2006:6).

Implied in the statement is that only males engage, or are socially expected to engage, in graffiti as a result of their inherent inability to naturally reproduce. Viewed in this light, the social practice of graffiti is seen as compensatory behaviour by males. Implicit in this statement is the notion that females do not, are at least not expected to, engage in any graffiti activities. The apparent, or supposed, lack of involvement by females is also noted by Ruto (2007) who makes significant assertions with far-reaching implications for the present study. She claims that high school students are not involved in graffiti due to a restrictive church-controlled school system and tasking preparations for university and tertiary education. Chitauro-Mawema (2006:223) claims that,

[...] graffiti is mostly visible in toilets in rural areas, written or painted with chalk, but mostly with human excrement. Urban toilets do not carry much of the graffiti, probably because they are too busy to allow some time to scribble such messages, or, perhaps urbanites have other forms of expression, like street remarks.

Chitauro-Mawema is not as dismissive as Ruto (2007) who fails to establish the existence of graffiti in Kenyan high schools. She only goes as far as to dismiss its existence in urban schools. Tagwirei and Mangeya (2014) demonstrate how both boys and girls in Zimbabwean primary schools actively participate in graffiti from as early as primary school level.

In educational institutions, the three notions of gender, sexuality and graffiti are intricately linked. To begin with, the toilets in these institutions are gendered. They are male or female. Individuals are hailed (to use an Althusserian term), that is, made gendered subjects, by the signs on toilets. The act of entering a specific toilet is thus a conscious performance of one's

gender. Green (2003:283) argues that ‘in the single-gender context of the toilet, gendered norms are likely to prevail, as the language styles of those interacting are likely to be more similar than different.’ Graffiti writing provides individuals with opportunities to use discourse in gendered communities of practice. Once inside, individuals consciously or unconsciously encounter sexualities inside toilet walls and doors. Again, they are included in discourses on sexualities which they might consent to or disagree with. Althusser (1970:45) argues that hailing, or interpellation, operates on a framework of assumed, or acknowledged, guilty conscience whereby:

One individual (nine times out often it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that ‘it really is he’ who is meant by the hailing. But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.

Applied to the context of the toilet walls in the educational institutions the concept of hailing can be related to that of gender accountability. Inscriptions made on the walls are aimed at individuals who suspect, or know, that those inscriptions are aimed at them as a result of their inadequate, inappropriate and, at times, non-performance of particular gender expectations. The choice to add one’s ‘voice’ onto the wall or door is perceived as speaking directly to the attributes associated with one’s gender. For boys, it might be the simple act of confirming long held beliefs, whereas for girls it might be a destabilisation of normative practices.

Gender provides the social framework through which sexuality is socially formed. Our understanding of gendered identities provides the material for understanding sexuality and sexual activity in general. Appropriate, or inappropriate, sexual norms, beliefs, values and behaviours, are predicated on gender expectations and the gender order operating in any given society. The notion of gender accountability and how it is built into graffiti to negotiate issues of (in)appropriacy can lead to the conception of graffiti as, to borrow from Green

(2003), the writing on the stall. Graffiti comes in as an arena on which the notions of gender and sexuality are actively constructed, and oftentimes performed, by particular segments of society.

The private nature of the social practice means that uncensored ideas find their way into mainstream discourses on sexuality. These uncensored perceptions of adolescent sexuality, by fellow adolescent writers, can act as a yardstick of what sort of behaviours (as well as attitudes, values, and beliefs) are perceived as being appropriate or otherwise. Thus, the ideas that emerge through graffiti in these institutions of learning may complement efforts in fostering behavioural and attitudinal changes in critical issues of adolescent sexuality. Levi (1941:314) rightly points out that ‘words form a kind of a linguistic currency or medium of exchange’ on which social policy is produced. It becomes important to investigate the nature and extent of contribution (from a qualitative perspective) made by students in educational institutions on the toilet walls in so far as the social construction of sexuality and gender are concerned. Analysis of graffiti inscriptions is based on the separation of high school graffiti from tertiary graffiti and the analysis of inscriptions from the respective institutions. The paucity of inscriptions in female toilets in tertiary institutions necessitates that the analysis of female graffiti be based on inscriptions from high school female toilets. There was, however, an abundance of inscriptions in both high school and tertiary male student toilets. Due to their similar nature, as well as space considerations, the analysis of male inscriptions will proceed as one unit.

### **6.3.2 Student graffiti in educational institutions**

The high school is a context in which there is a relatively high concentration of adolescents on an equally relatively small geographical space. The high population densities associated

with these institutions may necessarily entail very high and frequent levels of interaction. It is in this light that the study observes the significance of peer interaction and its influence in cultural transmission. Peer interaction enables the formation of a community (or communities) of students guided by a number of functions which include, among others, being a source for information, teaching gender roles, acting as a practicing arena to adulthood, and teaching unity and collective behaviour among its members. More significantly, peer groups are unique in that they are instances of socialisation occurring outside of the adults' control and yet they have far-reaching effects regarding the formation, maintenance and negotiation of child and/or youth behaviours and attitudes. Bearing in mind that the socialisation process is an ongoing and unceasing process, the role played by informal interactions in peer groups in institutions of learning becomes significant, especially with regards to how this potentially highly impressionable group constructs and negotiates the concepts of gender and sexuality.

It is apparent that the role and contribution of peer interactions to the socialisation of adolescents cannot be underestimated. Graffiti provides these young groups with a unique avenue of participating in peer or youth cultures. Two characteristics of graffiti in high schools make graffiti a potentially significant socialisation agent. In most cases, the inscriptions bear the name of the subject to whom they are targeted. The intimate nature of the inscriptions gives the impression that one's activities are constantly under surveillance. Having one's name cited in the inscriptions gives the impression that indeed one's activities have been 'weighed in the balances and [they have been] found wanting' (Daniel 5 verse 27). Most significant is the fact that the anonymous nature of the inscriptions gives the impression of community involvement. There is a sense in which having one's actions commented on in inscriptions on various surfaces creates impressions of the individual against the community,

in this case, the school. Combined, these characteristics of high school graffiti inscriptions make it a potentially potent socialisation agent as it redefines the concept of peer pressure. The individual mentioned in a graffiti inscription is truly under pressure from his peers. Bourdillon (1987) reveals how the breakdown of the traditional home as a result of urbanisation, with its associated urban anomie, meant that there was no longer any significant social group applying considerable pressure on the individual's behaviour. It can be, however, argued that peer inscriptions in high school toilets can still be regarded as performing this very significant social regulatory function that has been a salient feature of traditional community life. This is a quality that lends power to inscribers over the objects of their inscriptions, thereby influencing structures of prestige and power within the school set up.

### **6.3.2.1 Female sexual graffiti**

Sex-related graffiti covers inscriptions that make both explicit and implicit references to sexual behaviour and sexual intercourse. Analysis of graffiti inscriptions collected from girls' toilets in Zimbabwean urban schools demonstrates, rather surprisingly, a desire, by students to address what are considered inappropriate sexual behaviours. It is apparent from the discourse constructed through the graffiti inscriptions that one of the major preoccupations is the need to redress perceived deviant and inappropriate behaviours. The inscriptions cover a wide range of issues which include virginity, declarations of relationships, initiation of relationships, boyfriend snatching, as well as having multiple partners. These aspects of female sexuality can be, however, conflated into the two distinct areas according to their general interest in female sexuality. Resultantly, discussion proceeds under the two broad areas of chastity and cross-gender relationships. The sub-sections below discuss the major features of female high school students' inscriptions. Crucially, it is argued that this apparent

concern with perceived deviant behaviours by fellow students is in fact indicative of efforts by female graffiti writers to keep fellow female peers in their ‘proper place.’ Resultantly, the female high school students’ inscriptions are better read as discursive clusters (following Cassar, 2009) invoking a wide array of mainly dominant cultural and religious discourses in their construction of gendered and sexual identities.

### **6.3.2.1.1 Chastity**

Chastity is a word whose roots can be traced to the Latin word “*“castitas”*”, which means “cleanliness” or “purity” ([www.answers.com/topic/chastity#ixzz3Ci0q6zqE](http://www.answers.com/topic/chastity#ixzz3Ci0q6zqE)). The concept of chastity is therefore based on understandings and perceptions of what is considered ‘pure’ or ‘clean’, making it a social construct that is differentially positioned cross-culturally. Due to its cross-culturally constructed nature, chastity depends on how specific cultures have constructed their gender and sexuality codes. Sexual taboos can then be regarded as the framework on which chastity is constructed and negotiated. Kambarami (2006) stresses the social importance of female sexuality when she points out how upon reaching puberty girls are instructed not to play with boys. Chastity in girls’ sexuality necessarily encapsulates notions of virginity as well as associated uses of social corrective labels such as *hure* (prostitute).

#### *6.3.2.1.1.1 Virginity*

Virginity is a concept that has great religious and cultural value in most sub-Saharan societies. Immense prestige is awarded to the newly married woman who satisfies the test of virginity. Gelfand notes that traditionally young girls underwent ‘inspections at regular intervals and if found wanting the girl in question is sent back home with a hoe which has a hole bored through its handle’ (1968:105). In Shona traditional customs, a live cow (referred

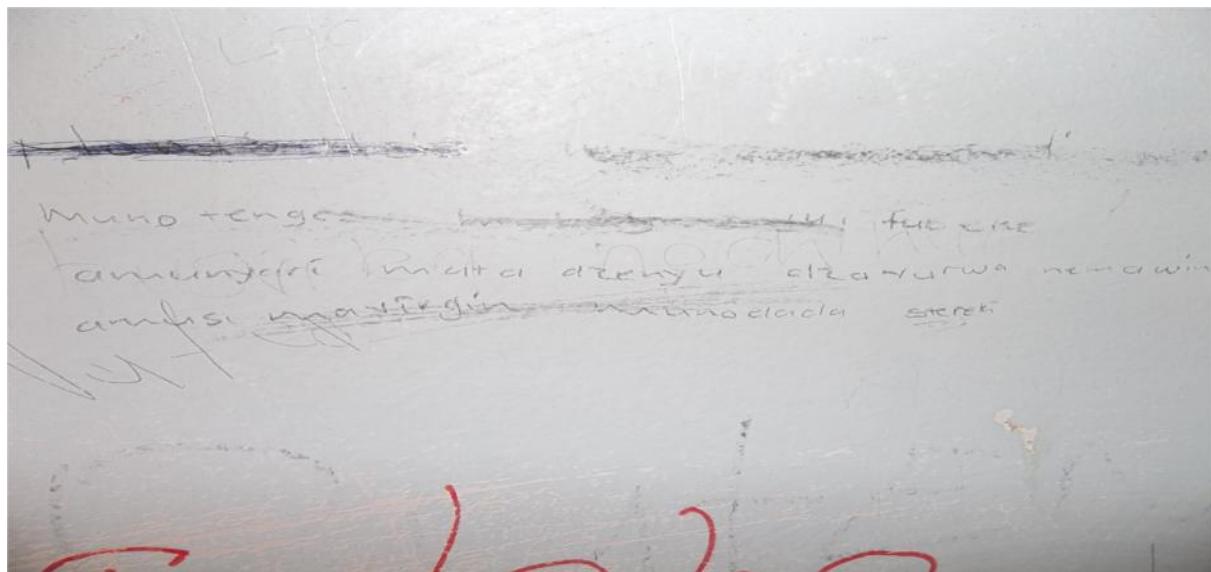
to as *mombe yechimanda*) is paid by the man in appreciation of his new wife's virgin state.

Kambarami explains how in Shona customs *mombe yechimanda*:

[...] is a cow offered to the in-laws as a token of appreciation for ensuring that his wife preserved her virginity. This custom holds much value in the shona culture and in some parts of the country, virginity tests are still carried out up to this very day.

On the other hand, if a man discovered that his newly-wed wife was not a virgin, he presented the in-laws a blanket with a very big hole in the centre. Adedimeji (2008:7) considers virginity as 'the distinctive mark of chastity, [it] is treasured among ladies and a newly-wedded wife that is not 'found at home' is an eternal disgrace to herself and family.'

Associations of virginity with female sexuality show the extent to which traditional society values this idea. This makes virginity a cultural concept. These cultural discourses are complemented by mainstream religious discourses to create one unified dominant institutionalised discourse. Significantly, female sexuality socialisation seeks to make the girl internalise the inherent shame and dirtiness of sex which are then employed in policing their sexuality (Foucault, 1979). In Zimbabwe's high schools, graffiti is a space where cultural notions of virginity are actively reproduced. The inscriptions collected from female toilet walls reveal a major preoccupation with the social value of virginity in a student's life. The inscriptions show that the students regard virginity as a symbol of cultural and spiritual purity as well as a source of power amongst the group. Utterances made on female toilet doors and walls constitute a number of discursive practices. The first one is that virginity is seen as the only true source of pride among female students. Girls are expected to preserve their virginity for them to be held in good standing within the group. Those who are known or suspected to have lost their virginity are held in a lower standing. They are seen to be lesser girls, as seen in Figure 6.12 below.



**Figure 6.12:** *Munotengesa* [rubbed off] *futseke amunyari mata dzenyu dzavurwa nemawindi amusi mavirgin munodada stereki* (You sell [rubbed off] you are not ashamed. Your vaginas were opened by touts. You are too proud [for nothing])

The inscription in Figure 6.12 above establishes a direct link between the notions of virginity and a girl's social standing within the group. Borrowing Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) notion of face, it can be argued that each and every individual wants to claim a sense of high positive social value in the community in which they live and/or interact. One derives their sense of pride from the knowledge that the community or social group within which they interact sees them in good standing. In other words, their communities of practice recognise and acknowledge their high positive social value. The inscription in figure 6.13 above makes a direct relationship between girls' virginity status and their sense of pride. It is only virgin girls who are allowed room for *kudada* (to be pompous/full of yourself). It implies that girls who lose their virginity, in this particular instance to people of low social standing such as touts, have nothing to be proud of. The notion of virginity-related pride was stressed upon by both high school and tertiary institution students. In example (86) Participant 5 had this to say on virginity:

86. [virginity] *ndiko kuti unzi musikana. Pamuchato asiri virgin haavharwe kumeso.* Every girl desires *kuvharwa kumeso. Usisisiri* you are useless. Wakotobuda muclass yevasikana. [virginity] is the defining feature for one to be classified as a girl. In

weddings those who are not virgins do not have their faces covered. Every girl desires to have their face covered. When you have lost your virginity you are useless. You would have moved out of the class of girls.

Participant 5 highlights the social significance for females to be considered or perceived as virgins. Not only is virginity perceived and regarded as a source of pride for the female concerned, it is also propped up by various rituals meant to keep female sexuality in check. The covering of the bride's face with a veil during the ('white') wedding ceremony is meant to celebrate the notion of virginity and at the same time is made a constant reminder of the 'punishment' of unchaste behaviour. In (87) below Participant 3, a female high school student, summed up the significance of virginity by commenting that:

87. Ndopane pride yemunhu. Uisisiri wava useless apa uri mwana wechikoro! (That is where a person's pride is. When no longer a virgin you are useless and yet you will still be going to school.

Implied in Participant 3's comment is the fact that virginity is something that has to be closely monitored or policed so as to ensure that no female loses their source of pride. The inscriptions are therefore read as a way of safeguarding fellow females from losing their pride. The suggestion is that these girls should be very ashamed at the knowledge that everyone knows that they are no longer virgins.

The inscription also highlights the subservient nature of females in sexual relations. The gender orders in most societies have socially constructed women in a subservient position to men. This feature manifests in different forums of interaction, of which sexual intercourse is not an exception. A close look at some of the words and terms used in inscriptions by high school girls to characterise sexual intercourse makes interesting reading. Examples (88) to (90) below show some of the common ways of representing the experiences of girls in sexual intercourse.

88. [rubbed off] 3 *hure ranzwa nekukwirwa nemaform 5 ese* ([rubbed off] 3 a prostitute in the habit of being 'mounted' by all the form 5 students)

89. *Wakasvirwa iwe* (you were ‘fucked’!)

90. *Hapana asisakuzive* (there is no one who does not know you).

The words *rakakwirwa* (who was ridden/climbed), *wakasvirwa* (you were fucked) and *asisakuzive* (who does not know you) are all synonymous to *kuvhurwa* (to be opened), alluded in Figure 6.12. It is important to take note of the fact that all the terms make use of the passive verbal extension. Sabao (2013:84) observes how the recurrent use of the passive morpheme in sex-related terms/activities ‘reflects a deliberate attempt to portray the woman as a victim of a penetration act.’ The discursive use of the passive construction in (88) to (91) serves to highlight the social constructed nature of female objectification. Objectification has the effect of denying females an opportunity to own their desire. In so far as gender relations are concerned, girls/women are usually constructed as objects of the sexual act. This is a dimension of a relationship dominance whereby the female is, invariably, the dominated. Although the passive construction has not been overtly used in example (90), there is a level on which it is presupposed. It is interesting that the inscription asserts that now everyone ‘knows’ the girl in question. It is the boys who are performing the action of knowing whilst the girl is a passive participant who is ‘being known.’ This limits the performativity and subjectivity of female students a case where all they have to do in gender relations is to avoid ‘being known’ by the boys. The boys seem to be given the latitude to know the girls.

