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I was at Mr. Balakasi' old shop where there was a shoemaker, having my sandals mended. My friend, nicknamed Itendo, came by (Itendo is a common nickname, it means "happenings" in Yao so there may be an implication behind this name). While the shoemaker was busy mending my sandals and we were chatting, a certain young girl, I believe aged 14 years, passed by. As she was passed by, my friend Itendo noticed that she was pregnant, and said 'This young girl is pregnant? But nowadays young girls are very fast with this exercise' (he said *masewera amenewa*, Chichewa, "this exercise") He said, 'But ladies are seasonal, they shine for a while and then wither, like a flower. This girl who has just passed by here, I thought she could have married someone rich. She was very proud, I once tried to propose her last year but she rebuffed me greatly. I wish I could meet her face to face and tease her.'

Then before Itendo finished talking the shoe maker began talking and said, 'Do you still go for ladies nowadays?' My friend answered, 'that was last year when I saw her as being beautiful, now I don't even think of having a partner. I was used having them before, but now I have realized that it has no goal, it's only wasting my money for nothing instead of supporting my wife and children. For you know sexual friendship is very demanding, you don't even eat whatever you have bought for her but rather she eats it herself or even her other sexual partners [eat it].' The shoemaker then laughed and said 'And now you are clever because you have realized that! This time is not a time for you young men to be after ladies. If you do, just know that you are soon to die. Ladies! They are the great killers nowadays because they possess our lives, and all of us men depend on them for entertainment and as comforters. But if [we are] not careful enough, a lot of young men --and not only young men but even old men-- are dying because of them, not only from AIDS but also *kanyela* and *ntayo*. And with the coming of this deadly disease AIDS, the number of young men who are dying is many. They die because of their [desires] and wants, because of *chiwelewele* [promiscuity].' And Itendo laughed and said, 'It's not because of their desires but its because it's [their] time.' The shoemaker said, 'No! Not because of time but because you are not satisfied with what you have. You may find that those dying are the ones who are married. They prove unfaithfulness to their wives, they prefer having another sexual partner apart from the spouse, but it's the same thing. It's the same because women are the same. But instead we go only for dressing [for appearances]. If you try to dress your spouse today, buying all the cosmetics for her, you may find that others will begin proposing her. Why? Because she now looks beautiful because of all the cosmetics you have bought for her.' (Meaning that we men are stupid for a trivial matter, yet the women are all the same.)

We were just listening. He continued saying, 'And a wise man, you find him busy thinking of plans to make money to support his family, he has dropped going for ladies. Clever guys have realized that in women there is death, they cling only to their spouses.' Itendo said, 'It's last week I came back. I was at N___ area at L___, there at Nt___ if you know.' (The shoe maker said 'Yes I know these areas, I was once there.' And for me Simon, I said I had never been to these areas.) Itendo continued, saying that 'At N___ people are dying a lot, especially we young men, because of AIDS. Yet even though the situation is like that, you find that people still continue practicing unfaithfulness by having other sexual partners besides their spouses, hence continuing the spreading of this disease AIDS.' Then I asked my friend. 'How do you know that a lot of them die of HIV/AIDS, my friend?' Itendo answered, 'I know! I have a radio. I am not completely ignorant about such things. Even though I didn't attend school, I really observe and listen a lot to the radio. As you know, nowadays almost every hour the radio announces the dangers of AIDS yet people seem not to understand even now.'

The shoemaker then said, 'Indeed, [much is said now about AIDS], the radio, the newspapers for those who are able to read for themselves about the dangers of this disease, and even in the churches as well. For example in my Islamic domination almost every Friday the sheikh never misses saying that Islam is the clean type of faith and [abhors] any uncleanness like adultery and fornication outside marriage. If a Muslim involves him/herself in such bad practices, the end result is the person becomes unclean despite

washing or bathing several times a day, and even worse the person comes to contract AIDS and eventually dies from it.’ The shoe maker continued, saying that ‘Therefore it is now up to every individual to safeguard his life, it’s not someone else[’s responsibility], by being righteous and faithful to a spouse. As I said, these girls are the same, there is no difference between your spouse and another ones’ spouse except dressing [appearances].

