

***Mvana* and Their Children: The Language of the Shona People as it Relates to Women and Womens' Space**

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Abstract

Research elsewhere, within English and other languages, has shown that linguistic behaviour is one of the keys to understanding the nature and status of women in the attitudes transmitted through language (Frank and Anshen 1983; Cameron 1990; 1998; Coates 1998; Spender 1980; West and Zimmerman 1975 etc.). This article seeks to examine the language of the Shona people as it is related to women and women's space by examining terminology for mvana [single mothers (...and more)] and their children, conceived out of marriage, to uncover and document explicit and implicit attitudes to women. The terms used in this article were collected through a questionnaire and discussions held in Harare and Mhondoro, especially targeted at the language which people speak, but is never recorded.

Introduction

The article discusses reference terms used to refer to children of single mothers, namely, children born outside marriage. It also discusses *umvana* (single motherhood) and the stigmatization associated with it, in order to try to understand the reference terms for the children, hereafter referred to as 'the woman's children'. In a way, this is a taboo subject, as the society sees women-headed families as deficient and incorrect, which explains the impolite language of the nonce name, the 'villageworld'. The article concludes by highlighting attitudes towards women and their sexuality (especially as this is seen *vis-à-vis* men).

The study seeks to investigate and analyse the Shona society's attitudes towards single motherhood and children who are born and raised by single mothers. Research has shown that linguistic behaviour is one of the keys to understanding the nature and status of women in the attitudes transmitted through language (Frank and Anshen 1983; Cameron 1990; 1998; Coates 1998; Spender 1980; West and Zimmerman 1975 etc.). As Spears (2000: vii) writes in the introduction to his dictionary, *Slang and Euphemism*, 'a culture's vocabulary contains a record of the culture's values, fears, hostilities and mistakes.' He also writes that there are 'many areas of human interaction where language serves as *evidence* of various social phenomena as well as being the medium for explaining it' (Spears 2000: vii).

Materials

The terms studied here are, primarily, taken from a questionnaire on marriage distributed in Harare and Mhondoro (see the whole questionnaire in the appendix). The questionnaire was motivated by observation, rather than by any previous research or by a particular theoretical framework which requires proof. Question number one in the questionnaire asks for informants' description of the meaning of marriage in the life of a Shona female or male. Question number two asks for terms that refer to:

- a) a single woman/man of marriageable age;
- b) a single mother/father;
- c) terms used to refer to a woman's and to a man's children; and,
- d) insults that include (the terms for) mother/father.

This article considers the questions asking for terms for single parents and terms used to refer to children of single parents (b and c, above). It draws background from informants' responses to Question No. 1 of the questionnaire. The other questions in the questionnaire are handled elsewhere in other research that I have worked on.

The terms from the questionnaire

Terms for single parents

Out of fifty responses, the term *mvana*, and sometimes its variant *bvana*,¹ emerges as the overwhelming term for single mothers, in over 99% of the responses. Other terms such as *nzenza* (one easily carried away — prostitute), *hure*² (whore), *pfambi/fambi* (prostitute), *joki*³ (prostitute), *chirikadzi* (widow) and *tsvingudzi* (married woman courted by another man, who is not her lawful partner) are also given. The terms appear, mostly, alongside *mvana/bvana*, as if to provide further descriptions of the term. Sometimes two, three or four of these terms may appear in one questionnaire as alternate answers. The first four terms, which when added together, amount to about 25% of the responses, suggest sluttish behaviour on the part of the single mother. *Tsvingudzi*, mentioned in one or two places, also intimates the same. Widowhood results from bereavement and not the lack of a marriage, *per se*. Therefore, strictly speaking, *chirikadzi* does not fit the *mvana* label, and its appearance in a negligible number of responses supports this assertion.

For single fathers, 60% of the responses indicate no known specific term for single fatherhood. These responses are stated as, *handizivi* (don't know), *hakuna* (there is none) or by a dash or blank space. *Tsvimborume* (usually refers to bachelor past the age of marrying) appears in 20% of the responses. The rest of the responses for single fathers, include such terms as, *baba* (father), *murume* (man), *zeeretsi* (a person who lives like a tramp, not taking responsibility for her/himself). It was further explained by some that the

term *tsvimborume* as currently used makes reference to the ‘marriedless’ status of the man, rather than the state of single fatherhood. *Baba* makes reference to fatherhood, but without the connotations of a single father. *Murume* is just a man. *Zeeretsi* is a commentary on the irresponsibility of the man, but without pointing at the wanting area.

