



Kupururudzira muroora songs in Muzvezve

**Bride welcoming ceremony or relegation of
women to the subaltern?**

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The institution of marriage is a place where Shona women have often suffered oppression instead of fulfilment. Women have lamented Shona cultural practices that are not cognisant of human rights despite Zimbabwe being a signatory to the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. Practices which are harmful to women and tantamount to gender inequality need to be discontinued in Shona culture. We notice that the impact of patriarchy and the vulnerability of females have been perpetuated in Shona culture through the performance of traditional bride welcoming ceremony songs.

Folk songs are an important element of Shona culture in terms of women's construction of their personal identities. *Kupururudzira muroora* (traditional bride welcoming ceremony) songs are part of

Shona people's folk musical cultural performances. These are songs that are sung for a bride on the day when she officially joins her husband-to-be's family. As she enters her in-laws' homestead, members of that community welcome her through song and dance to mark the arrival of a new member of their community. Her husband-to-be's sisters and aunts particularly get very active during this ritual as they celebrate their brother or nephew's achievement. The singing can go on until late into the evening sometimes.

In this paper we first discuss Shona conception of marriage by outlining the expectations, norms and values that they socially construct. We go on to examine the context of bride welcoming ceremony songs basing on information gathered through interviews conducted with brides and senior womenfolk. In the last section of this paper we present a lyrical content analysis of ten bride welcoming ceremony songs performed in Muzvezve for women arriving at the husband's home. The analysis reveals that these are in essence songs of subservience sung by women for fellow women. The songs perpetuate the perception that women are dispensable, and the misfortunes they suffer in marriage are brought by their refusal to be subordinate to, and to please, their husbands. The findings steer a discussion in which we argue that, in theory, Shona bride welcoming ceremony songs prepare women for subservience in marriage, making them unreservedly submissive to their husbands.

However, in practice not all Shona women are submissive. Notwithstanding the negative ideologies peddled by the songs, from an African phenomenological-hermeneutic feminist cultural approach, the paper exposes ways in which the space of *kupururudzira muroora* song performance practice can be reclaimed to provide more life-affirming self-images for brides based on equal rights. The conclusion points to a glaring need to socialise brides with songs that embrace contemporary feminist perspectives during young women's orientation into the institution of marriage.

Theory and Method

In this qualitative study we conducted a multi-sited ethnography in six villages in Muzvezve Resettlement Scheme from August 2011 to October 2012. We purposively sampled ten bride welcoming ceremony songs that were performed at different *kupururudzira muroora* events. The song performances were video recorded and their lyrical content was analysed in an effort to interpret the gender meanings connoted in the songs' messages. The recordings were replayed and the lyrics were converted to text format for subsequent analysis. We also purposively sampled and interviewed five women to solicit their views on the meaning of *kupururudzira muroora* songs. In reality not all women are docile in marriage in these changing contemporary times. Generally speaking, African women are the subaltern of the subaltern with or without the *kupururudzira muroora* songs but male dominance in Shona society is still embedded in the lyrics of bride welcoming ceremony songs in Muzvezve.

We argue from a phenomenological-hermeneutic feminist cultural perspective (Kanyoro, 2002) that the ten *kupururudzira muroora* song analyses portray patriarchal power dynamics in the institution of marriage which ought to be evened and understood better. We also discuss how sexual relations in Shona marriages portray male chauvinism. By patriarchy we refer to an ensemble of cultural, social, economic, political and moral forces that connive to naturalise and uphold male chauvinism as an entitlement and privilege. Society exerts a lot of energy to maintain this seemingly natural yet socially constructed mind set, whose removal is critical to pushing the agenda of gender equality in marriage. This patriarchal 'norm' needs radical reconstruction if the continual mystification of compulsory female subjugation is to be overhauled.