Knowing in this instance can be interpreted in two different ways. The first interpretation concerns people being privy to someone’s sexual behaviour. The second interpretation is connotative. In Shona culture, *kuziva* is a term that can be used to explain that a boy/man has had sexual intercourse with a girl/woman. Virgins are metaphorically represented as a mystery or an unknown quantity which has to be resolved by the man. In example (91) Zvarevashe’s (1983:82-83) *Museve wade nyama* reveals the discursive use of *kuziva* *musikana* (knowing a girl) in relation to sexual intercourse in a scene whereby a man,

Mazvikokota, is being tried in a village court for refusing to marry a girl he had sexual intercourse with:

91. ‘*Iwe Mazvikokota, uyu Miriro wakamuziva here?*’  
‘*Miriro ndakamuzivfa kare ndisati ndamunyenga*’  
‘*Saka wabvuma kuti Miriro unomuziva somukadzi wako?*’  
‘*Pano munhu asingamuzivi here pano mwana uyu?*’  
‘*VaGovera vangu vakapedzana neGonawapotera! Ko iwe Miriro mukomana wako uyu akakuziva here?*’  
‘*Hongu akandiziva. Zvabva kuAmerika akandizivazve..Akandiziva achiti anoda kundiroora.*’  
‘You Mazvikokota, did you know this [here] Miriro  
‘I knew Miriro long before I courted her’  
‘So you are in agreement that you know Miriro as your wife?’  
‘Is there anyone here who doesn’t know her’  
‘The Govera who ‘perished each other by Gonawapotera! To you Miririo did your boyfriend know you?’  
‘Yes he knew me. When he [recently] came from America he also knew me...He knew me saying he will marry me’

The extract from *Museve wade nyama* above stresses the point that knowing a girl or woman can only be done for a single purpose; that of marrying the girl in question. Once a woman is ‘known’, or once the mystery has been solved the girl loses the sense or hold of intrigue that she holds over men. The erosion of this intrigue is so devastating that men are expected to lose interest in her since she would have lost that sense of intrigue. This may be one of the reasons why a boy is forced into marriage once it is disclosed that he knows the lady in question. It is all about maintaining sexual anonymity. Proverbs such as *umhandara idivakamwe* (Virginity is a swim-once experience) encapsulate the importance of female chastity. Once one has swum in the waters, no one would want to swim in them again. It is not uncommon for boys to refer to someone’s ex-girlfriend as *marutsi ake* (his vomit) and as such no one wants to ‘eat’ another man’s vomit. There is no pride accorded to people who sleep with girls other people have already slept with. In other words, there is nothing to dominate since they would have already dominated.

The Shona literary tradition carries this motif whereby repulsion against other people's vomit is accepted as normal or logical. In Kuimba's (1976:165) *Rurimi inyoka*, Timothy 'justifies' his refusal to marry Jane thus: '*Kuroora Jane, mate, marutsi aSimon!* Jane *ipfambi zvayo!*' ('Marrying Jane, spittle, Simon's vomit! Jane is just a prostitute.' That Jane ends up committing suicide as a result of the 'shame' arising from her rejection by Timothy comes as 'just punishment' to the reader. This motif is a dominant one within Shona literature in general as depicted by Nyawaranda's (1990) novel *Ndiyani acharima gura?* (Who will till/farm a tired land?) and Hodza's (1980) poem dialogically entitled '*Ndiani achadawo kurima gura.*' In (92) the narrator lampoons a girl by stating that:

92. *Chadeuka chadeuka, mvura yeguchu haidyorerwi*  
*Wakabatira gombo wapisa mavivi ukariodza negejo*

.....  
*Ndiyani zvino achada kurima gura?*

(What is spilt is spilt, water from a container cannot be gathered  
You held a virgin land but burnt it and decomposed it with a plough

.....  
Who then will want to plough in the tired farm land).

The proverb *chadeuka chadeuka, mvura yeguchu haidyorerwi* (What is spilt is spilt, water from a container cannot be (re)gathered) invokes the finality and, to a great extent, tragedy of virginity. Once it has been lost it cannot be ever recovered. The major problem, then, lies in the question of which man will want to till this tired farm land. Thus, the position being constructed is that a girl is only valuable when untamed and productive (*gombo*), after which she is nothing more than an unwanted tired land.

Chitauro-Mawema (2006) identifies youth and virginity as the salient characteristics for defining the concept *musikana* (girl). Modesty, innocence, purity and chastity are qualities that are presumed to be synonymous with a girl's youth status. It is not uncommon for people to characterise a virgin as *musikana akakwana* (girl who is full/whole/unblemished). Unfortunately, this it is meant to signal that the girl is 'ready to be taken by men, literally and

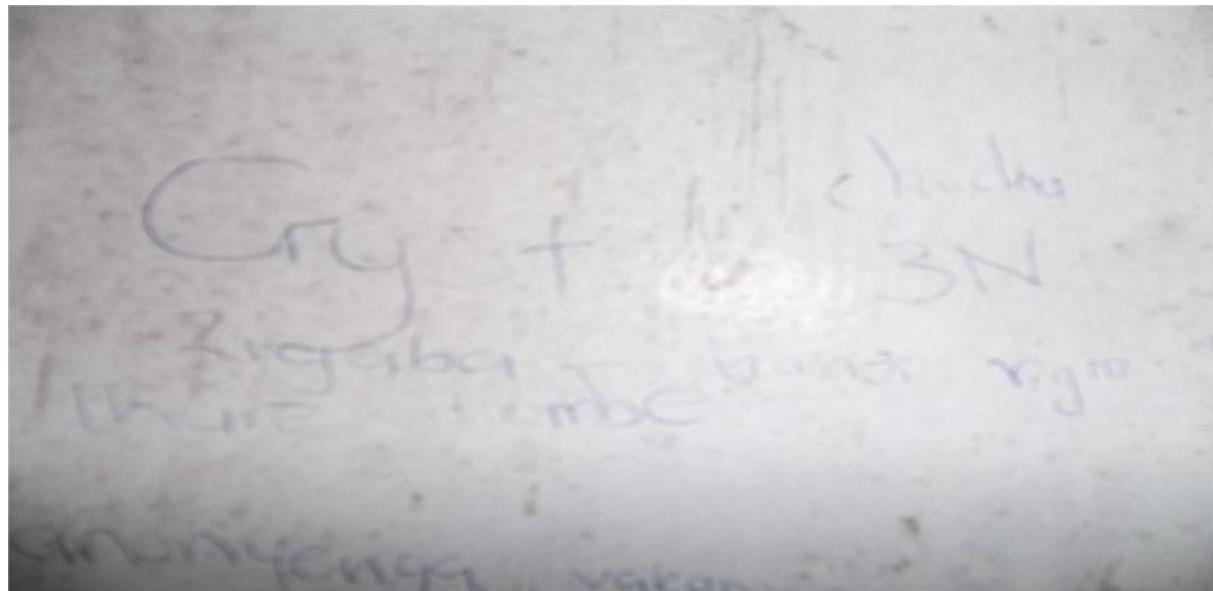
otherwise' (Chitauro-Mawema, 2006:97). She goes on to argue that invariably, it is men who are considered as 'taking' the virginity, rather than women granting it such that 'it is as if that the virginity was never the woman's to give, but the man's [to take]' (Ibid). It is not far off the mark to state that virginity is a concept that constructs girls as 'an investment that will bring the father wealth through *roora*.' However, since the two are not mutually inclusive, social mechanisms have to be put in place to guarantee the presence virginity, which is the one factor which is within the girl's control. The social policing of virginity through graffiti can be thus read as having its roots in traditional and religious patriarchal discourses. The students therefore focus on the factor which they perceive as within their control – chastity (represented by virginity), which is not as natural or inherent as youth. The inscriptions draw on this cultural script of 'knowledge' to actively construct the pacification of their peers.

Also implied in the inscription 'You sell [rubbed off] you are not ashamed. Your vaginas were opened by touts. You are too proud [for nothing]' is the type of man girls are expected to form intimate relationships with. There are societal expectations in relation to the type of man a girl is expected to date. In the Zimbabwean context touts are especially held in very low regard and girls who associate freely with them are similarly considered lowly. Thus, discourse constructed on the public platform of the toilet wall is also used to regulate the type of partners the high school girls interact and relate with. What is interesting is the fact that virginity is seen to be the overriding source of pride at educational institutions. Also implied in the inscription is that once one has lost her virginity she is no longer pure and should therefore keep a very low profile in society. This establishes a very explicit and direct link between sexuality and the kind of power and control one can have in the social group. As long as one is a virgin they have some degree of status amongst the members of the group and from that status they have a high degree of pride. This pride entails that one can be

afforded some leeway in as far as they want to assert themselves within the group. The moment one is seen to have lost her virginity they are automatically downgraded to second class members of the group with no right to establish any degree of control over the group since they would have lost their purity and hence their only source of pride. Stories about women being caught in the ‘virginity creams’ craze, such as one in the *Newsday* of the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, reveal that some women are driven towards pharmaceutical solutions to ‘restore’ their virginity and, by extension, their value.

Inscriptions of this nature also serve to further hegemonic relations. It is not a secret that chastity is a socially constructed notion that is meant to keep female sexuality under check. Traditional practices such as conducting regular vaginal inspections and the payment of *mombe yechimanda* by an appreciative husband are just ways of naturalising the ‘value’ of virginity through customs. The result of such practices is to make the ‘feminine woman worthy of men’s attention’ (Ndlovu, 2001:72). Insistence on the preservation of virginity by such graffiti inscriptions suggests that some women believe in remaining virgins in order to increase their social worth to men. A newspaper story carried by *The Herald* of the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011 about a Beatrice woman who carried virginity tests on fifteen (50) girls is consistent with these beliefs. One can therefore be in a position to better appreciate the informal adage, ‘if you want the milk buy the cow’ that is usually given as advise amongst women. It encourages men to marry their lovers before engaging in sex. The perception is that men generally do not feel compelled to marry women whom they have had, or are currently having, regular sexual intercourse with. It is then left to the women to police their own sexuality so as to guarantee and secure marriage.

Another point to note about the virginity inscriptions is the politics of labelling. Several inscriptions about girls who are believed to have lost their virginity consist of terms such as ‘*hure*’ (whore) as captured in Figure 6.13 below:



**Figure 6.13** Crystal 3N *zigaba hausi* virgin. *Ihure hombe* (Crystal 3N [you are] a big tin you are not a virgin. She is a whore)

Labelling is defined by Chatauro-Mawema (2006) as the employment of socially corrective common insults aimed at highlighting and changing deviant behaviour. She argues that in most cases the labels are aimed towards a younger person. Chatauro-Mawema (2006) considers the discursive practice of labelling as a way of designating, characterising or evaluating behaviour. The labels themselves are social constructs that are aimed at keeping particular social groups in check. The majority of the high school female toilets visited by the researcher revealed an obsessive use of the label *hure* in particular reference to perceived deviant sexual behaviours. The term *hure* is defined by Duramazwi *guru rechiShona* (2001) in two ways. The first definition is ‘*munhu anorara navarume kana vakadzi vose vose*’ (a person who sleeps with any man or woman). It is apparent that this definition equally regards

men and women to be capable of promiscuous behaviour for no apparent financial or material gain. Thus, men and women are equally capable of such promiscuous behaviour. The second definition is ‘*munhu anorara nevanhu achivabhadharisa mari*’ (a person who sleeps with people for money). The second definition, though it does not specify gender, applies mostly to stereotypical constructions of hure as someone who prawl bars and street corners in search of sexual clients. Resultantly, the use of the term *hure* usually denotes a female. This is an observation also noted by Chitauro-Mawema (2006) whose research shows that the majority of respondents think that the label *hure* mostly applies to girls and women.

Chitauro-Mawema (2006) notes that there are mainly three main derogatory labels used to refer to promiscuous behaviour. These are *pfambi* (prostitute), *joki* (rider of many men) and *hure* (whore). However, the present researcher observed that graffiti inscriptions exclusively employ the latter to refer to any sort of deviant sexual behaviour. The label *hure*, therefore, seems to be the ultimate derogatory term used to describe and evaluate promiscuous behaviours in females. In the case of the graffiti inscriptions in high schools, the term *hure* is discursively employed to exclude sexually active girls from participating in the social activities of the adolescent group. Labelled individuals are no longer regarded as part of the social category of girls. Thus, *hure* becomes one of the social corrective common insults which are said to be uttered for the purpose of highlighting and changing deviant behaviour of, usually, a younger person (Chitauro-Mawema, 2006:198). The assumption is that no female wants to be labelled a prostitute. This makes *hure* a potent social corrective label. Problems, however, arise in cases where such labels are used, for instance, to curtail women’s freedom of associating with members of the opposite sex (Somera, 2001). Cases such as these are indicative of the high intolerance with which society regards females who show some degree of independence in their lives. A woman has to be defined in relation to the

man. In linguistic research, this phenomenon manifests itself through the so-called comparative language studies which sought ‘to compare woman’s language [...] to a male standard...making male language the norm [...] any difference on the part of the woman as “deviation”’ (Spender, 1985:8). The use of such social corrective labels as *hure* is typical of how society tries to put and keep women perceived to be overstepping their boundaries in their ‘proper place’ (Gore, 2001:34).

Also closely linked to the virginity discourses is the use of the term *gaba* (‘a tin’) in reference to a vagina whose hymen has been removed through sexual intercourse. It connotes a ‘loose’ vagina. The term is therefore a comment on the need to preserve female virginity. Thus, engaging in sexual behaviour at an early age is seen to compromise one’s virginity and the associated tightness of the vagina. Again, the graffiti inscriptions establish a direct link between virginity and the tightness of the vagina. As far as the female adolescents are concerned, losing one’s virginity is tantamount to losing the tightness of one’s vagina. The term *gaba* appears in inscriptions (93) and (94) below:

93. Kudzai *zihure remakoko naTakudzwa akavhurwa makumbo rangova gaba risisina* beans (Kudzai the great prostitute and Takudzwa whose legs are opened and is now a tin without [any] beans).
94. Melisa *ihure ramakoko wakabobiwa uri gaba* (Melisa the great prostitute you were thoroughly beaten you are a tin).

Implied in example (93) is that a girl must always keep her legs closed all the time. In this case, the term ‘legs’ is used metaphorically to refer to the female’s fertility symbol – the vagina. Thus, a girl’s legs are symbolic of the girl’s virginity such that as long as the legs remain closed the girl preserves her virginity. The symbolic use of legs is by no means restricted to the Zimbabwean context. Amanze (2010) reveals how the Chewa men or husbands euphemistically use the term *mwendo* (leg) in reference to sex. He observes how it is common for these men to say ‘*akazi anga akundikaniza mwendo*’ (my wife is denying me

her leg). The combined use of the metaphors of the legs, tin and beans is significant in reinforcing the cultural value of female virginity. Once the legs are opened, the tin has also, in turn, been opened and the beans will have been devoured. Once the beans have been devoured the tin is no longer of any use. Examples (93) and (94) also suggest that the girls have been at the receiving end of sexual intercourse and have, consequently lost their net social worth. *Kubobiwa* (to be expertly and thoroughly beaten), in example (53), invokes elements of a thorough and well executed beating. The inscription implies that the girl in question has been thoroughly and well-beaten such that her genital is now a *gaba* (empty tin). This dovetails with informal discourses by males who represent having sexual intercourse with women as *kurova chinhu* (hitting the thing). Sabao (2013) reveals how males, in informal interpersonal communicative contexts, use the *kurova* (beating/hitting) motif to suggest the total domination of the female in sexual encounters. He explains that words such as *kubobiwa* are indicative of the obsessive male desire to characterise their sexual encounters with women as ‘complete and painful act[s]’ (Sabao, 2013:86).

The obsession with the tin metaphor can also be explained in the context of the ‘wear-and-tear’ that men associate with women who have regular sex (Chitauro-Mawema 2006:97). The general belief is that the vagina gets loose as a result of frequent sexual intercourse. The women are, therefore, expected to preserve the ‘quality’ of their vaginas by maintaining them as tight as possible. Like in inscriptions about virginity, no suggestions are made that men may also lose value through sex. Whilst the women ‘inevitably’ experience wear and tear, the men seem to go unscathed from the whole exercise. Judging from how men go around boasting about their sexual adventures, something which is mortifying to women, it may seem as if the men’s social worth increases with each sexual encounter. It is not uncommon for some women to regard sexually active men in high esteem; a paradox captured in the

Shona proverb *kwadzinorohwa matumbu ndokwadzomhanyira* (where their guts are beaten is where they rush to). One reading of the proverb may be that men's role is that of simply *kurova matumbu* (hitting or spilling guts) while, on the other hand, the women have their guts spilled for everyone to see and learn from. Men emerge victors whereas women emerge victims of the sexual encounter. The tin-motif in these inscriptions is read as efforts to pressurise girls to always safeguard their virginity and thereby maintain their 'social value.' It can also be said that that insistence on the 'quality' of the female's vagina feeds into long-standing debates on the social value or significance of the female body in enactment of power dynamics in gender relations. Jackson (1998:142) argues that:

The other central issue of the moment is 'the body.' It is through our embodiment that we recognise each other as gendered beings and engage in sexual practices [...] Ideas about the body have, at least implicitly, always underpinned feminist debates on gender and sexuality, and the body is increasingly becoming the terrain on which these debates are fought out.