The data suggests, therefore, that no equivalent specific Shona term to *mwana* exists which carries the sense ‘single father’. Thus, it can be argued that single parenthood is marked with respect to women, as they are the ones who are *mwana*.

Terms for children

Below is a list of terms, recorded and listed by parent and semantic/metaphorical implication.

The single woman’s children

mwana/vana (child(ren))

(blank) — This response indicates that there was no special term indicated (from the regular *mwana/vana*) as the space was left blank

chipo (gift)

zvikomborero (blessings)

hazvinei (it does not matter)

mugove [(it is our) share/portion]

gamuchirai (please, accept/receive)

mubvandiripo (the one I came with — child conceived before present marriage and whose father is other than present husband)

muzukuru (grandchild/daughter/son, nephew and niece)

(*ma*)gora [wild cat(s)]

musemwa (the hated/loathed one)

murambiwa (the one who was refused/rejected)

vasina baba (with no father)

vasina musha (with no home)

vana vasingazivikanwi baba vavo (children whose father is not known)

vana vemusango (children of the forest)

wemudondo (of the forest)

chemudondo (the thing of the forest)

magwenzi (bushes/shrubbery)

chisango (bush)

mwana wemudondo (child of the forest)

mwana vemusango (child of the forest)

mwana wemakwenzi (child of the bushes/shrubbery)

mwana akabva kuhohwa (child who came from (gathering) mushrooms)
chenzira [(thing) of the road]
chinhongwa/chinongwa [(thing) picked up/found]
(ma)bhoni(rokesheni) [(those) born in an urban location]

vana vemhosva (children of/from a case/offence)
*vana vedamage*⁴ (children of/for 'damage' — for whom 'damage' money is paid for the woman being impregnated out of marriage)
*vana vemendenenzi*⁵ (children of maintenance)
vana veupombwe (children of/from an illicit sexual deed)
vana vehure (children of a prostitute)

chibhanduru (a village evening song and dance outing by young ones)
chinungu (a type of dance by boys and girls in lines)
Tai — short for *Taitamba* (we were playing — having fun)
mwana wekumahumbwe (child of/from playing house)

vana vehure (children of a prostitute)
makuyu (persons lacking in decency)

The single man's children

(blank)
mwana/vana (child/children)
vana vari pamusha pavo (they are children in their home)
mwana akabvumwa nababa vake (s/he is a child who has been accepted by her/his father)
varidzi vepamusha (they are the owners of the home — they belong)

The responses to the questionnaire reveal forms that range from single words, compounds, simple phrases, and idioms to complete statements. The forms are descriptive, euphemistic and/or sarcastic, and could be described as either 'good' or 'bad'. The data reveals many 'tabooed' terms for the woman's children and none for the men's children. From the list above, the most prevalent terms given for the woman's children were *(ma)bhoni(rokesheni)*, *mubvandiripo*, *magora*, *chinhongwa/chinongwa* and *vasina baba*, in that order. These are forms that emphasize the child's birth circumstances as improper or immoral because of the child's 'lack' of a father. The other forms occurred with less frequency. The men's children are mostly reported as being referred to with the 'regular' term(s) for children, *mwana* (child), *vana* (children) or *vana vari pamusha pavo* (they are children in their home), or, no term at all which is indicated by a blank space (also includes a dash). A dash or blank may mean 'don't know the term', or that there is none.

Shona names usually reflect circumstances at birth (see, eg. Pongweni 1983; Mawema 1999), as is happening in these terms. The positive descriptions may sometimes be used as first names for these and for the generality of children, in line with Shona systems of naming. The negative descriptions are insults and slurs meant to show disrespect and to ridicule the children, their mothers, extending to the families that have raised what are believed to be irresponsible daughters. There are suggestions in many of these terms that the woman is a whore.

Contrary to the attitude displayed toward the man's children, the woman's children are the ones referred to with marked terminology. Respondents explained this asymmetry as resulting from the child's not having *baba vanovamiririra* (a father to represent them, to support them). According to Shona culture, if children are living with their father, then they are with the one they belong to as well as being where they belong. The understanding as expressed in the questionnaire is that '*murume ndibaba*' (a man is a father; a man is the head of the household); hence, the silence on the status of his children. The idea that '*baba vanotyisa*' [the head of the family is feared (and therefore respected)] was also given to possibly explain why his children would not be referred to by some descriptive derogatory expressions. The father is the one who gives children a totem,⁶ i.e. an identity. The idea of a man physically raising his child as a 'single father' was said to be a relatively new concept, as the children would mostly be cared for by their grandmother, an aunt or another relative, while receiving financial support from the father; or, the father would remarry and find the children a new mother.