We argue that there is a need to see how attitudes have contributed and perpetuated subordination among women in general, and Shona married women in particular. Firstly, the

phenomenological-hermeneutic feminist cultural perspective gives women the power to reject any life-denying aspects of the culture. Secondly, it gives them ability to identify life-affirming aspects of the culture (Phiri and Nadar 2006:11). This study raises the questions: Whether and in what ways the Shona bride welcoming ceremony songs have contributed to the relegation of brides to the subaltern in Muzvezve; and in what ways can the *kupururudzira muroora* space be re-claimed to promote more life-affirming marriages?

Shona Conception of Marriage

According to oral narratives people who live in Muzvezve 1 Resettlement Scheme are originally from among the Karanga people of Masvingo and surrounding areas in south-eastern Zimbabwe. They were resettled in 1984 and came mostly from Mhondoro, Gokwe and Sanyati Communal Lands into formerly white owned farming areas between Kadoma and Sanyati in north-western Zimbabwe that were divided into about twenty villages. Like many African peoples, these people in Kadoma District in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland West Province have high regard for marriage, which is why when a bride goes to her husband's home as a newly married woman, they sing songs to show her the reality of the institution of marriage which she is getting into. Among the Shona, which includes the Karanga, a woman is not simply married to her husband, she is also a 'wife' of the wider patrilineage.¹

For many Shona people, like people of many other cultures, believe that marriage has divine connotations and promiscuity can lead to serious misfortune. For instance, there is a Shona saying that a good wife is a gift from God (*mukadzi akanaka anobva kuna Musikavanhu*). Some of the brides and grooms who experience the

¹ Some Shona people still view their bride as a new member of the immediate and extended family, though others are now only valuing their immediate family members only in their appraisal of the bride's role.

kupururudzira muroora performances might actually go on to have a Christian wedding ceremony some years after the bride welcoming ceremony if they want and can afford it, but others may not. This is a practice which is happening in contemporary times but in pre-colonial times it did not happen. Marriage is perceived as an intertwining of the married couple's souls and connection of their two families, a spiritual bond which is only broken by either death or divorce. When a married couple divorce *gupuro* is supposed to be given as a token of divorce.

It should also be noted that Shona conception of marriage goes beyond a Christian view of marriage as a covenant relationship that ends with the death of one of the spouses (1 Cor. 7:10). In Shona traditional belief, the couple's spiritual bond continues long after the death of one of the spouses. The spirit/ghost of a wronged deceased partner can linger around and bring misfortune if the surviving partner breaches the sacred bond before or after death (Graves, 1988).² There are some houses that are haunted by ghosts and spirits of deceased spouses who, when they died, were angry about some aspect of their relationship or disposal of their belongings. Cleansing ceremonies maybe needed to make such houses habitable again. This makes marriage critical and central to the social well-being, health and survival of a community. Thus, marriage is accorded great respect because it is sacred and central to the well-being of the members of a community and sustains the patrilineage as couples reproduce.

There are gradual stages of courtship and solemnisation that are observed before marriage is finally reached. Grooms and brides who formally marry have to take time to know each other and each other's relatives and their family's public image. Introductions to the bride's natal family demonstrate the groom's seriousness with the

² The Shona people believe that upon death one's spirit (*mweya*) leaves the body and continues to influence the community in the realm of the living-dead.

relationship and intention to marry. A man pays lobola to appreciate the child bearing role that his wife plays. To a small extent, lobola is also about the exchange of the female labor from her natal family to the husband's. Lobola may be paid in full or in part payments before the bride is brought by her natal aunts to her new home (*kuperekwa*) for the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony to be performed. Grooms who marry informally have the obligation to settle lobola payments later on in their marriages.

In Shona culture songs are a fundamental mode of teaching so that the woman is prepared to understand different signs of both dangers and blessings in her marriage. Shona people use songs that they relate to particular situations that may arise. Songs are a very important part of the Shona people's daily lives and they punctuate all stages of life. Songs are used during many occasions such as initiation rites, young people's socialisation outings, etc.; in short, from birth until death. In the context of marriage initiation rites, songs become even more crucial because they are used as a tool for creating the identity of the married woman, as well as depicting the behaviour that is expected of her. Thus, it is vital to critically look at some of the songs that are used in issuing marriage instructions to young brides in order to assess the ways in which Shona brides are welcomed into the groom's home. This is significant because the *kupururudzira muroora* songs remain a reference point of a woman's life in marriage as they reinforce what the paternal aunts from her natal family (*vanatete*) would have taught her.