The vagina cannot therefore be read as simply another part of female physiology. It is taken as the embodiment of chastity such that its state is used to determine whether or not the female in question is bestowed with power both in the wider social context and within the relationship. Jackson and Scott (2002:270) summed up the effects of sex to the female body when they stated that:

First sex has different meanings for men and women [...] For young men it is an initiation into manhood, a confirmation of their masculinity, whereas for young women it carries no such status and can entail a risk to reputation. Femininity is confirmed with attractiveness rather than sexual activity per se.

The confirmation of one's sexuality is considered to be highly gendered. Whilst, on the one hand, males can strut their masculinity by sleeping around, females, on the other hand, can only make themselves attractive to male desire through clothing, cosmetics, deportment and so on. The researcher actually recalls how at a high school he used to teach there was a prize for deportment awarded to female students who were regarded as carrying themselves in a feminine manner. Continued insistence by the females themselves, in the inscriptions, is akin

to perpetuating ideologies of compulsory heterosexuality aimed at keeping them subordinated.

### **6.3.2.1.2 Cross-gender relationships**

Furman (2002), Sorensen (2007) and Cassar (2009) all acknowledge the fact that adolescents enter or engage in romantic relationships. In most cases these relationships are cross-gendered. Differences in social milieu however dictate that conduct or behaviours that are enacted within these relationships are dictated by context-specific codes. Expectations of behaviours and attitudes are determined by the individual's gender and sexual socialisation. This section therefore focuses on inscriptions used to intimate/suggest relationships across gender and the various ways in which cross-gender relationships are construed such as issues to do with courtship, lover-snatching and the power dynamics in such relationships. Graffiti is analysed to establish the extent to which students are expected to participate in these cross-gender relationships and how this participation is governed by constructed codes of behaviour.

#### *6.3.2.1.2.1 Courtship initiation*

The gender order in most social set ups is such that ‘women are expected to be sexually passive and submissive in contrast to the ideal masculine role of independence, activity and sexual desire’ (Gilchrist and Sullivan, 2006:196). Generally, females are expected to take a step back and let the males take the initiative in sexuality matters. Kambarami (2006) maintains that women are generally socialised to acquire qualities such as passivity and submission. In courtship, the patriarchal norm is that it is the male who is expected to initiate the contact and take the leadership role in both the courtship and love relationship. Girls who subvert this expectation and take the initiative by proposing their love to boys are regarded as deviant. The data collected from surfaces in girls’ toilets indicate a strong inclination against

patriarchal expectations. The inscription in figure 6.14 below identifies a girl who goes around asking boys out.



**Figure 6.14** Nyarai *anonyenga vakomana* (Nyarai asks boys out).

The inscription in Figure 6.14 above is not just stating the obvious. It should be read in the context of traditional utilitarian discourses. The African philosophy that life should be goal-oriented cuts across all spheres of life. In this light, romantic relations cannot be appreciated outside their traditional social function. They are the foundation on which the vital institution of the family rests. The formation and maintenance of romantic relations and guarantees of sexual intercourse are done with the overall aim of marriage and starting a family for the continuation of the clan. Women courting men is thus perceived as a serious violation of normative values and expectations. It is regarded an inversion of logic. Instead of the man pursuing the woman (a process which is also expected to be quite protracted) the woman is now doing the chasing. The commonplace assumption in patriarchal societies is that women are sexually docile. They can only be sexually active at the behest of the man. It is believed that a woman can go for as long as it takes without any sexual intercourse if no man has shown any sexual interest in her. Curtailing the women's freedom of association is one way

of ensuring that her sexuality is kept in check. Going after men, is perceived as synonymous to going after sex. In patriarchal societies women are imagined as people without sexual agency. Participant 2 in example (95) maintained that for females to ‘chase after’ males:

95. Kuzvitambisira nguva. Girls should just accept that waunoda haakudi (It’s wasting your time. Girls should just accept that the one they love does not love them [in return]).

These comments are significant in that they raise questions on what initiates female love or sexual desire. The graffiti inscriptions, as well as comments made by the participants, suggest that female love or desire can only be stimulated when a male approaches them. Thus, it is courtship that can only stimulate or stir romantic feelings in females. This is unlike in males who can initiate courtship based on the romantic feelings they develop for particular females.

The inscriptions also establish links between deviant sexual behaviours and the HIV and AIDS epidemic as illustrated in (96) below:

96. *Uchafa neAIDS hameno hako hure remakoko chinyenga vakomana* [sic] (You will die from AIDS beware of your [habit of] courting boys)

The inscription perpetuates a number of commonly held stereotypes about sexual behaviours, HIV and AIDS as well as the associated stigma. The inscription draws a link between sexual immorality and AIDS. Interesting to note in this proposition is the fact that reference is made directly to AIDS without mentioning the intermediate HIV. This conflates HIV and AIDS and makes them one. AIDS is no longer regarded as a condition developing from HIV but as a disease that one directly contracts as a result of sexual immorality. The same attitudes were also inscribed in an inscription, in (97) below, in a high school boys’ toilet which warned:

97. *Beche rinonaka ngwarirai pakati nebeche pakuurayisa* (the vagina is pleasurable beware the middle and the vagina causing death).

Examples (96) and (97) both manifest the sexualisation of HIV and AIDS whereby it is constructed almost exclusively as a disease of sexual decadence. All the other alternative or

possible methods of transmission are conveniently ignored. This then paves the way for the other assumption that stigma against people suffering from AIDS is justified because they deserve it. This proposition, in example (19), is implied by the phrase *hameno hako* (beware) which has connotations of washing one's hands against someone who has refused to heed advise from the people and cannot be offered any sympathy or empathy in the event of transmission. Thus, girls who choose to actively exercise their sexuality by initiating courtship are perceived by their peers as being of loose sexual morals and are therefore labelled prostitutes. Chiparamoto and Chigwenya's (2009:44) research on adolescents' perception on sexuality revealed that a considerable proportion of high school students were passionately opposed to the idea of girls asking boys out by pointing out that 'only girls of slack morals are capable of it.' This type of girls does not deserve any mercy in the event that the 'inevitable' happens. The females are therefore seemingly opting for freedom to be associated rather than freedom of association. Their 'choice' of partners is therefore limited to only the men who approach them. Discourse in graffiti therefore reinforces the notion that girls do not have the right to choose their 'Mr Right.'

Again, parallels can be drawn between graffiti inscriptions chastising women who go after men and Zimbabwean literature. Gaidzanwa (1985) points out that one of the dominant themes in Zimbabwean literature is the representation of unmarried woman staying in urban areas as prostitutes or women of questionable and loose morals. These sentiments appear in Shona novels, as illustrated by passage (98) which talks about a man refusing to marry a girl he impregnates in the city in the novel *Rurimi Inyoka* by Kuimba (1976):

98. Timothy, *akaenderera mberi*, 'zvinoi ndinobvunzawo dare. Munoti imhosva yangu here? Ukaisa mbudzi mubako rebere, bere haridi here? Kana bere rikadya, imhosva yaro here? Ini ndakavingwa nemusikana uyu' 'Kumadhorobha kune pfambi dzinoita sezvakaitwa nemusikana uyu. Kana mukandimanikidza kumuroora, akazofuma ofambira zvikomba sezvaakaita kwandiri, ndinopa mhosva kudare rino.'

Timothy, continued, ‘now I ask the court. Do you say it’s my fault? If you put a goat in a hyena’s cave, does the hyena not devour? If the hyena devours, is it its fault? I was approached by this girl’

‘In cities there are prostitutes who behave like what this girl did. If you force me to marry her, if she starts going after her boyfriends like what she did to me, I will hold the court responsible/accountable’

By setting this scene on a village court, Kuimba (1976) inflects his argument with what appears to be natural patriarchal ideology. In the process, urban women are socially constructed as prostitutes who are in the habit of chasing after men for selfish sex and are therefore not marriage material as they are like the proverbial leopard which cannot get rid of its spots. Graffiti inscriptions of this nature therefore resonate with a literary tradition which associates courting men with loose morals. The use of the label *hure* fits perfectly within a patriarchal system bend on curtailing women’s freedom of association.

#### 6.3.2.1.2.2 *Declaration of love*

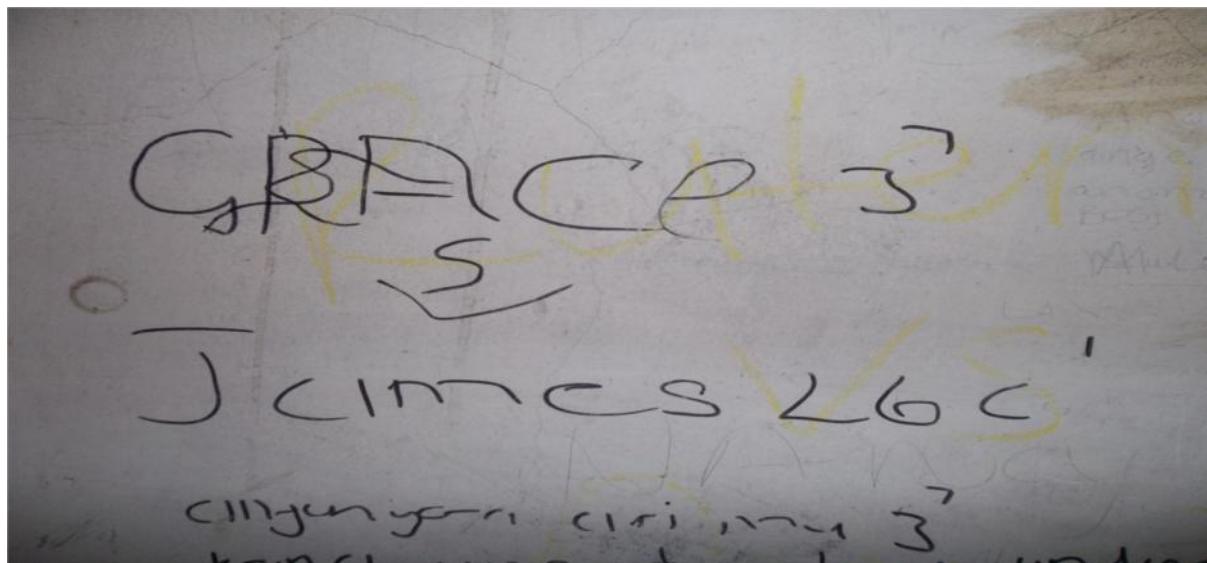
Cassar (2009) characterises the development of romantic relationships and attachments as a salient defining factor for adolescence. Sorensen (2007) acknowledges the value of these relationships when she states that they ‘become increasingly significant in the lives of young people as they move from early to late adolescence.’ These romantic relationships can epitomise children’s development of ‘paths and patterns of sexual development’ (Graaf and de Rademakers, 2011:118). Adolescents are actively involved in the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships. Present interest in these relationships lies in how they are discursively constructed and negotiated by this social group. Of particular interest are the power dynamics suggested in the inscriptions. Furman (2002:179) suggests that these adolescent romantic relationships, just like friendships, ‘are both egalitarian relationships characterised by features of affiliation, such as companionship and mutual intimacy.’ Given cross cultural variations in the social construction of relationships in general, it is an overstatement to suggest that such kind of relationships display the same characteristic across

cultures. Different cultures and social groups have equally diverse ideologies which influence their formation and maintenance of relationships of this nature. These ideologies then inform power dynamics in all forms of human associations and interactions. An exploration of graffiti in its respective cultural and social context can reveal how power dynamics are constructed and negotiated in different social milieu. Graffiti inscriptions can be used as a way to establish how power relations are negotiated in romantic relationships.

Cross-gender relationships are rarely taken seriously in schools yet evidence on toilet walls and doors shows that they are a significant part of adolescent life. Participant 11 acknowledged the need to take inscriptions stating relationships between individuals seriously. Her views are restated in example (99) below:

99. *Pane masentiments avonoexpresser ari serious zvokuti* you may get something *chiri* genuine. *Kumaschools nhingi* versus *nhingi* is serious (There are some sentiments they express that are serious such that you may get something that is genuine. In schools this and what's-his-name versus what's-her-name is serious).

Participant 11's comments highlight a significant aspect about the representation of *nhingi* vs *nhingi* (so-and-so vs so-and-so) in graffiti inscriptions. Inscriptions on both female and male toilets, and indeed other surfaces such as on desk tops, corridor walls and durawalls, reveal the omnipresent nature of this formulaic representation of romantic relationships. There is, however, cross-gender variation in terms of how the names are specifically captured. Tagwirei and Mangeya (2013) have shown that disclosure of cross-gender relationships almost-always run along the formula X vs. Y or X is in love with Y; where X and Y represent the names of the girl and boy involved. Evidence from the female toilets in high schools are peculiar in that the name of the girl precedes that of the boy, as shown in Figure 6.16 below:



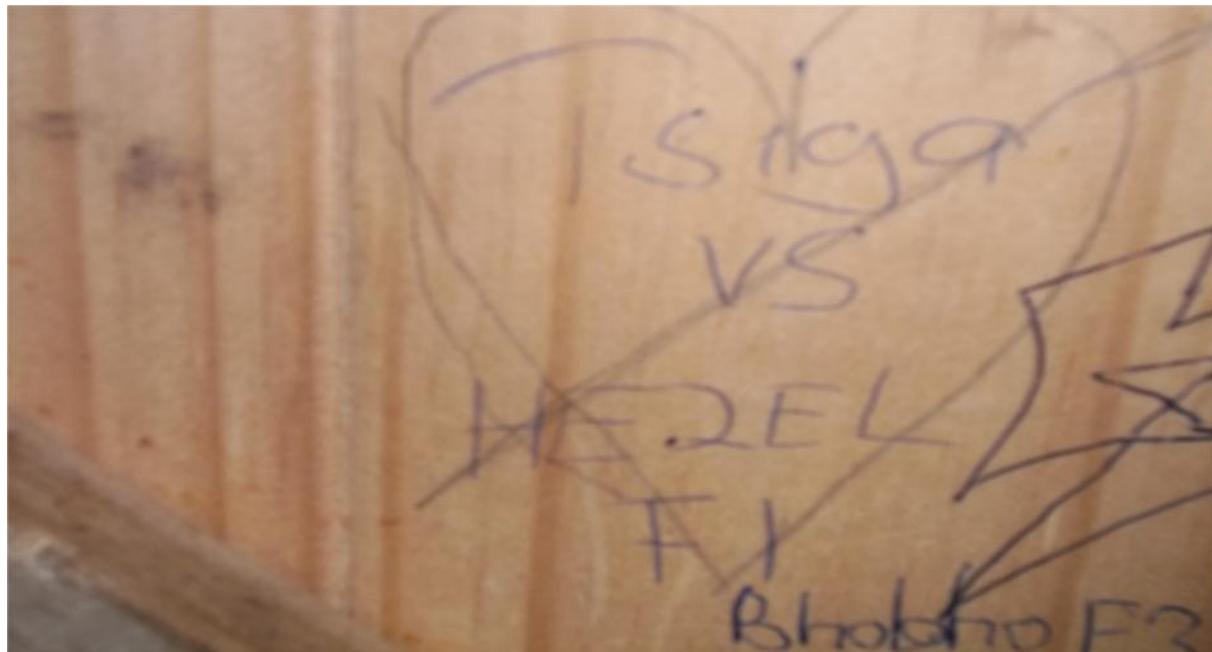
**Figure 6.15** Grace vs James

The inscription in Figure 6.15 presents an interesting case in that the girl in question is in a lower level than the boy (she is in form three and is three levels/years behind her ‘boyfriend’). Despite the apparent gap (which may also extent to age differences) the name of the girl is written first. This subverts common formulae for conjoining males and females as Tagwirei and Mangeya (2013:35) observe:

The prevailing formula for gender descriptive noun phrases which include the conjunctives ‘and’ as well as ‘or’ consider the male as primary and the female secondary. For example, in ‘he/she’, ‘him/her’, ‘male and female’ and in ‘boys and girls,’ the said formula is apparent.