Then I said, ‘But nowadays, it seems that HIV/AIDS is being spread almost every day for the reason we already raised, unfaithfulness, but are there some who are faithful enough and free from AIDS?’ The shoemaker responded, saying ‘Indeed, since the world is very vast it’s likely that there are some who are faithful enough as well as free from HIV/AIDS. For instance old people are more faithful than young men.’ Then I asked why is this so? The shoe maker said, ‘It is like this because old people are used to obeying laws and regulations, but young men are too stubborn to follow advice because of the tendency that has come nowadays of what they call democracy. They say everyone is free to do whatever seems best to him/her. And that’s why you see more deaths nowadays than before, because of this democracy. Young men are wise on their own and neglect to obey parents, for instance, and they indulge themselves with alcohol and sexual abuse, which eventually kills them.’ Then I said to the shoemaker ‘Do you know anyone, such as a friend, who is faithful enough?’ Mr. Shoe maker said, ‘Indeed I have another one here, not a friend but rather a relative.’ Then I said which sex is that relative and he said it’s a male and added ‘But he is older than me. He was born in 1951 and married long time ago, before me, and he is still living with the same spouse even though the spouse is now very old - which cannot be done by young men of nowadays. Young men nowadays who reach my age might have married 10 times, which is another issue of contracting AIDS because they never know, maybe the one divorced is absolutely free from [AIDS] while the one who is taken to be a new spouse [has it]. This also applies to women.’

Then I asked Itendo, during our charming chatting, if he knows anyone who is faithful. And unfortunately Itendo said nowadays it’s very rare to find because of development. I asked him to elaborate further what he meant by development (*chutukuko* in Chichewa). He said, ‘Because of development a lot of people have a lot of money and become rich. And because they are rich they are able to travel wherever they think of going. For instance, one can go to M___ or C___ or N___ and sleep at the decent rest houses and eat in hotels. There he is able to meet some well-dressed professional prostitutes who want money so they sleep with this rich man, for example. The end result is contracting HIV/AIDS, and when he returns he spreads it to his innocent spouse and children. So you may find that is very difficult to find someone nowadays who is indeed faithful and free from AIDS, as you asked before. Everyone nowadays has AIDS since it’s a crisis (*Mulili*-chichewa). [It’s only] because we don’t go for blood test then we just think we are free from the disease.’

Then I said, ‘Indeed you are saying the truth, but are there some who are free from this disease and never think of contracting it by any means, who when they want to have sex with another partner besides their spouse always use the condom?’ Itendo said, ‘But that is very rare nowadays. Very, very few people use condoms, for example, I, myself, I have never tried using the condoms since they were introduced in Malawi, even though I have been sleeping with other partners besides my wife.’ Then I asked him why? He said, ‘Its because the condoms are not 100% perfect and the Quran condemns this system and says it’s a great sin towards God, it’s killing the innocent children who might have been president in the future, who might have helped me in the future.’ Then I said, ‘Therefore it’s better to save the children and avoid committing a sin and choose to contract AIDS, not so?’ My friend said no, that ‘ It is necessary to choose someone who is healthy and strong because the healthiness of a person determines the condition of that particular person. So I used to go only for the healthy ones before I stopped going for other partners. As I said already, there is no goal [benefit?] nowadays of being after ladies but only wasting money.’ Then the shoe maker commented as well, saying that ‘It’s a great sin as well using condoms and said God in heaven will not be lenient on this sin – and only trust your spouse if you’re married, and if you are not married it’s important that one wait [for sex] and then marry and be faithful, that’s the only way of avoiding AIDS.’ Then I asked the shoemaker about his relative who is faithful and old, why is he faithful? He said, ‘ I had already said that it is because he was born long time ago and old people remember good advice [better] than young men of nowadays.’ Then I asked his denomination. The shoemaker said that his relative belongs to Islamic faith as he does. Then I asked if people admire [his relative] because of his faithfulness. The shoemaker said that indeed in his village, C___, a lot of people know about this couple. He doesn’t