Shona people raise their daughters with the view that one day they will go through the process of proper marriage rites in which teachings are passed on to the bride by her paternal aunt on how to keep her marriage and observe marital rituals. The bride is taught how to welcome her in-laws and visitors, how to take care of her husband, with the most central teaching being how to please her husband sexually. There are no written sources on the history and origin of *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony except oral information

from culture bearers who also affirm that nothing has been written on the history of the ceremony. According to the oral information from the old Shona people, the ceremony goes way back to the *pasichigare* era, well before the inception of colonial rule in 1890. When the Shona people migrated from Guruuswa (Savannah grasslands) in northern and central Africa, they brought the ceremony with them to areas south of the Zambezi River (Beach, 1994).

During the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony there is much singing, drum beating and dancing which is performed. However, the music and dancing is a celebration for the new bride, the lyrics of the music are also meant to impart marital "knowhow" to the new bride. The bride does not have any say on what the welcoming crowd and her in-laws are doing and is not even consulted nor asked to respond on any matter. In fact, if the bride/initiate asks questions during this time, she may be seen as ill-mannered. This is a sign of lack of *unhu* and she might be perceived as one with a potential to be difficult to handle. Thus, throughout the ceremony, the bride should not make eye contact with the people around her. This might also be a result of her shyness. She might only whisper to her aunt but must not voice any concerns. The bride pays obeisance to those who are giving her a husband as a way of showing respect and appreciation and this is the rightful behaviour she is supposed to adopt.

Just before the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony, a bride can even receive a beating from her paternal aunt depending on what the aunt thinks about the girl's character, as well as if she had not elongated her labia minora (*kudhonza matinji*)³. Elongation of the

³ Kudhonza matinji is a practice of pulling and elongating the labia minora. It is believed that men enjoy sex when a woman has elongated labia minora and that it opens the birth canal, making it easy for a woman in child birth. Nowadays even some married women who do not have elongated labia minora attempt to 'correct' this by applying Vaseline to soften their labia minora and then pull it.

labia minora is done prior to the bride welcoming ceremony and is done for the benefit and sexual enjoyment of the husband. The bride is consistently told to please her husband in bed and elongating her labia minora is very important for this cause. Kanyoro (2001) argues that the accountability of women in taking responsibility for their lives demands that issues of sexuality be discussed openly. However, in Shona culture this can only be done with the appropriate people such as aunts and uncles but when they are not available brothers and sisters can stand in for them. This will help women deal with elongating their labia minora for men's enjoyment. The World Health Organisation (2000) listed it as female genital mutilation that subjects women to unhealthy conditions for the sake of sexually pleasing themselves and their husbands, and Perez and Namulondo (2011) associate the practice with health risks. This is a contentious issue because other researchers have argued that it is genital modification (Koster and Price, 2008) and women regard the practice as a positive force in their lives.

When the bride welcoming ceremony ends the groom is called into the hut to collect the bride. He does not necessarily have to be present during the singing and dancing. This is an act, as Maxwell (1983) reveals, symbolising the man claiming his wife. The *kupururudzira muroora* teachings go on until the next day. Songs play a huge role throughout the bride welcoming ceremony performance. They are not just part of the ceremony but the ceremony's essence which embeds the teaching, values, mores and *unhu*. Thus, to understand the subordination aspect that a woman is prepared for by these songs and teachings to experience in her marriage, it is crucial to do a content analysis of some of the songs that are performed during the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony.

In Shona culture a bride is taught by her aunts how to behave sexually in her marriage. She must not refuse to be intimate with her husband without reason at any given time. If she does, the reasoning goes, he may look elsewhere and it will be considered "her fault."