The process of language acquisition can play a significant role in explaining the systematic and consistent occurrence of the female’s name in the initial or head position. In processing models, such as MacWhinney’s Competition model, the subject, as well as other syntactic and grammatical heads, is considered the most important grammatical element (Cook, 1991). Elements put in the initial position of utterances assume subject status and are endowed with a lot of privileges which include agency and control of agreement, among other functions. That the girl’s name comes first in graffiti inscriptions from girls’ toilets serves to position girls as the primary and defining participants in cross-gender relationships. The female is inscribed as the main component of the relationship endowed with both agency and control in

the relationship. Perceptions of the primacy of the female in cross-gender relations seems to contradict constructions about the supposed weaknesses of the woman who is famously referred to as the second or other sex (de Beauvoir, 1949). Graffiti inscriptions from male toilets take a different stance altogether. Names of boys tend to precede those of girls as Figure 6.16 below shows:



**Figure 6.16** Tsiga vs Hezel

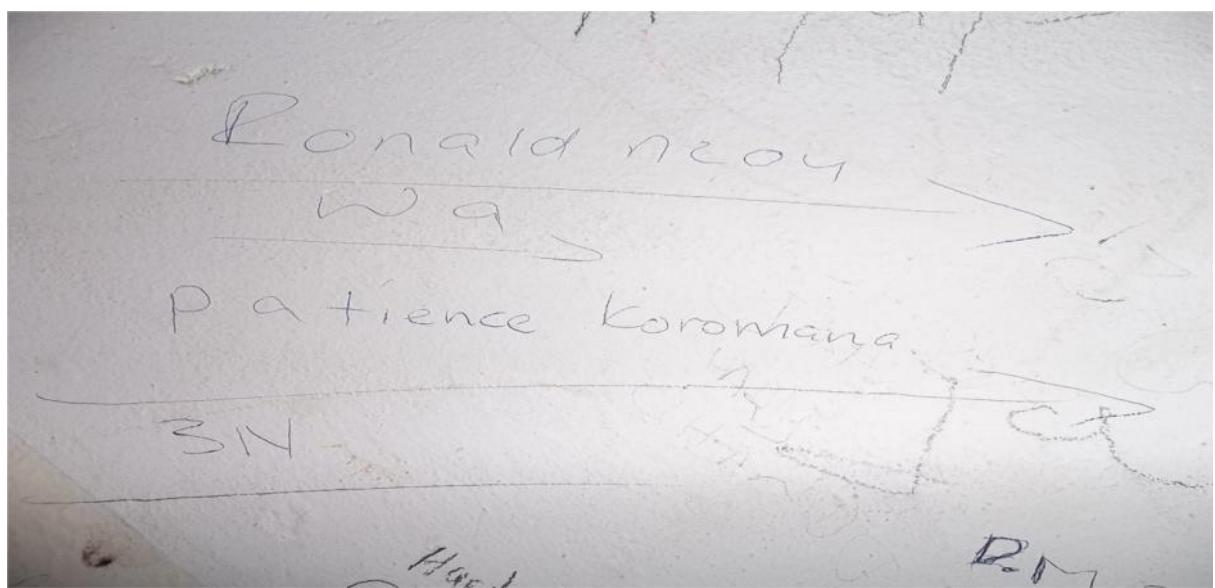
Figure 6.16 is, at a certain level, considered a more common representation of such romantic relationships where the boy is the head of the phrase and is therefore in the subject position. Occupation of the subject position by the male's name seems to be the norm in cross-cultural representations of such relationships. Texeira et al (2003:12) found that:

It is interesting to point out that in the five countries studied most of the romantic graffiti established a connection between a man and a woman rather than a disconnection...Examples of such kind of inscriptions are 'Thomas-N-Jessy' (U.S.A.), 'Eduardo e Cristina' ['Eduardo and Cristina'] (Brazil), and 'Emanuele e Valentina forever/6-10-2000' ['Emanuele and Valentina forever/6-10-2000'] (Italy).

They also go on to reveal the same pattern in inscriptions which were even expressing disconnections in romantic relationships. They cite how;

Spanish women produced a greater number of brokenhearted graffiti, such as 'David y Cristina/Amor Impossible/David y Cristina' ['David and Cristina/impossible love/David and Cristina'] (Texeira et al, 2003:12).

Texeira et al (2003) do not explain the apparent cross cultural occurrence of the female's name in the primary position. It is either they take it as a given or they just overlook the distribution. They, nevertheless, suggest that women produce more inscriptions on cross-gender relationships as a result of their perceived emotionally expressive nature which predisposes them to express, particularly, more positive connections and emotions. The consistency with which the female name occurs in the initial position suggests a framing that goes beyond a simple manifestation of women's propensity of being more emotionally expressive. A rare inscription found in a male high school toilet points to a more deep-rooted cultural phenomenon, as illustrated by Figure 6.17 below,



**Figure 6.17:** Ronald nzou wa patience koromana (Patience Koromana's Ronald Nzou)

Given that the girl in question is in form 3, there are very high chances that the boy is either in the same form or in a higher level. Taken in this light, it becomes consistent with Figure 6.15 (Grace vs James L6), with the notable exception that it is now the males who are indirectly conceding the primacy of the females in the romantic relationships. The ubiquitous nature of the cross-gender inscriptions by female students, complemented by Figure 6.17

(Ronald *waPatience*) presupposes a certain extent to which the females see themselves as defining the relationships and considering the boyfriend their property. Ironically, male students also consider themselves likewise, as suggested by Figure 6.17. Such a seemingly strange and curious power dynamic, especially in the context of patriarchy, is consistent with Shona philosophy as expressed by an adage *musha mukadzi* (it is the woman who makes the home) and the general belief that once married, the husband becomes his wife's first born. Hamutyinei (1969:17), in 'Kana wamutanga musikana' ('When you start/court a girl'), in fact reveals that this feminine 'mothering' tendency starts as early as after courtship when the 'girlfriend' polices the 'boyfriend's' movements when he states in example (100):

100.     *Woira woriswa semhou ine njinjana*  
          *Kungoti tsvendzu wotobvunzwa kwawaswera*  
          (You will be herded like a cow with a calf  
          You slip [her attention] and you will asked about where you spent the day).

In the context of patriarchy, the primacy of the woman suggests a major destabilisation of normative expectations whereby women take 'charge' of both the man and, therefore, the relationship. In the negotiation of patriarchal power dynamics, the systematic occurrence of the female's name in the head position demonstrates how discourse can be used to negotiate power relations. However, the researcher finds it a bit curious that the female is so 'powerful' especially within the context of patriarchal dominance. There should be a reason which the language 'allowed' the female to assume a more powerful role than the male. It is the researcher's position that this deceptive empowerment of women over men is ironically meant to further entrench the subservient position of women. This position is tested on inscriptions involving contests over boys, below.

#### 6.3.2.1.2.3 *Lover-snatching*

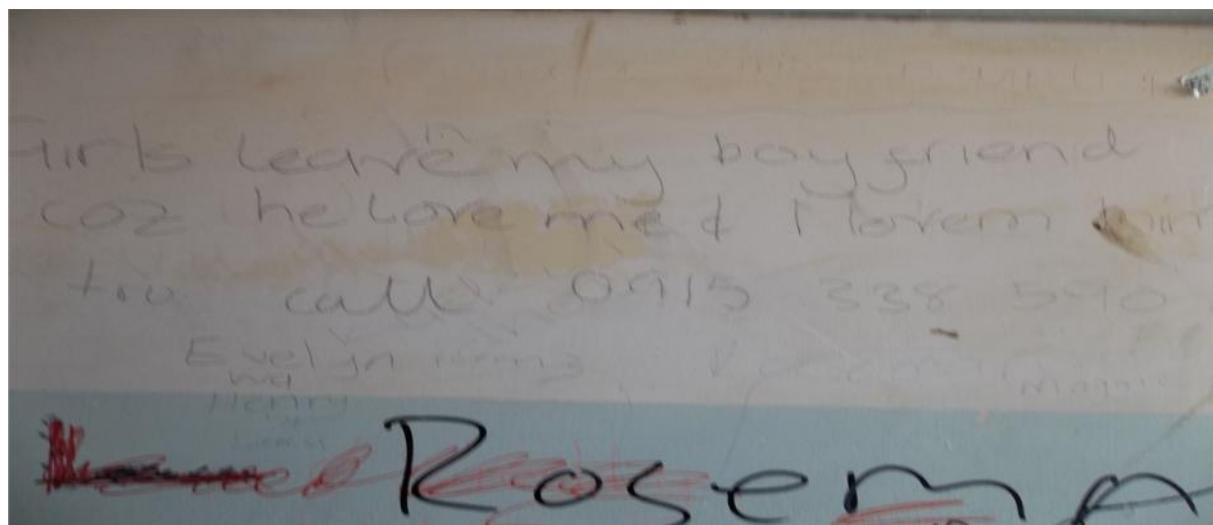
Texeira et al (2003) suggest that the declarations of love on walls by women can be regarded as one way of reassuring their lovers of their attachment as they are guided by the assumption

that the information they write will eventually reach their lover. They also suggest that making their love affairs public enables the women to get information about possible betrayals. Analysis of female high school students' inscriptions suggests a similar, but somewhat different occurrence of these inscriptions. A local song, '*Bhora rembabvu*' (Rough play) by Zimbabwean artist Leonard Zhakata (2001) advises lovers to safeguard their relationships by drawing parallels between relationships and rough play, as epitomised by (101) below:

101. *Nyaya yerudo itori bhora rembabvu*  
*Shanje rudo haikona kutambira kure*  
*Swedera pedyo newaunodanana naye*  
*Nokuti pane mumwe ari kumurwarira chose*  
*Pane mhombwe iri kumushupikira chose*  
The issue of love is a violent game  
Jealousy is [synonymous with] love don't play from a distance  
Get near to your the one you are in love with  
Because there is another who is mad about him/her  
There is an adulterer who is struggling very hard to get him/her from you

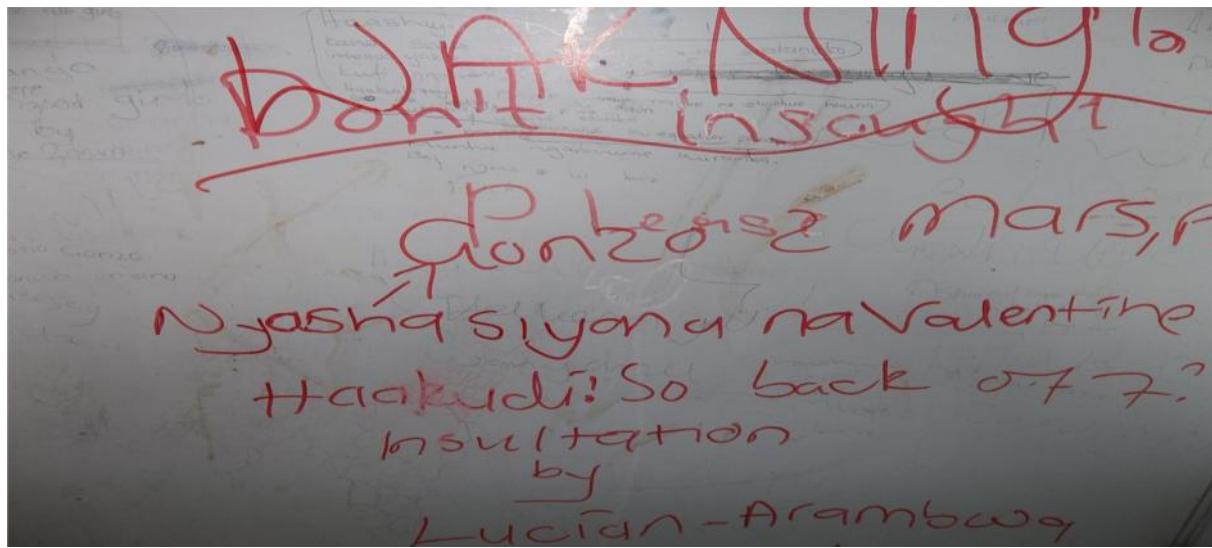
The song reveals that romantic relationships are much more than a walk in the park. It is a struggle (*bhora rembabvu*) in which the concerned parties in the relationship must vigilantly guard against adulterers. The declarations of love is perceived as one of the ways through which female high school students adopt the copyright principle to actively protect their relationships against external threats. The inscriptions suggest that one of the major threats facing these relationships is their fragility and vulnerability to another girl 'snatching' the other's boyfriend. It seems as if most girls in relationships are wary of having their own relationships being disrupted by others. Toilet graffiti in Zimbabwean high schools shows that girls tend to mark their territories and jealously guard against their boyfriends being snatched by colleagues. Gaidzanwa (1985) observes that part of the woman's duty is to secure and keep a man in her life. Part of the keeping involves guarding against other women who have the 'habit of taking' their partners. Inscriptions found on surfaces in girls toilets in urban high schools reveal this at two levels.

The first instance is whereby a writer publicly declares that she and her boyfriend are in love and then implores the other girls not to break up her relationship with the boy. Figure 6.19 illustrates this.



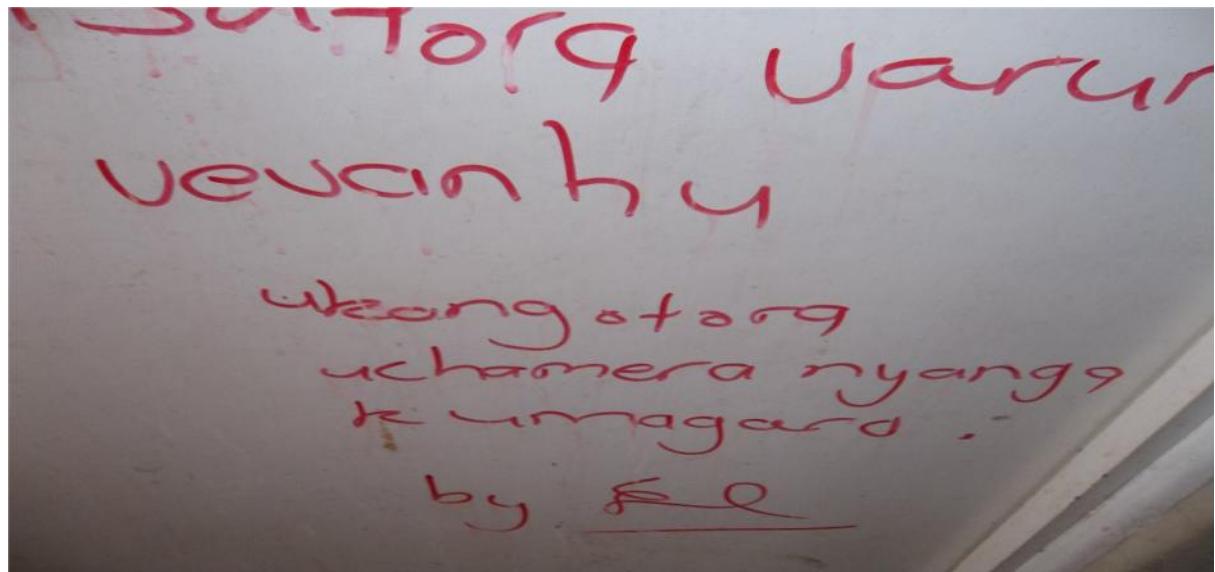
**Figure 6.18:** Girls leave my boyfriend alone coz he love (sic) me and I love him.

The inscription in Figure 6.18 above seems to point to the fragility of the relationship to outside influence. The inscriptions suggest that only fellow female students are capable of breaking up relationships. As a result, the males are rarely implicated in the breakup of relationships. In this regard, girls emerge the sole makers and breakers of cross-gender relationships. This is an idea that is reinforced by Chiparamoto and Chigwenya who reveal that girls prefer to be friends with boys since boys 'do not snatch your boyfriend' (2009:44). Thus, girls do not see the boy they are befriending as a threat to their boyfriends. Figure 6.19 below further highlights this point:



**Figure 6.19** Nyasha siyana naValentine haakudi! So back off! (Nyasha leave Valentine alone he does not love you! So back off!)

Male partners in romantic relationships are depicted as helpless and vulnerable participants who can be snatched away unwittingly. Again, this is an objectification of males in love relationships whereby they are stripped of their agency. This is a renegotiation of what it entails to be the ‘protector’ in the relationship. The everyday understanding is that it is the male who performs this role in the protection as a result of the perceived inherent vulnerability in the females. It is the girl who sees herself as having to protect the relationship. The construction of males as passive and vulnerable participants in romantic relationships means that females wield immense power in so far as the stability of the relationship is concerned. It also entails that there are girls who may deliberately choose to set out to break other’s relationships. The inscriptions also suggest that not even marriages are immune to other women who snatch husbands away from their marriages, as illustrated by Figure 6.20 below:



**Figure 6.20** *Usatora varume vevanh u kangotora uchamera nyanga kumagaro by [signature] (Do not take away other women's husbands if you do you will grow horns on the buttocks by [signature]).*

The inscription suggests that there are ways of dealing with women who take away other people's men. Thus, it is suggestive of a conceptualisation of women as powerful enough to take away men from their relationships means that the women also construe ways of protecting their men from such dangers. However, placing the burden of protecting the relationship squarely on the women's shoulders is regarded as a clever way to absolve the males of any wrong-doing in the romantic relationships, even extending to marriages. By constructing males as powerless and in need of the females' protection, they are not regarded as capable of any wrong-doing. It is the females who threaten the stability of the family. This supposed vulnerability of males to women is evident in example (102) below,

102. *Atoregwa wake wandinenge ndataura ndeyekwake hapana hama yangu pano handitodzikame* (To hell with whoever whose boyfriend I have snatched. I have no relative here I won't settle down).