The rest of the discussion now concentrates on the woman and her children. To understand why the woman's children are the ones who are labeled, let us go back to explain the meaning and social circumstances around the marked single mother (*mvana*) role.

The woman and her children

Mvana: the marked parent

The Standard Shona Dictionary (SSD) (1981) defines *mvana* as:

- 1 . . . Unmarried woman who has borne a child and is still able to bear more.
- 2 . . . Married woman of loose morals.
- 3 . . . Woman (married or unmarried) who has borne a child and is still able to bear more (deprecatory).

Although sense 1 seems to present a neutral definition, senses 2 and 3 are quite obviously negative, revealing the stigma that is attached to the word. In sense 1, *mvana* has the same meaning as *mumvana* (a married woman who has borne a child and is still able to bear more). It has been argued that at some point these two forms were probably one form, *mumvana*, with

mvana being a contracted form (Chitauro, forthcoming PhD thesis). Evidence from other Shona-speaking regions, where the two are used interchangeably, with *mvana* as a contracted form of *mumvana*, support this assessment. *Duramazwi Guru reChiShona* (DGR) makes the same marriage distinction between *mvana* and *mubvana* [*mumvana*]. The same is also seen in the ALLEX Project Shona Corpus.⁷ Another sense of *mvana*, coming out of the ALLEX Project Corpus, is, '(especially urban young) woman who has had (frequent) sexual relations', irrespective of whether they have children or not.⁸ The ALLEX corpus gives such examples as:

Ndiwo muroorere wacho wechinyakare. Kwete iye zvino kwekungoti mvana kana oroowa, anoroowa iri mvana. Asi kare kare, vaiinda nevana kurwizi kuchiinda chembere. (This is the marrying of the old times. Not nowadays where a child when she is married, is married as a non-virgin. But long ago, they went with the children to the river with old women).

Ndikabva pano ndinowanikwa newatanga ini. Idzo pwere dzikati dziri kumhanyirira mvana dzakapingudzwa kare, mazuva ano, hamheno tinenge tichizviona. (If I leave this place I will be found (grabbed) by the first person. These infants (young people) are running for non-virgin women who have been broken in/tamed already sometime ago, who knows we will see).

The corpus also provides as a neutral sense in which *mvana* refers to a woman, i.e. where *mvana* and *mumvana* are the same term, a sense which does not emerge in the questionnaire responses. Here is an example:

vakadzi vakati topururudza vachiunga , varume zenze tuku, tuchembere tukati twodeketera, mvana dzikati dzokaida kuimba, kakuruva ndiye togo. (women ululated with loud harmony, and the man were excited, old women ritually singing in monotone, women singing loudly, beautifully, and dust broke.)

Although, as reported, single motherhood can be a result of many factors, such as having children outside marriage, divorce, sometimes, being widowed (at an early age) or choice, the general stereotype is that she is willfully loose and a moral failure (Chitauro, forthcoming PhD thesis). Society encourages women to get married while they are virgins, not *mvana*. *Usikana* (girlhood/young womanhood) is generally viewed to be synonymous with virginity. Chitauro (forthcoming PhD thesis) observes that while the loss of virginity is seen as ephemeral, an inevitable natural growth process and a natural transformation into womanhood, girls and young women are warned to cherish their virginity, because once they lose it, 'improperly', to someone who does not, in the end, become their husband, then their names are tainted. They become *mvana*, in the eyes of the villageworld and, therefore, not 'good marriage material', as they would

have dirtied themselves. This would be unfortunate, considering that marriage is viewed as a woman's primary achievement, while any other achievement is viewed as secondary.