This means that even when she is tired, she is obliged to have sex with him. There is no reason good enough for a wife to deny her husband sex. Even when she is menstruating, she is taught that she can give her husband thigh sex. A woman is treated as a person who has no sexual needs of her own but her husband has to be sexually satisfied at all costs. Phiri and Nadar (2009:13) note that “the value attached to marriage is more than the value attached to one’s own life”, and this is evident among Shona people. Even if the wife knows that her husband is having extramarital affairs, many Shona say she must sleep with him unreservedly. Generally speaking, extramarital affairs may not be seen as enough grounds for the wife to deny her husband sex. Sex might help her secure or preserve her marriage, whatever the consequences. In fact, when a man is having extramarital affairs, the first thing a wife is asked by her aunt is whether or not she had been giving him sex whenever he wanted. Her role is to keep the marriage going by giving as much sex as possible. Some Shona women whose husbands are promiscuous end up insisting that *ndinogarira vana vangu* (I will stay in this marriage for the sake of my children’s welfare) in a desperate bid to sustain marriage. This is unsafe in the context of the HIV pandemic. It seems that the value of the woman is dependent on the extent to which she satisfies her husband sexually. Kindness and care for her husband is gauged on submission and fulfilment of his demands, preparing his meals, and doing his laundry among other things.

A woman is treated as ‘a sex slave’ by her husband. Slaves have no rights and in the same vein, Shona women do not have sexual rights. A woman can complain if sexually dissatisfied and say to her aunts that *handina kuvinga sadza pano* (Literally meaning that I did not come here just to eat thick porridge, also implying that I came here to be sexually satisfied by my husband) but most of the time Shona men do what they want, not what the women want. Their husbands have sexual rights hence whatever the man says, the woman is expected to obey. Sexual and reproductive rights of Shona

women lie with their partners, who usually dictate the number of children the couple will have, although it is the women who bear labour pains.

One could even say that some marital sexual relations among the Shona can be equated to cases of rape, though there is no crime called marital rape in Zimbabwe. Shona women are not to deny their husbands sexual pleasure no matter the circumstances. The woman should be submissive since denying her husband sex is seen as disobedience. This implies that a wife does not have to think twice when the husband wants sexual intercourse; she simply has to do it. As a slave master, her husband must have sex whenever he desires. This shows that the wife is owned by the husband, or regarded as her husband's property. Even if the wife is sick or tired, the bride is taught that she should be able to make love because, as some say, "her vagina is not sick" (Rasing, 2001: 286). Sickness or tiredness is not reason enough to refuse sex, therefore Shona women can be coerced into sexual intercourse. The fact is that a woman is not supposed to refuse to have sex with her husband. Women oblige for fear of losing their husbands to fellow women in desperate need of men, which emanates from socially constructed views amongst the Shona of unmarried women as prostitutes. Husband snatching makes women their own worst enemies, especially by 'small houses' (single mothers/women who secretly date married men in adulterous relationships). This kind of thinking and action puts women in a subservient position since they have no power over their own sexual lives. If a woman refuses to have sex, the teachings warn her that her husband might leave her for another woman. Also men in Shona culture marry to have children, hence when a woman cannot have children a man may want to remarry.

After sexual intercourse, a bride is taught that she should clean her husband using a piece of cloth and not vice versa. Cleaning her husband is considered to be a blessing and encourages a foetus to grow in the womb. After this, then she should kneel on the floor and

clap her hands to thank him for sex. Phiri and Nadar (2009:13) made the same observation and pointed out that there is no mutual ownership of each other's bodies between married couples. If one wants equality, then sex should be for mutual enjoyment and satisfaction, but in Shona culture it seems to be one-sided. The woman is the one who should thank her husband for sex which he demands. She cannot demand sex. The Shona wife is told to pay obeisance to her husband after every sexual act as if her husband derives no gratification from the act.