The inscription suggests that the writer is convinced that she has the other girls' boyfriend at her mercy and they cannot do anything about it. *Handidzikame* (I will not settle), in the context which it is used, is reflective of the fact that the individual know that what she is doing is wrong but is doing it anyway just out of spite. This reading is also explicit in an

inscription which, in response to the social corrective label *hure*, declared that ‘*hure izita rebase kushaya uniform haisi mhosva [...]*’ (prostitute is my professional/trade name not having a uniform is not a crime/my problem [...]). The inscriptions seem to imply that sexual immorality is a result of females who consciously and/or deliberately choose not to settle down. The irony is that absolving men from any wrong doing gives them the latitude to sleep around whilst the blame is put sorely on the ‘other woman.’ Lamb and Keon (1995) also note a similar situation whereby female journalists, when writing about men battering women in domestic violence incidences, had a tendency to avoid assigning responsibility to men as perpetrators of the violence. They instead constructed women as both culpable and complicit in their abuse as if to imply that they deserved their abuse by men. For the inscriptions to put all the blame on the female (constructed as a lover-snatcher) paints the picture that men are never at fault. Rather it is the woman who is perceived as a snatcher. Suffice it to say that snatching brings in connotations of ‘a smash-and-grab’ action thereby reinforcing the idea that the men may not even have time to react to their own ‘snatching.’ Such constructions become one of the various ways in which women are constructed as people of loose sexual morality. It is no wonder Spender (1985:15) laments the disparity in words depicting sexual immorality in men and women. She states that English has ‘220 words for a sexually promiscuous female and only 20 for a sexually promiscuous male’ serving to naturalise women as inherently loose. The focus group participants also pointed out that the supposed inherent sexual immorality in women is socially constructed. They cited how the term *hure* is only applicable to females and that there does not seem to be a semantic equivalent for males. Gender accountability of sexual behaviours seems only to apply to the female since they are the active participants in the break up and, therefore, the protection of the relationship.

The discursive use of *hure* as a social corrective label in high school female toilets reveals two inherent ironies. The first is that it is rarely used in reference to males. Going by the adage that it takes two to tango, one would have expected the inscriptions to label both the female and male participants. Failure to implicate and make the male responsible for his part in the relationship raises questions pertaining to its applicability to males. The selective application of standards of sexual behaviours feeds into the ‘slut’ concept which only punishes females for perceived sexual immorality (Cassar 2009:56) and, thereby ends up legitimising perceived and supposed male sexual freedoms at the expense of the females.

Male participants were quick to point out the ‘fact’ or ‘reality’ that males cannot be regarded as promiscuous per se. In (103) below Participant 7 explains:

103. According to culture *murume haasi hure*. *Tinoti murume ane muchiuno – harituke* as compared *kunzi hure* (according to culture a man is not a prostitute. We say a man has an active waist – it’s not [as] derogatory [as] compared to labelling one as a prostitute.

This highlights how culture has been used as a script to justify the double act of according the males with unrestricted freedom to exercise their sexuality whilst, at the same time restricting female sexuality.

The second, and perhaps the biggest is that it is the females who are using the label and not males. Cameron (1998:148) stresses the power of naming by explaining that:

The ‘power to name and define’ can be understood in two senses: *our* power, as feminists, to (re)name and (re)define our own realities, but conversely also the power of dominant groups to name and define reality for everyone. Since our lives and relationships are carried on to a large extent through language, since our knowledge of the world is mediated through language, the power to name and define is an important arena for reproducing or challenging oppressive social relations.

The discursive use of *hure* in inscriptions in high school girls’ toilets reveals a tendency by women to uses labels that are by and large a man’s creation and part of male arsenal in the

subordination of females. Using such terms is adopting the male political resources for furthering the patriarchal hegemonic position in society. To naturalise the use of terms as *hure* in curtailing female freedoms of association and expression amounts to stripping females of their power and, at the same time, bestowing it on males. Going by Cameron's definition and significance of naming, the female students seem to miss a very big opportunity to appropriate discourse to construct, through graffiti, relations and realities that best mediate their own position in relation to males.

It has been revealed that graffiti is a site that provides female high school students with discursive spaces to explore sexuality issues. One striking observation made of graffiti inscriptions in Zimbabwean high schools is the absence of what may be regarded as deviant notions of sexualities. Jackson (2005:297) acknowledges the contribution of non-conventional forums in enabling the 'emergence of "new sexualities" as an expression of a young women's independence and normative constructions of being (hetero)sexually active.' Cassar's (2009) exploration of inscriptions in a Maltese school revealed how graffiti was used to reconstruct and renegotiate lesbian and bisexuality notions in the context of dominant cultural and religious discourses. The common trend in, especially graffiti research, is that such discursive spaces enable and empower its participants to explore forbidden notions of sexuality and thereby renegotiate and reconstruct gender identities and expectations. Inscriptions from female high school students have however subverted this trend by overtly maintaining the dominant institutional patriarchal expectation. By insisting on the preservation and upholding of virginity (by extension chastity), using the social corrective label *hure* on those perceived as sexually immoral (echoing what Cassar refers to as the slut concept) and blaming fellow females for instability in relationships, the inscriptions echo dominant discourses meant to keep women subordinated to male domination aimed at making

them sex objects. This use of graffiti to further male hegemonic purposes makes the inscriptions more understandable when read as ‘discursive clusters’ consisting ‘a conglomeration of various discourses about the body, gender, love, sexualities, intimacy, romance and relationships’ (Cassar, 2009:49).

The intricate relationship between the inscriptions and dominant cultural and religious discourses explains their failure to question, resist or renegotiate the hegemonic status of male dominance. Female high school students, thus end up ‘obliged to use a language that is not of their own making [...] remain[ing] “outsiders”, “borrowers” of the language [...] and [therefore] male property rights to the language are reinforced rather than weakened by women’s use of language’ (Spender, 1985:12). They end up expressing themselves only in male terms. Resultantly, they are using a potentially liberating and empowering forum to further entrench their own dominance by patriarchy. It is not therefore off the mark to suggest that the only norm violation in their inscriptions is the act of writing itself. Outside of that, they are still using language to further male hegemonic discourses. In the process, gender, like other systems of difference and inequality, continues to inculcate ideas and notions about ‘inherent’ natures that imply and justify male dominance (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 2006:247). An application of the broken windows concept on female high school students will wrongly predict the moral decadence of the inscribers.

Lastly, the inscriptions highlight the socially constructed nature of sexual morality. By insisting on virginity, chastity and sexual decadence only on the female, graffiti inscriptions suggest that morality is discursively constructed to keep the female in her ‘proper place.’ As Epstein (2006:46) rightly concludes ‘the social construction of gender is achieved by obvious and subtle controls that assign females and males to social roles and social spheres where it is

believed to be they should be.' Their informal interactions in graffiti end up just reproducing and maintaining those structures of prestige and power which dominates their socialisation process. These findings are by and large consistent with Arluke et al's (1987) conclusion that the weight of the traditional and religious patriarchal master code are so entrenched in feminine psyche that they can only reproduce and perpetuate these dominant discourses in their anonymous inscriptions. The inscriptions end up lending female graffiti a conformist character. The graffiti however manifests some non-conformist signs in so far as the preoccupation with what may be termed as taboo discourse is concerned. Their production of obscene language highlights the power inherent in graffiti practices.

### **6.3.2.2 Male sexual graffiti**

Bay-Cheng (2010) regards school-based sexuality education as representing a formalised attempt to prevent the negative outcomes of irresponsible sexual behaviours and attitudes by adolescents. It is a formalised attempt to inculcate and develop the desired behaviours and attitudes. Socialisation of the adolescents in terms of good behaviours thus proceeds by way of socially constructed hegemonic discourses of dominant groups, the master code, on whose ideology the curricular is based. The construction of these hegemonic discourses, by no means, goes unchallenged. These dominant discourses are contested by different social groups in various forums. Graffiti provides adolescents with discursive spaces on which to contest discourses relayed through school-based hegemonic sexuality education. These discourses emphasise responsible sexuality characterised by abstinence and faithfulness. Given Waller's (2007) concession that parents rarely create the time to discuss sexuality issues with their children, it is imperative to establish how the adolescents construct parallel sexuality discourses in reaction or alongside the discourses on sexuality belonging to education, health, traditional and religious institutions. Thus, graffiti can be conceived in

terms of space enabling adolescents to construct and renegotiate the notions of masculine identities and sexualities on their own terms.

Graffiti produced by male students in high schools and tertiary educational institutions can be read as contestations between hegemonic and subordinate discourses. The analysis of graffiti inscriptions reveals that students construct and negotiate notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, as well as what may be considered new forms sexualities. This section of the research therefore discusses the construal of sex, gay as well as masturbation, as viable sexuality practices.

#### *6.3.2.2.1 Construal of sex*

Graffiti by female students in high partly dwells on what is perceived as ‘negative sexuality.’ Preoccupation on ‘deviant’ behaviours and attitude is largely indicative of how female graffiti writers appear as victims of the patriarchal notions of ‘conventionalism, restraint, passivity and conformity’ (Arluke, Kutakoff and Levin, 1987:2). Analysis of inscriptions made by male high school and tertiary students provides a different dimension. Male graffiti, for example, is partly addressed to the ‘benefits’ of sex, something which contradicts the master code whose signature terms on sexuality include abstinence and marital sex.

Some of the inscriptions suggest a negotiation of the dominant discourses of no sex before marriage and abstinence. Figure 6.21, below illustrates one such case.



**Figure 6.21** *Mhata hupenyu vakomana pasina mhata handirarami* (the vagina is life boys. Without the vagina I won't survive).

In a social context in which educational as well as health discourses on sexuality are dominated predominantly by abstinence and the ‘dangers’ of reckless sexual activity the inscriptions above can be regarded subversive. Evident in the inscription is the celebration of sex as an essential element of one’s life. The intertextual, or more precisely dialogic, import of the statement ‘the vagina (sex) is life’ with clichés such as ‘water is life’ or ‘education is life’ makes for a more interesting reading. The latter, ‘education is life’, resonates in schools and belong to a master code which in turn relegates sex to the margins. ‘Sex is life’ on toilet walls, therefore belongs to a subversive code which seeks to appropriate discourse on sex from the centre and render it multiple and complex. The statement ‘*pasina mhata handingararami*’ (‘without the vagina I won’t survive’) invokes the inclusion of sex in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, where it is considered among other life’s basic needs. Inscriptions such as those in examples (104) to (106) below show the significance of sex to male graffiti writers:

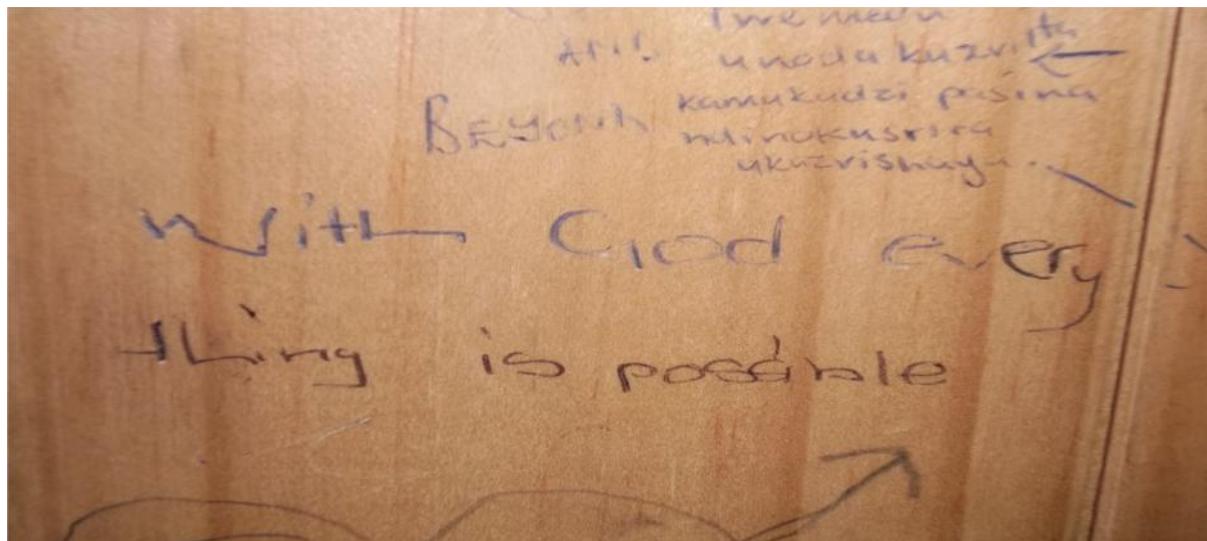
104. Fuck *punani* (fuck girls)

105. Kaydee was born to fuck all bitches

106. Sperm producer

Example (104) suggests a desire to engage in heterosexual sex. Punani, which is Jamaican patois for the female sex organ, is considered an object of male sexual gratification. There is however another possible reading: that the writer is generally ‘fed up’ with girls and might be hinting at alternative forms of sexuality. It is when interpreted in the context of example (105) that a desire to have sex with women is exhibited. Male writers of graffiti seem to see imagine in the context of sleeping with women, whom they regard as objects. When such desires appear frequently on walls and doors, they become naturalised. ‘Sperm producer’ suggests an identity built around notions of sex alone. Such texts reveal male chauvinistic behaviour. It would appear as if the penis is the man and vice versa, perceptions that are not far from some male patriarchal attitudes.

There is also another dimension that comes from the male inscriptions on sex. Sex is regarded as a punitive measure taken against wayward people. Sex can be used as a weapon for debasing perceived wayward individuals, as illustrated by Figure 6.22 below:

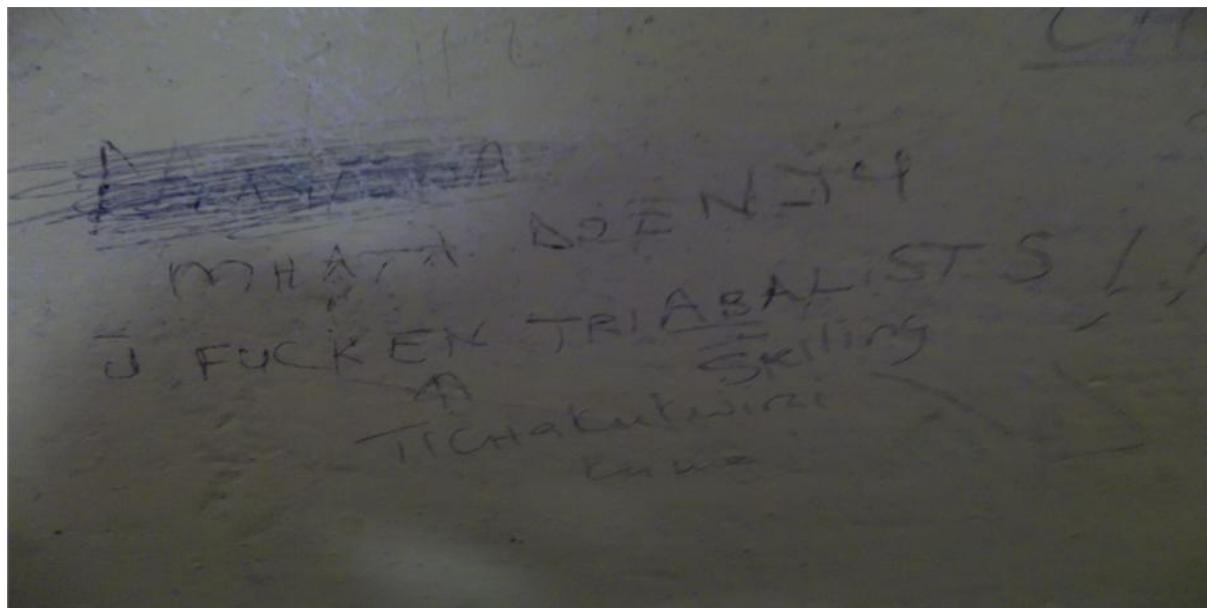


**Figure 6.22** Iwe meda unoda kuzviita kamukadzi pasina ndinokusvira ukazvishaya (Hey Meda you want to a woman for nothing. I will fuck you and you beyond your understand).