Such stigmatisation or shaming leading to the loss of one's moral reputation, it was explained, does not seem to be shared where men who impregnate women outside marriage are concerned. The result is that parenthood is marked for women. Women are categorized by marital status, as the 'good' married woman/mother *vis-à-vis* the 'incorrect' unmarried woman/mother (Gaidzanwa 1983). Marriage is viewed as a woman's ultimate goal, and if she loses her virginity, has a child and fails to get a husband, then she is viewed as a moral failure, raising 'totemless' illegitimate children. Her special responsibilities should be to make sure that she is never in the position to even potentially help create a totemless child. Since men do not seem to lose their moral reputation when they have children outside marriage, women are the ones who should know better and save themselves from the stigma of *umvana* (see also Kahari 2000). Respondents justified this asymmetry through such explanations as, *mwanasikana ndiye anofanira kuchengetedza unhu* (the female child is the one who should keep her morality), and *uhure huri pavakadzi* (loose behaviour exists [only] among women). Still, others said that such an asymmetry arose because the mother is the one who nurses the baby and is, therefore, seen breastfeeding a child without a father.

The social fact that (young) men are not shamed as much points to an asymmetrical relationship between the single father and the single mother. As suggested during the fieldwork, men do not seem to be negatively affected by their role in creating what turn out to be 'totemless' and 'homeless' children when, after all, it is the man and his family that pass on the totem to the young ones. Should the man, as the potential head of family, therefore not be the one to be disgraced for not passing on a totem to his children (see also Chitauro, forthcoming PhD thesis)? The study of manifestations of asymmetries is known as markedness (Cameron 1998; Lakoff 1987). Lakoff defines markedness as a term used in linguistics to explain:

a kind of prototype effect — an asymmetry in a category, where one member or subcategory is taken to be somehow more basic than the other (or others). Correspondingly, the unmarked member is the default value, the member of the category that occurs when only one member of the category can occur and all other things are equal (Lakoff 1987: 61).

In asymmetries reflected in gender studies

... women are subsumed under the linguistic norm which is based on, or identical to, men's representations, leading to their invisibility. Sometimes they are made visible only to display their difference, i.e. their deviation

from the norm. The latter leads to their 'marked linguistic treatment' (Lakoff 1987: 61).

In the current example, *mvana* is made visible to reveal her deviation from the norm, i.e., her deviation from societal expectations.

The marked children

Considering the discussion above, it becomes apparent that the woman's children are labeled and marked, by association. The harsh treatment of the children seems to be a result of the stigma associated with the mother's *umvana* status. As Jay (1992) writes, products of stigma become objects of ridicule and verbal aggression. The derogatory nicknames can also be viewed as a type of verbal aggression (Spears 1982: xviii). The children are described as children who are not being raised in 'their' (proper) home, since, culturally, they are being 'raised' by a guardian (male) who would either be the child's maternal grandfather or uncle (mother's brother). As guardians, they can temporarily give the children a last name, but not a clan name or totem — an identity. The mother, because she is a woman, is said to be unable to pass on to her child a *zita* (name/identity) or totem, as only males can.

The data gathered suggests that a 'fatherless' state brings stigma and disgrace to the children of a single mother. Contrastingly, a 'motherless' state does not seem to have an effect on attitudes towards the man's children. As reported, bad behaviour seems to be expected and condoned of (young) men more than of women. The man's children's status is not talked about, as the children are said to have an identity. In this context, the man's children are the unmarked members with the default value, representing a category with the feature that is expected (Matthews 1997: 217). The woman's children are the marked members because they lack a feature, a father; hence, their labelling.

Here are the main reference terms that have been highlighted in the article, categorized by metaphor (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987), thus highlighting how the children are conceived of, consciously or unconsciously, within the culture:

- Wild (they are wild children or children from the wild)
- Homeless children
- Outsiders (they are not part of the 'ideal' membership in a household, which also, in a way, classifies them as wild)
- Fun children (children conceived accidentally in the 'excitement of social outings')
- Gifts from the ancestral spirits or from God
- Children of a damaged mother
- Atypical children.

(It should also be remembered, as mentioned earlier, that a sizeable number of people responded with *vana* or left a blank in the questionnaire, indicating that they were not aware of any terms to refer to the children; as with the single father's children.)

Here is how the terms fit into the metaphoric categories delineated above, starting with the euphemistic, and moving on to the insulting.