We seem not to find a distinction between a wife and a sexual client here and the teachings by the aunts tend to prepare brides for a submissive role in marriage. She is depicted as worthy only as she satisfies her husband sexually and as long as she can bear children. If she refuses to have sex with him at any given time, she risks going back to a lonely life and some women may suffer without husband, depending on their financial status. This means that without making herself sexually available the woman has no value, implying that a woman's value is when there is a man with her. Rakoczy (2004) argues that a woman ought to have intrinsic value on her own as a human being but distressingly the common trend for Shona peoples, it is women (the aunts) preparing another woman (the bride) for a lifetime of subjugation in marriage through these teachings. It is a sad truth that once a husband dies, many women begin to suffer as they have no employment and very little education if any. It is quite distressing for whom marriage and prosperity is meant, because apparently is it just for the man.

If the couple divorces, it is the woman who is usually blamed although oftentimes men behave promiscuously in marriage. Statements such as one which equates a man to a hunter who never gets satisfied sexually are at the foundation of much of the dehumanisation that Shona women endure in their daily lived experiences. The wife is not allowed to refuse him sex but a man has a reason to refuse his wife sex. If the wife does not listen to her

husband's instruction, he has the right to starve her of sex. The woman is given no reason to refuse her husband, but the husband can, on the account that she has not followed his instruction. Clearly, the man has complete power over his wife's sexuality. The man owns his wife's body and not the other way round.

This section provided a normative view of the gender relations within a Shona marriage from our lived experiences which provide an emic perspective since we are part of that culture. In the following section we provide evidence from our research that reinforces this perspective as well as show forms of resistance by Shona women.

The Context of Bride-Welcoming Ceremonies

When a teenage girl has biologically matured and is on the verge of getting married, her paternal aunts start educating her about her impending marriage. In some instances the teachings used to occur in the past (and even still occur today) as part of the preparation of brides for marriage, though not all couples go through that rite in contemporary times. Without the preparatory teachings, a bride is presented as unfit to handle marriage and she is also portrayed as an uncultured or untaught woman. The common assumption is that she may encounter marital problems later if the elders do not prepare her for the institution of marriage by telling her what to expect and how to handle situations that may arise. Some senior female members of the family also give instruction through speeches, demonstrations and/or dramas.

A bride can move into the groom's home either formally or informally. The formal way is when lobola (bride-wealth) is paid for her to her family and both sets of in-laws are in agreement, which is referred to as *kukumbirwa*. The bride's aunts or sisters take her into the groom's home in broad daylight (*kumupereka*). The informal way is *kutizira mukumbo* (literally meaning to run a leg) which occurs when the bride decides that she will go to her lover who may or may

not have impregnated her. In other cases it might be because during their dating the groom may have committed *madarikanhumbi* (having premarital sex with her) and consequently he may have broken her virginity. Some of the women we interviewed said they eloped to their husbands when they were not pregnant because they felt that their suitors were dawdling.

Our respondents narrated varying experiences and circumstances surrounding *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony performances. Most couples who marry within the rural environment usually experience the performance of bride welcoming songs. This could be a sign that rural community dwellers still value this traditional cultural practice. Some but not all newly-married urban couples find time to visit their rural homes during public holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and state holidays to have the bride welcoming ceremonies conducted by their people as a sign of accepting the bride. The bride is usually accompanied by her *tete* (paternal aunt) but sometimes her sister can play the same role.

The bride welcoming ceremony can be performed either in the afternoon or at night depending on the beliefs and principles of the groom's family. If the bride comes through *kuperekwa*, the ceremony may be performed during the day. Our informants said that usually the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony is performed during the evening and into the night if the bride comes into the groom's home through *kutizira*. The ceremony is the traditional way to introduce the new bride into both the groom's home and the village community. When the bride comes at night, those whose construction of marriage has been influenced by Christianity might be heard saying *achatiswa nemazizi* (literally meaning that her wedding has been conducted by owls), meaning that she got into the institution of marriage nicodemously.

The ceremony may begin about three kilometres away from the groom's home, the bride usually walks for a few steps and sits down,

waiting for her husband's sisters to do *kushonongora*⁴ (give her money or a token) for her to continue walking. The groom's sisters may give her a stick symbolising the money they will give her later. However, the bride is usually advised to not accept such tokens because her husband's relatives may deceive her. If they do not give her anything or they do not give her enough, she remains seated.