The inscription is ambiguous in the sense that Meda can be a girl or a boy who is not behaving according to expectations. On the one hand, the individual in question may be a girl who is acting in ‘deviant’ ways. What is evident is that the writer reads Meda’s behaviour as a challenge to his masculinity. The individual in question may also be an effeminate male who ostensibly ‘deserves’ or ‘warrants’ being fucked by a ‘real man.’ However, the focus is not on the sexual identity of the individual in question. Rather, it is on the suggested course of action considered appropriate in dealing with the individual in question, regardless of their gender. Sabao (2013:87) observes the relationship between sex and discipline thus:

Sex is depicted as a control element, a disciplining tactic inflected upon women who are gutsy enough to stand up to their men and whose character is characterised as arikundijairira (sic) ‘she has no respect for me’ in some scripts.

For the graffiti writer ‘fucking’ the individual is a way of setting them straight or dealing with them accordingly. It is interesting that this course of action is extended to cases involving other males. There are instances where sex is explicitly used in inscriptions as a tool to threaten individuals and/or social groups by students in institutions of tertiary education in ethnicity ‘wars’, as illustrated by Figure 6.23 below.



**Figure 6.23** Mhata dzenyu u fucken triabalists – tichakukwirai (your vaginas/arseholes you fucking tribalists – we will ride/fuck you).

In this case the researcher considers the two possible meanings of the Shona term ‘mhata’, as either referring to the vagina or the anus. Suppose the writer referred to ‘vagina’, and had a case against male tribalists, it would affirm Connell’s notion about multiple masculinities. To suggest that a man is endowed with a vagina is to say he is not masculine enough. This, in turn, evokes notions of femininity which justifies the threat *tichakukwirai* (we will ride/fuck you). The second translation ‘your arseholes’ would still carry a more or less similar meaning, except that it conforms to a more general insult, for example in black American insults.

The threat in Figure 6.23 lies in the fact that the individual in question will not enjoy the punishment and this will force them to change their behaviour. This further draws attention to the utility of sex within masculinities. It is regarded as a weapon against weaker people, especially women. The male is conceived as the enforcer of discipline. Rape is also perceived as the ultimate sign of dominance and humiliation. It is common for men to diagnose ‘errant’ women of sexual deprivation, views which are almost similar to Freud’s ideas on female

sexuality. Some men actually believe the solution is to sleep with such women and impregnate them. Ferlic (2008) admits that most societies and cultures in fact use sex as a way of controlling wayward or deviant members, thereby underlining the creative power of sexuality. Commenting on the ‘punitive’ function of sexual intercourse, Participant 7 in example (107) maintained:

107. Sex is a dominating weapon. In Tonga sex inonzi kukunda. Kukwira munhu kwakafana mekumukunda (sex is a dominating weapon. In Tonga sex is referred to as to beat/win. To fuck someone is to beat him/her).

Sex is therefore perceived as an action that is heavily inflected with power struggles whereby the participants aim to dominate the other. In this light, males take sex as a way of keeping their female partners subordinated. In extreme cases, rape is perceived as the ultimate sign of dominance and humiliation. These views obviously assume that women do not want sex and they only engage in it at the behest of men – maybe due to reproductive pressures.

Inscriptions in the male high school toilets reveal an active construction of sexual fantasies which involve female teachers. Examples (108) to (111), below, show the extent to which this is done.

108. Mrs [name not clear] I have had sex u [*sic*] (Mrs [name not clear] I have had sex with you).

109. Suck my dick miss Phiri

110. I fucked mrs kujinga

111. Mrs Chikwaka *vakachemerera pandavasvira* by me (Mrs Chikwaka moaned when I fucked her).

Taken out of the context of masculinities and associated relations of power, the inscriptions may seem nothing more than adolescent fantasies actively constructed by horny adolescents trying to get to terms with an overflow of hormones in their systems. However, when considered in the context of masculinities the act of imagining oneself having sex with a

female teacher represents a destabilisation of authority and the affirmation of manhood. The process of masculinity socialisation more often than not involves teasing boys for coming second best to girls. Boys are chided for signs of weakness against girls, which translates to failure to dominate. These sentiments reflect the general gender order in most patriarchal societies where there are gendered spaces and roles. It presents potentially serious problems for most men to find themselves in spaces that are dominated by females.

Educational institutions present some of those unique cases in which the males do not want to accept female dominance yet they are ironically led by the very people they think they are better than. Graffiti revealing sexual fantasies can then be regarded as a way of rationalising anomalous power relations. Examples (108) and (109) frame these fantasies along pornographic ‘lines’ where the idea is to totally dominate and humiliate. The sucking of the dick can, presumably, be well-executed when the woman is in a kneeling position where the woman appears to be ‘bowing’ to the man and showing ‘reverence’ to the male symbol (the phallus). Statements about ‘*kuchemerera*’ (‘moaning’) are meant to show that, in spite of the boys’ inferior age, they can sexually dominate or/and gratify the adult female teacher. The inscriptions therefore can be interpreted as indicative of the men’s solution for getting to grips with a social environment which puts them under individuals who are perceived as inferior to them. Inscribed in these fantasies is a healthy notion of hostile sexism which is aimed at degrading women who occupy social positions that are perceived as a threat to patriarchal hegemony (de Lemus, Moya and Glick, 2010). The female teachers are imagined as sexual objects and as, therefore, inferior to the male students. Such fantasies are compared to those constructed by female students as illustrated by example (112):

112.        *Natasha anoda sir vescience*

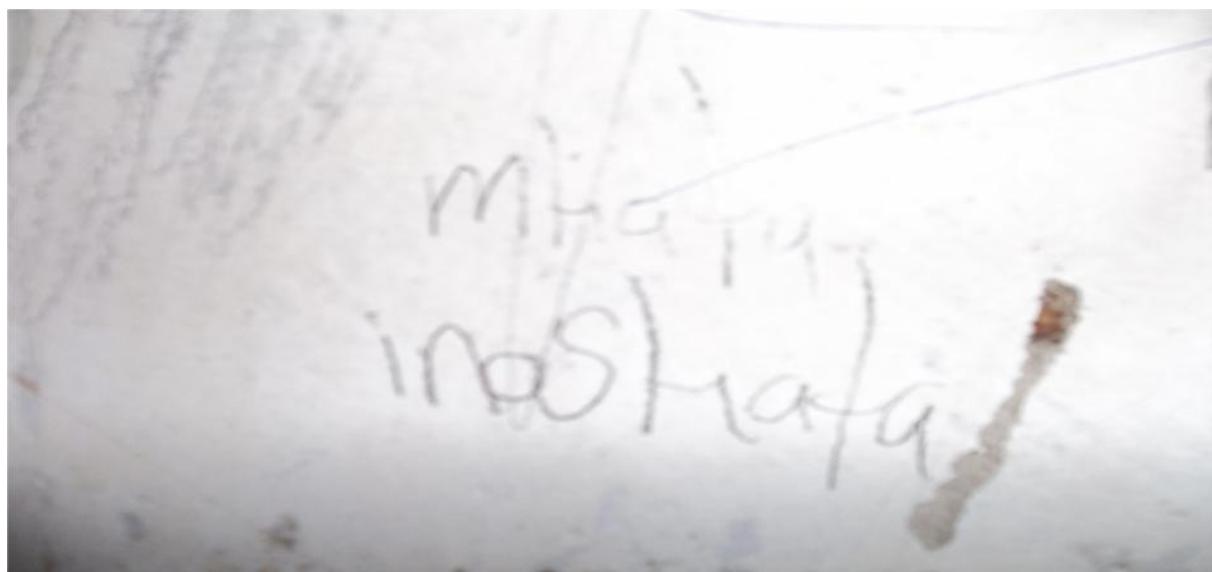
Example (112) represents a moderate fantasy/aspiration in the sense that it suggests a ‘healthier’ desire which does not seek to dominate or debase the other party. The use of ‘sir’ is taken as indicative of some degree of respect towards the teacher concerned. It is also worth noting that the inscription makes no explicit reference to sex. Graffiti on sexual fantasies and desires inscribed on toilet walls by both male and female students is suggestive of a fundamental difference: while the more erotic fantasies by male students seek to totally dominate and debase the female teachers, the more romantic desires constructed by female students seek healthier relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

#### *6.3.2.2.2 Homosexuality*

Zimbabwe is a nation that has unequivocally outlawed the practice of homosexuality. Still the anonymity of graffiti writing allows individuals to explore this marginalised sexuality. Analysis of the inscriptions in male toilets in high schools and tertiary institutions revealed a certain degree of similarity with other researches that have been carried out on homosexual graffiti. Sechrest and Flores (1969), Stocker, Dutcher, Hargrove and Cook (1985) as well as Trahan (2011) reveal how both heterosexual and homophobic graffiti compete for discursive spaces offered by the toilet walls. The diversified nature of the social milieu in which the inscriptions were made are suggestive of the fact that the general tolerance level of homosexuality in each respective context shapes its (re)construction and negotiation on the walls.

Inscriptions on homosexuality in Zimbabwean high school and tertiary institution toilet walls can be broadly classified into pro- and anti-homosexuality writings. Pro-homosexuality inscriptions display a certain degree of diversity depending on how the inscription intends to discursively position the reader. The mild inscriptions are aimed at justifying or, at least,

rationalising the availability of alternative sexualities. An inscription such as in figure 6.24 below, prompts the reader towards this position.



**Figure 6.24** *Mhata inoshata* (the vagina is not pleasurable).

In the event that ‘*mhata*’ refers to ‘vagina’, the text would represent a subversive code against heteronormative expectations characterising sexuality in Zimbabwe. Dominant discourses on sexuality represent heterosexuality as the ‘only’, ‘normal’, ‘moral’ and ‘humane’ sexuality that can be practiced. All the 12 focus group participants unanimously declared that it is not normal for any individual to practice homosexuality. In example (113), Participant 1, summed up the ‘impossibility’ of practising homosexuality by pointing out:

113. Hazvitomboiti. Hazvitombotenderwi nyangwe nemubhaibheri (It’s virtually impossible. It’s not allowed even in the bible).

Thus, the participants used hegemonic cultural and religious discourses to castigate their denouncement of homosexuality. They even went as far as attributing its existence to evil forces and what they considered questionable religious practices such as Satanism. The inscription also challenges taken-for-granted perceptions on pleasures of vaginal penetration. The discourse on heterosexual identity is partially predicated on the pleasures assorted with vaginal penetration and its associated orgasm. This discourse has served as one of the major

pull forces drawing men towards heterosexuality. The inscription can therefore serve to orient the reader towards a redefinition and rethinking of notions of heterosexual pleasure. When the other, dictionary, meaning of ‘mhata’ (as anus) is considered, the text would therefore assume a homophobic character. It would be a contribution to the master code, one which seeks to enforce heterosexuality.

Some graffiti inscriptions in male toilets operated like a newspaper’s classified section. Male writers take the walls as platforms through which they can seek male partners. In this case the anonymity granted by graffiti motivates writers to write almost anything. Figure 6.25 below is one such instance:



**Figure 6.25:** Ndiri kutsagawo [sic] mukomana wekusvira kumanyowa (I am looking for a boy/male to fuck in the ass).

The inscription reveals two aspects about the homosexuality. Firstly, we learn from the inscription that homosexuality is also gendered, in the sense that one of the participants performs ‘maleness’ while the other performs ‘femaleness.’ Madero (2012) acknowledges the significance and part played by gender role performance in general homosexual sociability. Homosexuality is a social practice in which gender is actively ‘done.’ The inscription in 6.27 constructs homosexual identities on the basis of performance where one performs the male

role of penetration while the other one becomes the recipient. Interestingly, homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is also constructed and framed along patriarchal tendencies of objectifying another body, as exemplified by the explicit statement of the inscriber's intention. The inscription thus reveals the existence of gender orders even in sexualities that are practiced amongst supposed equals. This highlights a crucial aspect of gender as a system that operates on inequality. The fact that the participants are both males does not necessarily mean that they perform the same roles. One has to perform the dominant role while the other has to play the subordinate role, suggesting a system that is based on unequal relationships of power.

However, a notable omission in Zimbabwean inscriptions on gay invitation is the role of the penis. The inscriptions collected from the toilet surfaces only explicitly mentioned *kusvira* (fucking) and do not focus on the role of the phallus. Example (114), below, is one such instance from a university student who only stated that,

114. Am looking for gays on campus.

A significant omission in inscriptions of this kind is the role of the penis in homosexual relationships which is evident in examples used by Madero (2012, n.p.), who observes the centrality of the penis in gay invitations, in examples (115) and (116) below:

115. Big, fat dick. I like lightly built, hairless, passive guys. Every day from 4.30-7 p.m (Madero 2012, n. p.).

116. I come here every day. I have an 8-inch, fat dick. I'll be waiting.

These examples highlight the glorified role of the penis in eliciting potential gay partners. Madero (2012) acknowledges the centrality of the extraordinary size and bulk of the penis in what he refers to as the 'symbolic capital in the economy of pleasure and stereotypes to

seduce anal receptors' (n. p.). The 'penile codes' serve the role of establishing the dichotomous dominant/active – dominated/passive sexual roles that are ascribed to masculinity. Although the penile code is not inscribed in Zimbabwean graffiti, the dichotomous active – passive roles are implicitly inscribed through the stylistic choice of the verb *kusvira* (to fuck). When combined with *ndiri kutsvaga* (I'm seeking), one gets to understand that one male actively seeks and then sleeps with the sought-after partner. Thus, the invitation is constructed, inflected or inscribed with the proposition that the respondent is coming in to fill the dominated sexualised role in the relationship. They come with the full knowledge that they are nothing but the writer's source of sexual pleasure. In spite of the omission of the penile codes, Zimbabwean inscriptions on gay invitation are still consistent with other such inscriptions on the basis that they 'generally submit to the performance and distribution of sexual roles that are supported by the masculine/feminine representation dichotomy' ((Madero 2012, n. p.).

The notion of unequal relationships in gay relationships highlights another issue that is consistent with the homosexuality inscriptions and discourses, especially in graffiti inscriptions. The majority of the inscriptions made explicit or implicit references to the anus as illustrated in examples (117) to (120) below:

117. Gwanzura *anosvirwa naMukwembi sure* (Gwanzura is fucked in the ass by Mukwembi).
118. Kiki *anogara achiswa* [sic] *kumanyowa nakumbi* (Kiki is frequently fucked in the manure/ass by Kumbi).
119. Eto *ingochani naRusike vanoisana kumagaro muoffice* (Eto is gay and Rusike they fuck each other in the office).
120. Diggs *imhata yaTino* (Diggs is Tino's vagina/arsehole)

The inscriptions from (117) to (120) all make reference to the anus in one way or the other. Whilst, *kumagaro* is the most common term used to refer to a person's behind, *sure* (back) is also commonly used to represent the anus. *Kumanyowa* pejoratively refers to the anus. Example (120) makes an implicit reference to the anus through the use of the term 'mhata' in reference to a male perceived as another's object of sexual penetration. The inscriptions in examples (117) to (120) reflect a number of attitudes towards homosexuality. The common derogatory reference to the anus as *kumanyowa* (where the manure is) reveals a negative perception towards homosexuality. It invokes images of filth and dirt, images which are hurled against homosexuals in many African cultures. Madero (2012) also reveals this trend in Havana homosexuality graffiti as exemplified by (121) and (122) below:

121. I fuck men in **the ass**. If you live alone and want to meet me, come Friday April 23 at 2. p.m., I'll be wearing white (Madero, 2012, n. p.)

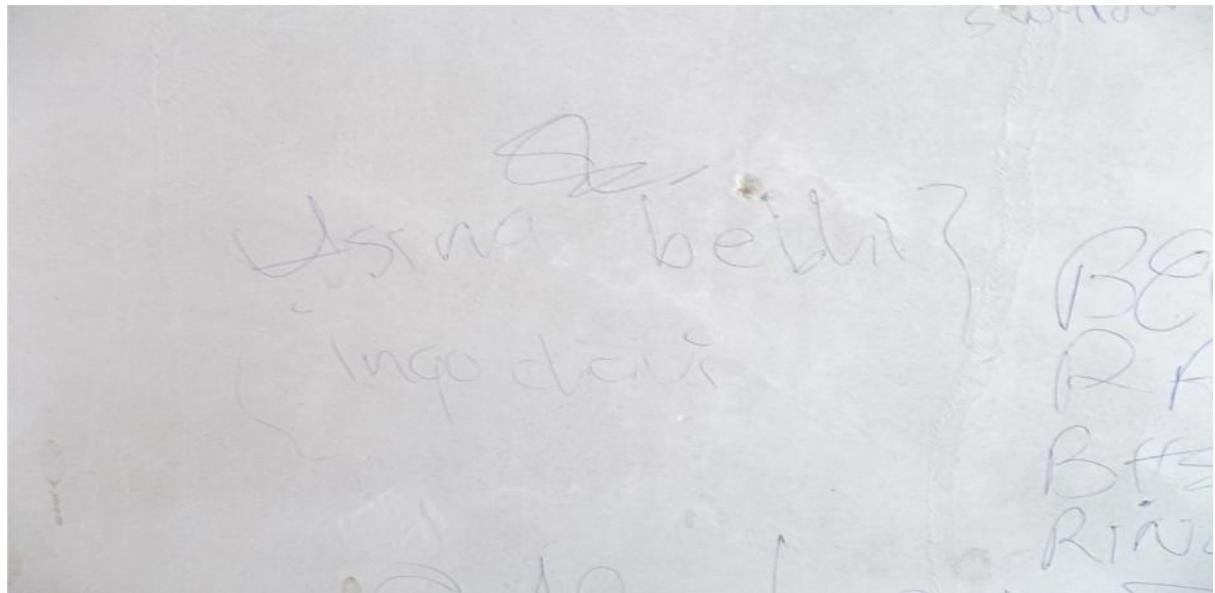
122. Mulatto man, big dick, **loves asses**, and getting sucked. Tell me how we can meet (Madero, 2012, n. p.).