Gifts from the ancestors and from God

There are terms that celebrate and accept the child's birth, despite the unfortunate or unplanned circumstances of her/his conception of not being born in a father-headed family. In these more positive terms, the children are regarded as gifts from the ancestors and from God.

chipo (gift)

chikomborero (blessing)

mugove [(it is our) share/portion — it is what we have been granted]

gamuchirai (please accept/receive)

hazvinei (it does not matter (that our daughter has been 'spoilt' and rejected; that the child has been rejected by its father)

From observation and discussions, I learnt that close family members, such as the mother, uncles, grandmother or grandfather, use the 'gift' reference terms, as an expression of their love and acceptance of the children as the fruits of life, despite their being 'mistakes', as implied by the villageworld. Grandparents might say, '*Tingarambe sei chipo chaMwari?*' (How can we refuse God's gift). Most said that they saw their children and grandchildren as children, just like any other children, but were sometimes forced to counter the negative labelling, coming from the villageworld with their own positive messages.

Fun child

These are terms used to imply that the child was conceived during play/dance.

chibhanduru (type of dance — therefore, child of fun)

Tai for *Taitamba* (we were playing — therefore, this child was unplanned)

mwana wekumahumbwe (child from 'playing house')

chinungu (a type of dance by boys and girls in lines, therefore, (child of) fun)

The terms sarcastically ridicule the conception of the child; otherwise if the parties to the pregnancy were serious they would not end up

misbehaving in such socially unacceptable ways. The terms describe the children as 'mistakes' or 'accidents' or 'jokes' resulting from nights or days of fun.

Outsider

The data suggests that the boundary is a family personified in the head of the household, the father, who owns the home.

Mubvandiripo [the one (child) I came with]: This is the traditionally accepted term, a statement understood to refer to a child that a woman conceived before the present marriage and whose father is other than the present husband. It is still one of those words that make people uncomfortable. What is worth noting with this term is that while there are men with children from previous relationships/marriages, who get married, their children are not referred to with any such terms. There was no reference to something like *musvikandiripo* [the one (child) I found (at husband's)] for the child that the woman finds a new husband already with. The term further highlights clan ideology in Shona, where the child gets her/his identity from the biological father.

Muzukuru (grandchild/daughter/son or niece/nephew): This is a term which, in its regular use, is understood to mean what is in the glosses highlighted here, irrespective of the sex of the parent who is the reference point. In its extended use, in special contexts, the term is understood only to mean an unmarried daughter/sister's (sister to a brother) child. When used only for a woman's child, the noun acquires a euphemistic special meaning, which divides children, in a way where, on the one hand, we have *mwana/vana* [child/children), for a son's child(ren) or a married daughter/sister's (sister to a brother) child(ren)], and, on the other hand, *mu/vazukuru*, for the unmarried daughter's children. In introducing children, the man-of-the-house might say something like, "These here are (my) *vana, vanaShumba* (the Lions — totem) and, this, here, is my *muzukuru*" (and then meaningfully ends there). The person to whom the introduction is made will then understand the message to mean that the *muzukuru* is an illegitimate child, whose *mutupo* (totem) is 'unknown'. If the *muzukuru's* father has not married the mother or accepted the child, according to custom, then he is 'not known'. *Muzukuru*, in this example, therefore, labels the children referred to as such as outsiders.

Wild

Gora: The child is referred to as a wild animal, a *gora* (vulture/wild cat). Compared to the domesticated cats that are reared in homes, wild cats live in the wild, away from people, fending for themselves. The woman's children are seen as wild cats trying to live in homes in which they do not belong,

and enjoying hospitality which they are not entitled to, as their father has not delivered *roora* (bride wealth), part of which are cows. It was also explained to me that the Ndebeles also refer to the woman's children with the same term, *igola*, in their language. They explain that, unlike *igola* that are in the wild, regular cats are fed on milk. If, therefore, *igola* are seen feeding on milk, then they are stealing. In the same way, a woman's 'illegitimate' children are seen as 'stealing' from the 'legitimate' children, as their father has not invested any cows with the father-in-law, in the form of *roora*. Should their father deliver *roora*, then they will be free to come into the maternal grandparents' home to be treated like *vana* (children) and to drink the milk.

The child is also considered wild because of the place of conception, which is perceived to be, metaphorically, in the wild, not a home. Because there is no marriage, there is no 'home', so the child must have been conceived in the wild. Because there is no husband for the mother, no father for the child, the child must have been 'picked up' out there. See the following:

chemudondo (the thing of the forest)
magwenzi (bushes/shrubbery)
chisango (the bush — signifying illegitimacy)
mwana wemudondo (child of the forest)
mwana wemusango (child of the forest)
mwana wemakwenzi (child of the bushes/shrubbery)
mwana akabva kuhohwa (child who came from (gathering) mushrooms —
 conceived when the mother went out to pick mushrooms)
chenzira [(thing) of the road]
chinhongwa (the thing picked up/found) — like the woman went out looking
 then happened to just stumble on this child. She could not have conceived
 the child with a man because he has not claimed the child)

The prefixes *che-/chi-* in e.g. *chenzira* and *chinhongwa* objectify the child, making her or him more 'thinglike' than 'humanlike'.