Elderly people sit curiously in the round kitchen hut of her husband's parents' home in anticipation of the bride's arrival. Upon her arrival, she is guided into the kitchen where the in-laws and some members of the community would be waiting for her. They prepare *sadza* (a thick porridge commonly made from maize or sorghum, the staple food in Zimbabwe) and chicken for her and plead with her to eat. In Shona culture, the bride should not promptly accept the food offered; she should initially refuse and accept later. If the bride accepts the food there and then, her in-laws will conclude that she lacks good morals (*unhu*). She is not expected to get acquainted unexpectedly too quickly with the new environment, despite the fact that the groom may have opted for a bride *wematongo* (from the locale or same area where he lives).

The ceremony comprises singing, dancing and ululating as the groom's family and village community welcome their new bride. The groom's aunts and sisters (*vanatete*) and members of the village community sing the bride welcoming songs which are sometimes punctuated with teachings, mockery and denigration. They sing in jest and sarcasm. The *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony usually runs from dusk until late into the evening. The bride is told to cover her face with a white cloth. The white cloth is usually a symbol of purity. Throughout the ceremony, the bride says nothing and remains draped in the white cloth until her husband's relatives give her some money, again an act of *kushonongora*. After the ceremony during the

⁴ The bride can use the money that she earns to buy what she needs for her new home after giving her aunt or sister some.

first evening, a bride who has been formally introduced by her paternal aunts (*aperekwa*) joins the groom and they go to sleep. If she has eloped (*atizira mukumbo*), the first night is not treated as a ceremony since she will have joined the groom's family informally.

The following day the bride, with her sister or aunt, wake up very early in the morning and sweep the yard, wash the plates and do all household chores before the in-laws and everyone else wake up. They pile up the rubbish in small heaps and again wait for *kushonongorwa* (small gift of money or token). Very early in the morning, the bride and her sister or aunt are accompanied by a fellow *muroora* (daughter-in-law) of her husband's family who is well versed with the way her husband's family conducts itself. The trio move around wearing *madhuku nemazambiya* (pieces of cloth that women wrap around their heads and their waists) giving the husband's relatives water to wash their faces. The relatives in return should also give a token of appreciation either in cash or kind. The exercise is seen as a way of introducing the new daughter-in-law to members of the immediate and extended family. After the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony, the bride is supposedly assured of happiness and a fulfilled life as the daughter-in-law of her new home.

The varying circumstances surrounding the performance of songs at the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony show that this performance, like all cultural productions, is not static but is continually reinterpreted and reimagined in the Shona community. This is evidence of the continuity of change (Nettl, 2005) in which an important cultural trait persists through various permutations in different contexts. The Shona continue to perform bride welcoming ceremony songs because they are important in the transmission of social knowledge about marital relationships. The patriarchal nature of the Shona society is now being questioned with the advent of an influx of new ideas on gender equity. Apart from welcoming a bride, the performance of Shona bride-welcoming ceremony songs

transmits cultural knowledge of expectations, norms, customs, mores and values.

Kupururudzira Muroora Song Analyses

A bride welcoming ceremony is punctuated by singing, dancing and ululation. In this section we analyse the songs that are used in welcoming Shona brides into their in-laws' homestead and marriage. There are songs that specifically refer to how the woman should view and respect her husband. The focus of this section is on the interpretation of ten of such songs which depict the power dynamics in marriage. It is also important to mention that some of these songs may carry both an explicit and an implicit meaning. The bride's aunt bears the responsibility to explain the meaning to her niece. The songs are generally short and have a chorus. It has to be noted that the order in which we present the songs below is not necessarily the order in which they are performed. Individual performances may or may not include all the songs presented here.