The term *manyowa* represents the anus as an orifice that is full of faeces (symbolised by manure). Madero (2012) considers the obsessive association of faeces with homosexuality as indicative of the general tendencies of reducing gay, or homoerotic, subjects to nothing more than mere anal receptors whose bodies are narrowly perceived as orifices. He goes on to add that, at the same time, homoerotic desire is thus simplistically reduced to the anal desire of the penis. Trahan (2011) explains that such routine dismissals of homosexuality reveal a battle that go beyond simple matters of sexuality. He considers homophobic statements not just as mere statements about sexuality but also as ideological expressions. The obsessive references to the anus construct homosexuality as a penetrated masculinity (Pascoe 2005). Penetrated masculinities are cases whereby the males are considered to have abdicated their

power and as such are seen as lesser beings. Homophobic discourses therefore become a deliberate construction of marked sexuality in the battle for ideological legitimacy.

The battle for legitimacy and dominance in sexuality discourses manifests itself in taken-for-granted insults to perceived ‘deviant’ or ‘deficient’ males who are labelled *ngochani* (gay).

Figure 6.26 below presents an interesting example.



**Figure 6.26** *Usina bhebhi ingochani* ([any boy] without a girlfriend is gay)

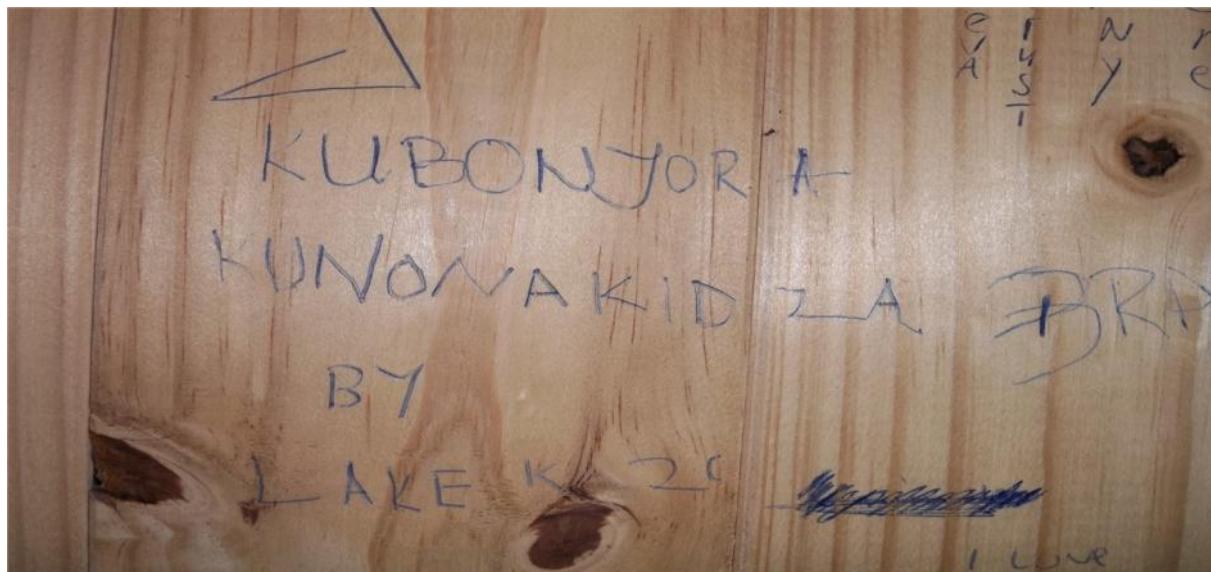
The inscription assumes that every male is, at any given time, supposed to have a girlfriend. Normative heterosexual experiences dictate that a man should have a girlfriend. The fact that this inscription is found in the context of a high school, where romantic relationships are, at best discouraged, is reflective of an active construction of masculinities in adolescent sexualities. Such expectations on romantic relationships are perceived as discourse running parallel to the mainstream institutional discourses (educational and religious) that stress the importance of shelving ‘deviant’ romantic relationships and prioritise education instead. Again we see master and subversive codes interacting. Graffiti inscriptions of this nature imply that only sexuality worth practising is heterosexuality such that any male without a girlfriend has

to be labelled gay. Heterosexuality is construed as the default setting and any deviancy is met with social disapproval. Pascoe (2005:330) refers to this discursive use of homophobic language as ‘fag talk’, which he characterises as a central mechanism in the construction of contemporary adolescent masculinities in America. Gay-related inscriptions such as this one perform a social regulative function whereby they are meant to discipline and institute behavioural change to perceived deviant males. As Pascoe (2005) elaborates, the males are schooled on potential ‘gay’ behaviour and strive to avoid it at all costs. The gay label is therefore seen as performing the same regulatory function as the discursive use of *hure* by female students. The only distinction between the two social corrective labels is that *ngochani* and *hure* have different corrective effects. On the one hand, *hure*, as used in female high school students, is used to regulate behaviours of fellow students who are perceived as overstepping their gender and sexuality boundaries. The female students police each other so that they live according to predominantly traditional gender role expectations. *Ngochani*, on the other hand, serves to perform a rather contradictory socialisation function. Whilst it serves to ‘pressurise’ males who are perceived dominant in romantic and sexual activities, it also curtails their exercise or experimentation with other alternative sexualities such as homosexuality. A remarkable point in the discursive uses of the two terms is their apparent functional complementary distribution. *Hure* is used mostly by females against other female peers perceived as deviant whilst *ngochani* is mainly used by males against perceived deviant peers. *Hure* is meant to curtail female rights of association and movement whilst *ngochani* is used to attain two seemingly distinct social functions in male discourses. On the one hand, it is used to ‘peer-pressure’ males into heterosexual relationships. In this instance masculinity is predicated on male ‘possession’ of a girlfriend, presumably for domination purposes. On the other hand, it is meant to police other males from experimenting or practising gay sexuality. The two social corrective labels, *hure* and *ngochani* underline the

social constructed nature of ‘morality’, which is then taken as the basis on which notions of ‘normal’ or ‘appropriate’ behaviours are evaluated in situ.

#### *6.3.2.2.3 Masturbation*

Masturbation is considered as natural self-soothing activity by the Child Welfare Training Institute at the University of Southern Maine (2006). It is seen as a sexual activity that starts as early as infancy (*ibid*). It is only that in infancy it is not as goal-directed as when practiced in adolescence or adulthood. The differential goals in infancy and in adolescence and adulthood bring in the dimension of nurtured needs. Whilst masturbation is instinctive in infancy, it is used by the latter groups to achieve predetermined social functions. It is, however, not a universally accepted sexual phenomenon and its practice is open to contestations in different social milieu. Whiting and Koller (2007) note the significance of male toilets as sites of sexual practices such as masturbation and how this practice can be enacted both physically and/or through constructions of shared knowledge. It is in this light that graffiti inscriptions found in male toilets in high school and tertiary education institutions are analysed in order to explore how they reveal male social constructions of masturbation. Debates on the ‘normalcy’, ‘legitimacy’ or ‘appropriateness’ of masturbation characterise male graffiti on the subject. The inscriptions range in mood from mere declarations about the pleasures or ‘benefits’ of masturbation, to the dangers of masturbation to downright denouncement against masturbation. Figure 6.27 is an example of inscriptions which glorify masturbation.



**Figure 6.27** *kubonyora kunonakidza* by Lakek (masturbation is pleasurable by Lakek)

The writer merely declares that masturbation is fun without elaborating further. Such a declaration is obviously in conflict with the school master code, especially when governed by religious discourses which see masturbation as a sin. This inscription is complemented by yet another, (123) below, which declares:

123. I am a form 3 student who enjoys masturbation.

These inscriptions need to be understood dialogically, with inscriptions on the pleasures of ‘straight’ sex and those on gay sex. Together, they represent serious ideological contestations around notions of sexuality where writers seek to establish a particular sexuality as the best or the commonsensical one to pursue or practice. Read together, the inscriptions reveal a battle for ideological supremacy in the sexuality battles where one is declared as the most pleasurable ahead of the other. Examples (124) to (126) demonstrate this battle of sexualities as inscribed in toilet graffiti.

- 124. *Beche rinonaka* (the vagina is pleasurable)
- 125. *Kubonyora kunonakidza* (masturbating is pleasurable)
- 126. *Mhata inoshata* (the vagina tastes bad)

The inscriptions in examples (125) and (126) have the notion of pleasure as a defining characteristic of sexuality. In this case it is pleasure that is taken to be the defining function of

sexuality rather than its reproductive function as the school master code would suggest. Example (124) is included to explicitly highlight the taken-for-granted position of heterosexuality as the most satisfying and pleasurable sexuality option. The untold pleasures of masturbation are also constructed in graffiti from other social and cultural contexts as illustrated in examples by Stocker et al (1972) and Zelinski (2010) in examples (127) and (128), respectively:

127. Masturbate now! You'll never know what you missed (Stocker et al, 1972:366).

128. Masturbation is the best form of self-expression. And sex is occasionally a good substitute for masturbation (Zelinski, 2010:51).

By questioning the legitimacy of sex's legendary pleasure, the inscription pursues other sexualities that are regarded as more satisfying in so far as pleasure is concerned. Other inscriptions on masturbation, however, bring in a different dimension as illustrated by example (129) below.

129. *Rambai muchibonyora kuti zvinhu zvifambe* (keep on masturbating for things to be alright).

It is apparent that the inscription is not predicated on the pleasure argument. It brings in a certain degree of functionality that goes beyond the mere pursuit of pleasure. When read in the context of high schools, especially boarding schools (incidentally the inscription was taken from a boys' toilet at a boarding school) where discipline and security measures curtails the free association between male and female students, the inscription might be interpreted from the point of view of masturbation functioning as a release of sexual tension. Constant interaction between boys and girls may inadvertently, or even inevitably, stir sexual urges in the boys. Masturbation, therefore, remains an alternative to sexual intercourse.

In the context of tertiary education institutions, the inscription in example ... (*kuti zvinhu zvifambe*) takes a different dimension in that unlike in high schools where boys cannot freely

‘interact’ with girls, males in tertiary institutions have the freedom to do so. In fact, most toilets (as well as clinics) in these institutions have a healthy supply of both male and female condoms which suggests an expectation regarding their sexual activities. The impersonal verb *rambai* (continue) instead of the more inclusive *ngatirambe* (let us continue) implies a double act of appreciating the necessity of masturbation as a sexual practice whilst distancing oneself from it. This is indicative of the constructed nature of sexualities where meanings and attitudes are shaped through discourses. Inscriptions in male toilets in tertiary education institutions highlighted this constructed nature of masturbation through discourse as highlighted by examples (130) to (133) below.

130. HMS (Masturbation studies)

HMS 101: Introduction to masturbation  
102

131. kusabonyora is not a sign of being good or faithful but a lack of high sperm content. Look for help before it is too late. By NVD. Comments.

vabonyori@live.com.

You need Jesus  
Not Jesus but Allah  
Jesus is not an expect [sic] on sex

132. Masturbation is advisable but not excessively. Its [sic] normal to masturbate AIDS kills.

So you mean those with AIDS do not mustarbate [sic]. Be serious young man.

133. *Pamberi nebonyora* (forward with masturbation).

Example (130) illustrates the socially constructed nature of sexuality in general as well as masturbation in particular. In the context of university education acronyms such as HMS usually stand for degree programmes. By proposing a degree on masturbation, the writer creatively toys with an impossibility of taking sex discourse into the school curriculum, thereby destabilising conventionalised education. Example (131) seemingly functions to complement example (130) in the sense that it rubbishes uninformed and, hence unfounded, assumptions about the practice of masturbation. The inscription sets about to dismiss

‘misconceptions’ about idealistic or reductionist if not myopic, notions of ‘good’ and ‘faithfulness’ (which are central concepts in both traditional moral as well as religious discourses). The writer bases his ‘argument’ on the biological condition of low sperm count (which he erroneously refers to as sperm content). The inscription makes the assertion that those who do not masturbate do so as a simple consideration of its effect on their reproductive ability. The chain of responses following the statement lends it a dialogic character. Just as graffiti dialogues with discourses external to it, it also enables an internal form of dialogue. The inclusion of religious arguments (Christianity and Islam) is especially crucial in the sense that it serves to highlight the supposed ‘inadequacy’ of religious discourses in defining issues such as sexuality. Religiosity is constructed through the invocation of the ‘expert’ (erroneously represented as expect) discourses to question both the quality and utility of sexuality knowledge emanating from these discourses. Thus, the various utterances can be read as appeals to males to be more pragmatic when approaching issues of sexuality. Key in the two examples is the role played by ‘knowledge’ or ‘information’ in the social construction of knowledge. The examples suggest that it is unfounded and uneducated ideas that inform the marginalisation of other forms of sexuality such as masturbation and there is need to ‘(re)educate’ the ‘ignorant’ to make them ‘see the light.’ Thus, knowledge is the source of power that the inscriptions draw upon to advance their positions in this ideological repositioning of masturbation as a legitimate option.

Example (132) represents a compromise between the practices of heterosexual and masturbation. The writer acknowledges the high prevalence of AIDS, which he assumes is contracted in heterosexual relationships (The researcher is also open to possibilities that the condition can also develop in the context of homosexual, bisexual as well other forms of sexualities). What seems to be given is the fact that the condition seems to be conceived as

obtaining in associations that involve the participation of at least two individuals, regardless of their biological sex. However, the commonplace assumption that most Zimbabwean people make is that AIDS is a heterosexual condition. It is from the belief that AIDS develops in sexual relationships involving multiple partners that writers of graffiti propose masturbation as an attractive proposition. Thus, the proposition is based on the notion of mortality, which is meant to make it attractive. Interestingly, female tertiary institution participants were sympathetic to males who engage in masturbation. They justified their perceptions on masturbation as highlighted in example (134) by Participant 8:

134. At times those people *vanenge vari right. Ini hangu ndowona sekuti zviri nani. Mafeelings agara ariko kuvanhu. Pamwe musikana wake haapo. Zviri nani pane kubuda. Ini semusikana* I will understand (At times those people are justified. I think it's better [for a male to masturbate]. Feelings are a part of people's make up. Maybe his girlfriend is not around. It's better [to masturbate] than to go out [looking for prostitutes]. As a female I will understand).

Participant 8 highlights how masturbation is socially constructed as a sexuality that is better adapted to solve health concerns in the context of alleged natural tendencies by men to constantly engage in sexual intercourse and the inevitable threat of sexually transmitted diseases as well as the AIDS scourge.

However, example 131 is also a chain of utterance, just like in example (48) above. The responses to assertions about AIDS make interesting reading in the sense that they question the validity of the implication that those who have AIDS do not masturbate. Whilst the argument is open to debate, and can understandably go either way, the most significant part of that response is the use of the term 'young man' in the inscription. This part is meant to draw on hegemonic patriarchal discourses which contend that young men are immature and they are prone to lapses in reasoning and perceptions. Thus, the response is a slap in the face which seeks to dismiss the first proposition on the basis that it is made by an essentially immature person who has not thought his argument or position through. The response is

therefore read as an implicit recognition of masturbation as a threat to the hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Again, the legitimacy of masturbation is predicated upon perceived knowledge, and wisdom (as invoked by the term young men, backing up the arguments made). The response is therefore interpreted as an attempt to restore ‘heteronormativity [for] the maintenance of heterosexual hegemony’ (Jackson, 1998:142).