*(ma)bhoni*⁹ — short form of *mabhonirokesheni*¹⁰ [(those) born in an urban location]: This reference term has originally been used for those children conceived in urban or non-traditional locations such as commercial mines and commercial farms, irrespective of who the parents are. It is also used, according to the results of the questionnaire, in some contexts, for a woman's children, who are born in the cities or any similar place. The term was conceived in colonial times when cities and other industrial and commercial areas were men-only areas, no-go areas for women. It followed then that a woman who ventured into the cities was seen as 'not proper' because she was putting herself in male territory, at the mercy of urban men. Shona

literature is abound with such stories, (see, eg. Chakaipa 1963; discussions in Gaidzanwa 1985; Chitauro *et al.* 1992). If a child resulted from urban unions (with no traditional marriage formalities), then the child was referred to as *(mu)bhoni*. Proper women with proper homes did not live in or have children in the urban jungles.

Homeless

With these terms, the child is pictured as one who is 'homeless' — *asina (ku)musha* (with no home), because according to Shona culture only a father or paternal relatives can give a child a home, i.e., somewhere where he belongs, an identity. One's identity is her/his 'home'. Other people, like the mother or maternal relatives, can only offer the child a roof. The expressions below also reflect this same thinking:

vasina baba (without a father)

vasingazivikanwi baba (whose father is not known)

It was said that because the father would not have customarily accepted the child, the child would be referred to as 'rejected' through such references as:

musemwa [the hated/loathed one (by father)]

murambiwa [the one who was refused/rejected (by father)]

Children of a damaged mother

vana vemhosva (children of/from a case/offence)

*vana vedamage*¹¹ (children of/for 'damage' — for whom 'damage' money is paid for her being impregnated out of marriage)

vana vemendenenzi (children of maintenance)

vana veupombwe (children of/from an illicit sexual deed; child from adultery)

vana vehure (children of a prostitute)

These forms, some of which highlight the influence of Christian values on Shona indigenous culture, emphasise the disgrace surrounding the birth of the child, in that the mother was impregnated outside marriage, namely, damaged. 'Damage' is payment paid by a man to the father of the woman he has impregnated, for having 'damaged' her (physically, taken her virginity; metaphorically, damaged her reputation and that of her family). Consequently, the man responsible has to pay the girl's father for making his daughter 'damaged goods'. This 'damage' is believed to compensate the father for his child's defilement by a man who has not married her. *Vana vemendenenzi* is a more recent coinage, coming from the Maintenance Act of

1983, which allows women and men to claim maintenance from their partners, for themselves and for their unemancipated children, below the age of eighteen. In *vana vehure* (children of a prostitute), 'prostitute' is synonymous with 'woman'.

Atypical children

makuyu: The children are also referred to, metaphorically, as *makuyu*. The SSD gives three definitions of *guyu*, the singular form of *makuyu*. Two of these senses may be applicable to this specific usage. The second sense means *onde* (a fig), and does not seem to have any connection with children. Here is how 1 and 3 read:

1. Person lacking sense of decency... 3. Prolapse of uterus.

It would seem that the child is seen as atypical in some way. The child may be said to lack decency because of being conceived out of marriage, and existing without a father. Or the child may be seen, metaphorically, as unfit as a prolapsed uterus (which is literally damaged), from which, metaphorically, the child came.

The single mothers and those that are close to these women that I talked to informally said they, obviously, did not particularly like any of these forms, especially the negative ones, as they reflect a lack of sensitivity. They said they saw their children as any others, even though they were unfortunate to grow up without a father. They said they were compelled to use the lighter labels to mitigate negative village sentiments, but would prefer that the children did not have to carry any labels at all.

Except for these responses where the children are referred to as children, and the euphemisms said to be used by close family members, most of the terms are quite (sarcastically) rebuking, ridiculing, mocking, rude, hateful and, consequently tabooed. Such bad forms were reportedly used by outsiders; or sometimes, even by family members, (especially in times of conflict) to hurt and to emphasize the perceived sluttishness of the mother, the illegitimacy of the children and the shamelessness of the maternal family. One of my informants said he referred to his own nephews and nieces as '*magora angu*', especially the boys. He said that his sisters were an embarrassment to him as they were "constantly" bringing "these children"¹² home. The negative terminology devalues and depersonalizes the woman and her children (see also Jay's 1992 comments on racial insults).