know whether they admire them or not because he has never heard others talk about their admiration, but ‘I only know about this myself because, as I said, he is my relative and we know each other. Then I asked whether both of them are faithful? The shoe maker said indeed both of them a man and a woman are faithful towards each other and considering their ages it shows that they will remain faithful until one of them dies.

We chatted and chatted and then my sandals were fixed and only chatting followed. Then I asked the shoemaker for the second time whether he knows anyone else in his village or a neighboring village who is faithful? The shoemaker said he doesn’t know anyone apart from the relative he had already talked about, and said he can’t say anything about others because what they do, they do on their own without his presence. We laughed and chatted and chatted. Then I took my sandals and said farewell to them. I left Itendo and the shoemaker still chatting. The End!

15/05/2002.

I was chatting with my two friends. We were talking about girls and enjoyments accentuated by them. My first friend’s name is Daniel Foster, a teacher at N___ N___ primary school, and the other one is named Muhajiri. We talked and talked about many issues concerning our enjoyment of girls and its bad consequences.

During the course of our talk on the veranda of a shop, my in-law named Nelson Size – the brother of my wife—came. He joined us and said ‘But having a girlfriend demands courage and perseverance.’ (NB: We let him (in-law) tell his whole story when he found himself in the conversation of my friend, who I thought was faithful). ‘One day I was caught red-handed by some of my enemies – they wanted the girl who was my lover last year and the girl rebuffed them and knew that she was in love with me and then they plotted to catch me. They did one day. This day I was lent a house by my great friend the son of the owner of Z___ rest house and bottle store. While I was chatting with the girlfriend there--fortunately I had already done two rounds—my enemies came and gathered around the house and shouted that I should come out from the house together with my fiancé and said they wanted to beat us. (NB: 2 rounds means ejaculating 2 times!) I courageously came out and thoroughly discussed [the issue] with them and convinced that I was not doing anything to her but rather I was proposing her. They didn’t understand but rather decided to take me and her together to her mum. Then she [the mother?] forced me to go to meet her [the girlfriend’s?] uncle, who challenged me to take her for my wife. But I refused, saying that I am schooling. Her uncle seemed to understand that and I was released. It was at 6 p.m. . I walked home and reached there around 7 p.m. Just when I reached home I just saw her coming, challenging [disobeying?] her parents but I refused to sleep with her. If I wasn’t going to sleep with her it’s better that I should be free [of] her and stand alone (rather divorcing her [?]).’

Then Muhajiri asked, ‘Why were the boys plotting?’ Nelson said, ‘It’s because the girl had rebuffed some of them and they were jealous of me.’ And I said: ‘Why were they doing that, does it mean she is the only beautiful girl there at Nt___?’ Nel (short for my in-law) said, ‘There are many beautiful girls at Nt___. When I came here after finishing secondary school, I noticed that there are fewer girls here than in Nt___. And in Nt___ there are more diseases, I believe, than elsewhere.’ We laughed and I asked why? Then Nelson said, ‘Because in Nt___ there are more girls than here and also due to the construction of the road to C___. So a lot of men are working there, whenever they have received [their pay] they tend to go for the women there and for *kachaso* (alcohol). Women think they have a lot of money and indeed they give a lot to the girls they sleep with.’ Then I said, ‘What kind of diseases do you mean, in-law?’ He said there are not many, the well-known diseases in Nt___ are AIDS and *chambu*. I asked how he knew it was AIDS, he said it’s because of its signs and symptom that the majority show-- persistent coughing, their body becomes thin and weak, and their hair is not good (*tsitsi losasangalatsa* – Chichewa). We laughed and laughed and then I asked what kind of disease is *chambu*? My in-law said *chambu* is the kind of disease that generally results when a woman has had a spell put on her, say by her husband, so that anyone sleeping with her should have troubles—some die, others have their genitals spoiled by many sores so that it has to be cut off at the hospital. We laughed. And Muhajiri asked, ‘But people still practice adultery there, why?’ My in-law said, ‘Yes, and more often than here I think, and [be saying its time to get the disease?].’