Example (89) (*pamberi nebonyora*) draws on a different script to advance its position. Whilst the first three fought their ideological battles on academic grounds, the writer is drawing upon the dominant political script in the country. *Pamberi* (forward with) is a dominant and significant part of, especially, southern African politics. In Mozambique it is realised as *aluta*. Chitando (2002:5) defines slogans as ‘short, precise declarations that demand the response of the audience.’ Slogans are statements that are obviously aimed at eliciting a response from the audience, or from the reader, in the case of graffiti. Being inherently political, slogans are therefore dialogic statements that are aimed at engaging and positioning the reader towards a predetermined ideological position. However, the dialogic nature of the statements is realised when the reader/audience responds in a particular manner. This necessarily involves the priming of the reader such that they can only respond in a predetermined manner. An utterance such as that in example (133) is meant to elicit the response *pamberi* (forward) from the reader. It is an instance of dialogic contraction whereby the reader is primed or positioned to respond in one expected way. The inscription thus draws on the genre of political slogans to invoke democratic notions which are inherent in their mobilisation nature. Fairclough (1999) characterises the process of ideological formation as one that results from propositions that are meant to figure as implicit assumptions in inscriptions. The inscription advances the ideological position of masturbation by eliciting, or forcing the reader into, a positive response to his ‘social’ slogan. Inscriptions in male toilets

in high schools and tertiary educational institution are arenas in which the viability and legitimacy of masturbation is actively constructed. The inscriptions from the two groups of students, however, show a sociolinguistic variation in relation to the treatment of the content on the toilet surfaces. Inscriptions in high schools tended to be less dialogic as they tended to solicit or include little responses from readers. In contrast, the same issue was much more dialogic as evidenced by a number of utterance chains which taken as a manifestation of debate or interaction. The inscriptions in tertiary educational institutions were also more pragmatic in the sense that they tended to focus on the bigger picture by, for example, contextualising the matter on factors hitherto perceived as misinformed or unrealistic such as inadequate knowledge while also detaching it from the wider social factors such as HIV and AIDS. Significant in both cases is the fact that debate on masturbation can be taken as yet another way in which new sexualities are explored with the aim of expanding the horizons of masculine sexual pleasures.

Graffiti inscribed in male toilets in high schools and tertiary institutions highlight p'Bitek's (1998) notions of the sociality of the individual who, as a constructed entity, can only obtain freedom by social cooperation. The socialisation however proceeds in different trajectories or routes. There is a deliberate attempt to construct a gender order predicated on the notion of separation or difference. Graffiti inscriptions in educational institutions in Zimbabwe reveal a deliberate attempt by the writers to construct different realities for the two sexes thereby constructing different gendered identities. The inscriptions interestingly reveal a conformist tendency to construct the gender order based on hegemonic patriarchal dictates of traditional and religious discourses. Thus, the inscriptions show a healthy dose of normative heterosexual expectations. Male graffiti however show signs of sexual adventure through an exploration of alternative or new sexualities such as homosexuality and masturbation.

Inscriptions ‘debating’ the academic legitimacy of masturbation show how reality is itself a constructed notion.

It has to be appreciated that inscriptions in educational institutions can potentially cause a number of social and health-related problems for the society. Chief among them is the fact that graffiti inscriptions in these educational institutions necessarily involve the explicit naming of specific individuals involved in the toilet discourses. Sustained targeting of specific individuals does not necessarily appreciate how such negative attention can in turn negatively impact on the students’ academic performance. A student who feels targeted for the brunt of such discourses can undergo psychological-related disorders such as stress and depression. If these psychological disorders or problems are not quickly identified they may lead to tragic consequences such as ostracism and, in extreme circumstances, suicidal tendencies.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

The chapter analysed how the various surfaces on which graffiti is inscribed offer discursive spaces for the construction of reality. Analysis focused on the multiple reactions to the social practice of graffiti in which attention was directed at participants’ attitudes towards the occurrence of graffiti in urban areas. Participants’ reactions to graffiti revealed a predominant tendency to classify graffiti through a binary approach of graffiti as vandalism or as a utilitarian tool. The graffiti-as-vandalism approach to classifying graffiti was based on the notion that the walls are an inappropriate place for serious discourse and that the practice of graffiti is reflective of inhibited mental and intellectual capacity on the part of the writers. Analysis of street protests revealed the general indomitable nature of human beings in the resistance of economic and political unfreedoms thrust upon them. Street protests showed how power is ubiquitous in society such that it can never be completely vested onto single

individuals, groups or institutions. The various surfaces on which the inscriptions are made show an attempt to redistribute and renegotiate the relationships of inequity. Inscriptions in high school and tertiary institution toilets revealed an active construction of gendered identities by students. Inscriptions by female students revealed a conformist tendency which sought to keep female sexuality in line with normative heterosexual demands. Males on the other hand used the inscription as a masculine-making weapon but went on to explore alternative sexualities such as homosexuality and masturbation.

# **CHAPTER 7**

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.0 Introduction**

The research was a sociolinguistic investigation of variation in graffiti writing in Zimbabwe's urban areas. The social practice of graffiti is an aspect that reveals various aspects of urbanities, contrary to Chitauro-Mawema (2006) who strongly claimed that graffiti is not an aspect of urbanities due to the alternative use of street remarks in the social contexts of urban areas. The discipline of sociolinguistic is a departure from the Chomskian approach to the study of language in that it sets itself apart from Chomsky's notion of universal grammar which, among other things, makes strong claims about the homogeneity of linguistic competence, the universality of grammatical rules and principles (universal grammar) and the marginal role of meaning in communication. Sociolinguistics sets itself apart in the sense that language users develop different components of competencies (subsumed under communicative competence) and these competences vary according to prevailing social factors. Sociolinguistic can then be used to predict linguistic variation within and across groups. The social practice of graffiti was used as an arena for the study of this variation.

In setting about to explore the variation, inscriptions were collected from various surfaces in three urban areas of Zimbabwe. These are Harare, Chitungwiza and Gweru. The aim was to investigate whether any variation exists in graffiti discursive practices. The research was therefore informed by three major research questions which are, what is the spatial distribution of graffiti? What are people's attitudes towards the practice of graffiti? What are the differences between street protests and toilet graffiti in educational institutions? The responses to these research questions were guided by the two theoretical paradigms of social constructionism and critical discourse analysis. Taken together, the two theories predict that

discourse is a social construct (and as such it is contingent to people's interactions) and that the use of this discourse is taken as a reflection of social power. Discourse is then regarded as a tool for the (re)production, maintenance, perpetuation and resistance of power relations. Analysis of the attitudes and the inscriptions collected from the various surfaces were explored from the viewpoint that linguistic use is never neutral and as such the researcher investigated the ideological positions/propositions advanced or resisted in the inscriptions. The conclusion to the research proceeds by way of presentation according to the three subsections of attitudes, street protests and educational graffiti.

## **7.1 Research findings**

The research concluded that graffiti has a very long history and is most likely here to stay. People's denial and dismissal of the existence of graffiti practices does not mean that people will stop inscribing on the walls. The ubiquitous nature of graffiti on various public as well as private surfaces indicates that the practice of inscribing on the urban landscape is likely to endure for some time.

Graffiti writing suggests the lack of alternative spaces for engaging in certain discourses. The control of dominant and hegemonic discourses means that there are very limited spaces for the public engagement of what may be regarded as counter-discourses. In extreme situations, alternative discourses are not tolerated.

Graffiti is used by 'cowards' who lack the courage to openly and publicly air out their sentiments. The prevalence of graffiti in various surfaces as well as in institutions such as educational facilities is testimony of how people in these various forums lack the guts, or the

platform, to directly say what is on their minds. They instead turn to the anonymity of graffiti to speak out their minds.

The practice of graffiti can also reflect hidden agendas. This is especially so in political graffiti where the inscription of the opposition's name on one's durawall is synonymous to the instigation of politically motivated violence against the private owners of the surfaces concerned. In this regard, the inscription of such messages on people's houses can be used as a way of settling scores, political or otherwise, on a political arena.

Graffiti can also be discursively used as *bembera* whereby writers seek to wrest power from the centre. Traditional cultural practices, such as *bembera*, appreciated and recognised the fact that power cannot be vested in any one individual or social group. Graffiti writing highlights the need to decentralise power so as to make it more ubiquitous in the society.

Place is very important in determining attitudes towards both graffiti writers and content. The social formation of attitudes toward graffiti is predicated on notions of where the graffiti is inscribed and where the writer is 'coming from.' This crucial where of graffiti determines perceptions on both the writer and the seriousness of the content. An interesting finding was that the participants took toilet graffiti as the epitome of graffiti and they used this 'knowledge' to undermine graffiti content on the basis that nothing important or significant can ever be written or discussed in the toilet. For the participants, the toilet is only there to provide ablution facilities and nothing more. They also used the physical context of the toilets to perpetuate notions that graffiti is inscribed with faeces as a writing medium, thereby adding to the wholesale dismissal of the practice. In this case, as Seu (2010) rightly puts it, the medium on which graffiti is inscribed is taken to be representative of the message. This perspective is then used as the basis on which to dismiss graffiti as 'disgusting.'

On the other hand, place was instrumental in the making of associations between segments of society most likely to participate in the practice of graffiti. These attitudes revealed latent class struggles whereby those perceived to write on walls are regarded as belonging to the marginalised sectors of society. Chief among them are the location and rural raised people who are socially constructed as ‘unpolished’ and ‘uncivilised’ and are resultantly associated with the ‘crude’ graffiti writing.

Graffiti writing is taken to be indicative of writers’ cognitive disposition. Graffiti writing was perceived as an occupation of people who are either intellectually challenged and/or are somehow mentally incapacitated. This was justified on the basis that since the toilet is obviously not meant for discoursing and the content is on trivial or inconsequential issues, it is most likely that graffiti is a product of people who are incapable of perceiving the apparent inappropriateness of the practice. Presence of graffiti in institutions of higher learning was likewise rationalised on the basis of factors such as the institutions’ massification drive, and students’ alcohol and drug abuse. Massification was regarded as allowing ‘undeserving’ individuals into tertiary education.

The attitudes towards graffiti reflect a deliberate attempt to marginalise and render impotent a ubiquitous discourse. These perceptions are built around the constructed notions of appropriateness and legitimacy, which are ironically so-constructed by the group doing the defining. The attitudes are therefore a reflection of power differences and inequalities inherent in all systems based on difference.

Another significant difference that emerges from the analysis of the participants' attitude is the fact that graffiti is not so much characterised as vandalism, but as defacement of public and private property. As such, it is not associated with other forms of crime, serious or otherwise, as is the case with other researches on graffiti. Instead, strong links are made between defacement and notions of immaturity, juvenile delinquency, dysfunctional familial background (also associated with lack of moral guidance) as well as intellectual incapacity and mental inhibition due to alcohol and/or drug abuse. These negative reactions to graffiti strips the wall, as well as other surfaces on which graffiti is inscribed, and render them ineffective spaces for public engagement. Resultantly, whilst the surfaces may be very accessible to the writer, their potentially to intersubjectively position the audiences towards their propositions are then compromised or minimised.

Graffiti is not regarded as a form of art. Rather, it is characterised as an alternative utilitarian discourse that functions as an outlet for pent up emotions and, politically, to resist conditions of domination.

Graffiti can be characterised as street protest. The term street graffiti was chosen by the researcher to refer to graffiti whose salient spatial distribution was mainly durawalls of both public and private institutions. These inscriptions are generally militant in nature and they tend to reflect socio-economic as well as political commentary. The inscription of graffiti can therefore be taken as the manifestation of the people's indomitable spirit.

Inscriptions on ZESA show a pragmatic response to the energy crisis facing both the country and the region. Apart from the expected inscriptions demanding power, a surprising result was that there were some inscriptions which adopted a negotiated approach to the redressing

of identified power-related problems. The significant issue was that the inscribers construct themselves as having the power to negotiate with a formidable foe and use the empowering nature of the durawalls to voice their concerns.

Political graffiti is a multi-nuanced discourse which cannot be realistically approached from a single standpoint. It cannot just be approached from a one-dimensional approach which presupposes that it only offers spaces on which the dominated groups seek to challenge political hegemony and master codes. Political graffiti should be treated as a multi-nuanced platform which allows for the engagement of both master and subservient codes side by side. Political graffiti in Zimbabwe revealed tendencies to employ inscriptions for either pro-hegemonic or anti-hegemonic purposes. Anti-hegemonic inscriptions are used to declare the presence of the opposition in the urban areas, with Harare recording the highest variation in the opposition parties inscribed on the walls.

Most significantly, anti-hegemonic graffiti was perceived as a manifestation of traditional checks and balances which sought to maintain the love-hate relationship between leaders and their subject as healthy as possible. By and large, anti-hegemonic graffiti, in its constant challenge of hegemonic discourses, reveals the indomitable spirit of the human being.

Graffiti can be used to perpetuate master codes and political hegemony. Pro-hegemonic graffiti highlights how graffiti is used to maintain the status quo as well as further the *commandement*. Such kinds of inscriptions are therefore used to further the ideology of the current political dispensation. In the process, graffiti was used to mark residences of perceived opposition supporters as a possible way of inciting youth militia to institute political violence against the perceived opponents.

Graffiti is used by female high school students to perpetuate patriarchal hegemonic tendencies to sexualise females and, in the process, curtail their freedom of association. Girls are not only made to share the blame for the phenomenon of their sexualisation but they are actually made wholly responsible for their condition and male participation is downplayed. It is the female who must always ‘keep her legs shut’, must not provoke the males into having, or at least wanting to have, sex with her, and snatch other females’ unsuspecting lovers. Female inscriptions in high school toilets do not therefore ‘challenge much of what has counted as “knowledge”’ possibly due to the fact that they have internalised this knowledge as a result of their being part of male-dominated societies for so long (Jackson and Jones, 1998:1).

In using man-made language (Spender, 1985) the inscriptions serve to only legitimise the prevailing gender order which has effectively kept females subordinated. Graffiti is not being used as an arena for communicating social alienation. It is actually used to achieve the opposite effective. That is, that of socially alienating perceived deviant individuals. This is all done in the guise of gender accountability where the inscriptions are used to interpellate perceived deviant individuals. The irony of gender performativity is that females by virtue of being sexually repressed, perceive themselves as the key to human sexuality and gender performativity for both sexes. In this regard females are the mules of sexuality.

Inscriptions in male toilets revealed a masochist tendency to construct sex as a calling for men who consider themselves incapable of surviving without sex. This is seen as a reaction against the abstinence messages dominating educational health and religious discourses which advocate for putting education ahead of romantic relationships and sexual activity.

Sex is also constructed as a tool for domination and a regulative weapon for wayward individuals who need to be put in their right position. This regulative and domination role of sex was not only restricted to females. It was also applied to males especially in the settling of ethnicity scores in tertiary institutions.

Graffiti is used to construct and negotiate alternative sexualities such as homosexuality. Inscriptions questioning or debating the assumed pleasure of vaginal intercourse highlight the constructed nature of the notion of pleasure on which heterosexual intercourse is predicated on. The academic motif used in inscriptions on masturbation epitomise the constructed nature of sexuality and how it is a product of existing knowledge. Implied in the inscriptions is that changes or ‘developments’ in knowledge in turn informs changes in sexuality as well as gendered identities.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

Recommendations are in this research conceived of statements of facts that are used to enforce action. They are made on the basis of the study findings. The recommendations are listed below:

1. As deduced from graffiti plot and setting people are emotional and manifest emotional outbursts. Therefore, people should desist from emotional outbursts and face the truth or reality.
2. It was found out that most of the graffiti was found in hidden places like bridges and toilets. This shows hidden agenda. Therefore, it cannot receive public attention. One might have wonderful ideas but they won’t reach a wide or preferred audience. People therefore need to air out their views on more conventional forms of media.

3. Graffiti has aesthetic and artistic potential. This research recommends the archiving of some graffiti inscriptions for posterity. We can learn the history of an epoch based on graffiti material of the time. What we gather from Zimbabwean graffiti on politics, ZESA and sexualities through graffiti is a significant part of the country's future. After thirty years this graffiti might disappear and yet it should remain as a record of events of the time.
4. The research observed that graffiti inscribers use a special paint which cannot be easily washed away. It is a recommendation that such paints should be used to inscribe other essential material.
5. Graffiti can be a strategic tool that can be used by economists, marketers, politicians, social commentators, jester-cum-moralists and comedians. These various people can use graffiti to good effect in society.
6. Sexuality education should, in part, speak to the discourses found in various toilets in educational institutions. Graffiti in educational institutions can be taken as discourse representative of the adolescences' views on various sexuality issues.
7. More conventional spaces should be opened up to promote and further public debate in the urban landscape. Public spaces should not only be restricted to recreation alone but should extend to meaningful development oriented public engagement.

### **7.3 Directions for future research**

The research has not been exhaustive in terms of its analysis of graffiti inscriptions in urban areas. There are a number of areas where further development through theses and research papers is envisaged. The research did not fully explore political graffiti as some inscriptions tended to be extremely abusive and vulgar as they were perceived as promoting hate speech.

Analysis of these elements from a different theoretical perspective goes a long way in exposing their motivation and potential effects in the political arena.

There is also need for further exploration of social graffiti especially in connection with how graffiti is used in identity construction. Jena (201) hints at the existence of murals and pieces in the high density suburb of Mbare. There is therefore need to contextualise these forms of graffiti to the socio-cultural milieu to appreciate relationships between their production and utility.

Finally, there is also need to interrogate the assertion that graffiti is a product of urbanity. The obsessive focus on the artistic value of graffiti has had the negative effect of sidelining/overlooking other forms of graffiti. Chitauro-Mawema (2006) makes hints of the proliferation of graffiti in rural areas. Her assertions therefore provide impetus for study of this type of graffiti that has received little to no academic attention. A study of this graffiti may then also reveal important insights of this population segment that have not been hitherto exposed.

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