Spears (1982), in a dictionary of slang and euphemisms, which claims to cover all major English-speaking regions of the world (Britain and various parts of the Empire or Commonwealth, and the US), contains the following entry:

accident 1. a bastard. [Colloquial and nonce since the early 1900s or before] Synonyms: adulterine, adulterine bastard, adulterous bastard, avetrol, babe of love, bachelor's baby, bachelor's son, bantling, bar steward, base-begotten child, baseborn, base-son, bast, bastard, bastarda, bastrich, bell-bastard, blankard, born out of wedlock, brat, bush child, bush colt, by chop, bye-blow, by-scape, by-slip, by-spell, catch-colt, chance-bairn, chance born, chance-child, come-by-chance, filius nullius, filius populi, grass colt, hasty pudding, hybrid, illegitimate, incident, love-begotten child, love-brat, love-child, merry-begotten child, misbegotten, momzer, mongrel, natural, natural-child, nephew, niece, non-wedlock, nullius filius, off-girl, of unknown birth, old field colt, out-child, outside, outside child, outsider, side slip, side-wind, side-wipe, single child, son of a bachelor, son of a bitch, squeker, stall whimper, unlawfully begotten, whore's-kittling, whoreson, woodscolt, yard-child 2. ...

The Spears entry in which the illegitimate children are carried under the slang and euphemistic term, 'accident', highlights the very same ideas expressed in Shona, and more. The long list of synonyms also carries striking similarities with the metaphors coming out of the Shona terms. The terms highlight the child as a product of illicit behaviour, a mistake, an unplanned conception, wild, a product of fun, of unknown origins, an outsider, a nephew or niece, among many other beliefs. For example, the use of such terms as 'colt' and 'mongrel' illustrate the wild, untamed and difficult animal. A colt is a young uncastrated male horse. A mongrel is a dog or any other animal of no definable type or breed. Spears defines 'bastard' in a gender-neutral way as:

child born of unlawful sexual intercourse; a child conceived in haste, eg., on a bed-roll or pack-saddle... [since the 1200s, Oxford English Dictionary]

The thinking differs where, in the Spears entry, the definitions cover both the woman's and man's children, whereas the Shona terms refer to the woman's children only. However, an informant, who is American, tells me that Spears is "missing usage in the real world' as a bastard is 'fatherless' not 'motherless'". Another point of variation worth noting is the metaphor of the illegitimate child as a love-X, expressed in Spears in such terms as 'love-brat' and 'love-child'.

Conclusion

The terms used for women and their children in the language of the Shona villageworld reflect a Shona patriarchal tradition which highlights that a family is headed by a father who gives children a clan identity. The terms are both good and bad, but mostly insults and slurs. They serve as verbal attacks and 'verbal cushions on the mother's morality, as well as on the children's legitimacy. Such linguistic asymmetries reveal a lot about people's

attitudes. The language reflects the negative attitudes about the nature and status of women, as revealed in the marked terms for the single woman and her children. Attitudes towards single men and their children are different, as the patriarchal society highlights the 'Strict Father'¹³ (Lakoff 1996) conservative thinking. The father is seen as the personification of a proper family, its head thus highlighting the disparities in power between women and men. Single men's children are, as a result, not marked.

The stigmatization of the single mother and her children is a manifestation of the larger social order of things, within the patriarchal system, a system further entrenched by colonial structures (Ranger 1993; Chinyowa 1997; Chitauro, forthcoming PhD thesis) such as Christianity. It is clear that in some of the terms, Christian morality reinforces negative indigenous values. The terms and their meanings and assumptions have shown that the morality burden is on women, with, apparently, not much verbalized pressure on men. The women are the ones who are watched, an observation also made by Orbaugh (1996: 122) in Japanese fiction, 'Women in a patriarchal social economy constantly experience themselves as objects of the gaze, the speech, the judgements, the violence of men.' The study suggests that the woman has the 'sexual-responsibility role, thus making her accountable for sexual activities as well as sexual 'accidents'. The role of the woman as the sexual being has also been highlighted in other works on the Shona language and society (see, eg., Gaidzanwa 1985; Kahari 2000; Chitauro, forthcoming PhD thesis). Elsewhere, researchers on the English language have long made similar observations (see, e.g., Preston and Stanley 1987; Russ 1983; Frank and Anshen 1983; Stanley 1977; and Schulz 1975).