My friend Daniel Ambali asked only one question and then he departed after buying his groceries. The question was, 'Why did your partner, as you said, want to sleep with you again the same day yet you had already done two rounds?' We laughed and he [Nelson] said, 'You know, girls are never satisfied, she wanted more rounds I believe.' Then Daniel left, we were three. Then I asked, 'But can people in Nt___ know that a friend or a person is suffering from HIV or AIDS?' Nelson said, 'Yes, they certainly come to know that.' I asked, 'So what do they [the infected people] do?' He said they do nothing, only living and proceeding with their normal life. And I asked, 'What do you do yourself about the HIV there in Nt___?' My in-law laughed and said, 'I don't overdo it, I only have one partner and after that I go to another partner. And I select them, I don't go anyhow as others there do.' Muhajiri then asked, 'AIDS has a choice?' He said 'Yes, even when you enter into a shop one choose the kind of clothes, for example, which might suit him/her and their durability.' We laughed and Muhajiri said, 'And you choose for durability yourself with regards to partnership?' He said 'Indeed. There are other types of relationship without real love, ladies who only want assistance from you and then when you are lacking [money] the love ends.' We agreed with him and he concluded like that.

And I asked whether he uses condoms when sleeping with his partners and he frankly said he doesn't use. Although he goes to his friends who are Health Surveillance Assistants at Nt___ and asks them about the condoms and they give him some, he said he never uses them because the girls refuse (we laughed and laughed). And I asked what do men and women in Nt___ do to try to combat AIDS? He said he doesn't know anything about what they do to combat the disease because what he sees is only that people trust their partners, they are fond of sexual relationships and the majority show symptoms and signs of AIDS and the *chambu* mentioned. Which shows, he said, that people don't trust condoms, especially those working on road construction and the drunkards. He continued saying that 'Even my friends, the HSAs, don't use the condoms. I know all their secrets for I sometimes walk with them to visit their partners. They say the distribution of condoms is only their work, it does not interfere with their personal lives. People use or not use according to their liking. My in-law said they said "'We HSAs teach people ways of family planning and child spacing but you find people not following; it's the same as with the use of condoms.' We laughed and laughed and went to sit at the bus depot for my friend Muhajiri wanted to catch the bus for M___ where he stays.

And then I asked my in-law, 'What do people do after noticing that his/her partner seems to have AIDS?' He said, 'Some couples come to an end and for others the marriage continues.' And I asked, 'Do they use condoms then?' He said 'I don't think they use because it will just be a waste of time since both of them have contracted the disease.' Then I said, 'What about to those who are not married but have sexual partnership, what do they do if they feel their partners might have AIDS?' My in-law said 'As I said already. I can't know exactly what they do. But I can assure you that they just continue sleeping with one another. For example, a noticed a certain sexual relationship where both of them showed signs and symptoms of this HIV, the hair of both of them became scraggly and they were very thin with very pale faces. But they still continue to be sexual partners.' I asked if both of them are married, he said the 'The man is married and the woman is not, her husband died, they say of AIDS.'

We chatted and chatted, then I asked him whether he knows anyone such as a best friend or a village mate or from a neighboring village who is faithful. He said frankly that he doesn't have a best friend who is faithful but all his friends go for sexual partners even though some of them are married. And I asked 'Then why get married?' He said enjoyment. We chatted and chatted until the Minibus came and my friend Muhajiri rode first to drop [get off] at D___ to [visit] his relatives before proceeding to M___. The subject changed. We were only two left—me and in-law—and we were going home now.