The terms listed in this article do not represent attitudes necessarily shared by all Shona speakers; hence, the reference to the language of the villageworld. Spears (1982) makes the same point in his dictionary. He writes, 'the long lists of synonyms found within some entries represent a variety of conflicting attitudes and should not be assumed to represent what "society believes". Many different levels of society ... are represented in the various entries' (Spears 1982: xxv). The same goes for the Shona examples.

In conclusion, the terms examined have revealed asymmetries between female and male roles within Shona. The terms indicate the stereotyping or prejudice of a patriarchal society, in which women are depersonalized and their actions are scrutinized and judged, while men's are tolerated, because men are the given authority.

Endnotes

1. The form *bvana* does not appear in any of the three dictionaries, *Duramazwi ReChishona (DRC)*, *Duramazwi Guru reChiShona (DGR)* and the *Standard*

Shona Dictionary (SSD) used in this study. Only *mvana* does. The *DRC* carries the form *mumvana* only. Interestingly, *mubvana* is recorded in the later dictionary, the *DGR*, as the main entry, whose variant form is *mumvana*.

2. English — whore.
3. English — jockey.
4. English — damage.
5. English — maintenance
6. A totem is a clan identity symbol, which is usually an animal or a part of the body of an animal.
7. The ALLEX Project (NUFU Pro 28/96 (1996-2001) — now 18/2002) is a cooperative research project between equal partners, the University of Zimbabwe (African Languages Research Institute), the University of Oslo (Department of Scandinavian Studies and Comparative Literature and the Documentation Project) and The University of Gothenburg. The Project has to date collected corpora in Shona and Ndebele. The Shona corpus is at over two and a half million running words.
8. Also heard on a ZBC Radio 4 programme that featured Mr Munjanja, a gynaecologist, (late 90s — exact date unknown). One of the panelists kept referring to urban young women as *mvana* because 'they are always sleeping around with men'.
9. English-born.
10. English-born in the locations. Location was a term used to refer to high density suburbs in the urban areas, where indigenous people lived in the then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).
11. English — to damage.
12. Name of informant withheld.
13. Lakoff contrasts the Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models in American politics where the country is viewed as a family, and conservative political positions fall into the former model while liberal positions fall into the latter.

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APPENDIX

KUROOR(W)A / KUSAROOR(W)A

Getting Married/Not Getting Married

- 1a) Tsanangurai kuti kuroor(w)a kana kusaroor(w)a chinhu chinorevei muupenyu hwemunhukadzi kana munhurume.
Explain what getting married or not getting married means in the life of a female or male.
- b) Tipei mazita/mazwi, kana aripo, anoshandiswa pa:
Give us words/nouns, if they are there, that are used on/for:

| | |
|---|---|
| munhukadzi asati aroorwa asi iye apfuura zero rinotarisirwa <i>a female not yet married when she has gone past the age (she is) expected to</i> | munhurume asati aroora asi iye apfuura zero rinotarisirwa <i>a male not yet married when he has gone past the age (he is) expected to</i> |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| munhukadzi ane mwana/vana asi iye asina kuroorwa <i>a female with (a) child(ren) but not married</i> | munhurume ane mwana/vana asi iye asina kuroora <i>a male with (a) child(ren) but not married</i> |
|--|--|

| | |
|---|---|
| vana vemukadzi vaanoita asina kuroorwa <i>children of a woman she makes without being married</i> | vana vemunhurume vaanoita asina kuroora <i>children of a man he makes without being married</i> |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|--|
| zvituko nezvamai <i>insults about mother</i> | zvituko nezvababa <i>insults about father</i> |
|---|--|

Ndezvipi zvituko zvakawanda? Unofunga kuti sei zvakadaro?
Which of these insults are many? Why do you think that things are like that?

- c) Pane dzimwe nzvimbo dzamatadza kuzadzikisa, dzisina mazita mumutauro medu. Dzokerai kunzvimbo dzakadai idzi motsanangura kuti chii chiri mumagariro edu chinoita kuti mashoko aya asawanikwe.

There are some places that you failed to complete, with no words/nouns in our language. Go back to such places and explain what it is that is in our culture/society that makes it such that these words/phrases do not exist.