We must begin by contending that power dynamics in marriage between men and women are culturally constructed. Songs are an element of culture and we notice that there are songs that show patriarchy among the Shona people. *Kupururudzira muroora* songs provide valuable insights in understanding the subservience that Shona women are supposed to endure in their marriages. It is possible that Shona men do not intentionally and directly subordinate their wives but the socialisation and welcoming brides go through sets them up for an inferior role in their marriages and men are the supposed beneficiaries (Maluleke, 1997). In the *kupururudzira muroora* marital ceremony a woman is made to think (intentionally or unintentionally) that she has no significance and her only duty is to satisfy her husband both morally and sexually, yet in reality she might work industriously. If she fails to achieve that she is susceptible to losing him.

In the past⁵, as the bride arrived at the groom's home she was carried on her paternal aunt's back naked. A song is sung; *muroora tauya naye muroora tauya naye nemagumbeze* (We have brought the bride, we have brought the bride, we have brought the bride with her blankets). The song says that we brought her with her blankets signifying that she is not going back to her natal home because even her blankets have been moved to the new home. One of our respondents said that the bride might also be wrapped in blankets as a sign that she is a virgin and it is up to the groom to break her hymen. At the groom's house after sexual intercourse, the groom would give the bride's aunt a blanket pierced with hot ashes to make a hole in its centre if the girl was not a virgin. The groom throws hot *mavhunze* (charcoal) the next morning to the excitement of all his family members. This means that the groom was strong and as Chondoka (2001:96) puts it, it was a test of the man's virility rather than a girl's virginity.

The next song portrays the bride as desperate and out of sorts; *Dai pasina hanzvadzi yedu iwe waitoorwa negudo remugomo* (Had it not been for our brother, no man was willing to marry you and only a baboon from the mountain would have married you). This song is sung as a playful mockery of the new bride. The welcoming party teases the new bride by suggesting that had it not been for their brother no man was prepared to marry her (implying that she is ugly) but only a baboon would have had the courage to propose marriage to her. To the groom's family, his decision to marry her has liberated her since they think she was desperate. In terms of gender equality, there is need to fight against the notion that women are lower in dignity and need men to complete them as human. This song illustrates that in Shona culture a bride only gains value when a groom chooses to marry her.

⁵ There might possibly be some people who still do so today but nudity is rare

Another song goes *Muroora amire-e, amire, muroora amire nemadziro papata* (The bride is standing, she is standing, the bride is standing stiff by the walls). The literal meaning of this song is that the bride, after eloping to the groom's home, waits anxiously by the eaves to be escorted into the house since she will probably be shy. In some cases she might actually hide behind the kitchen door with her face covered. *Papata* means a state of being stiff or frozen, usually a frightened status, and it can be quite stressful physically. The hidden meaning of the song is that the bride can resist sharing the same kitchen with her *vamwene* (mother-in-law) and standing by the wall is done in protest. It can be interpreted as a quiet resistance. Her message is that she wants to use her own kitchen, probably basing on prior knowledge about her *vamwene* which she might have gathered from gossip or rumours.

There is a song which goes *Kuno kwedu kunogaiwa mari veduwee, kunogaiwa mari. Kwawakabva kunonhuwa nhamo veduwee, kunonhuwa nhamo* (Here in our family we make money, we make money. Where you come from stinks of poverty, stinks of poverty). This song actually places the bride's family into a lower social status than the groom's family which is putatively more successful based on wealth. It gives the impression that the groom is a financial saviour to the bride. It implies that the bride has made her decision to marry the groom on monetary terms and it is sung by the aunts to denigrate her in a joking manner as she comes to join their family. She automatically is deemed to be ever grateful, voiceless and servile in the relationship because that is the usual predicament of a poor person. They cannot decide anything and that is why we argue that such lyrical content in the bride welcoming ceremony is tantamount to relegating the bride and according her otherness rather than warmly welcoming her and showing her rightful place as an equal partner in marriage. The culture in which these songs are sung treats *varooro* as 'other' so songs could not have been any different.

Another song is *Dai uriwo mugariro, pasi pangagare mugariro* (If only the humble character she shows at the time of her arrival would be always like that and a true depiction of her real self it would be a better world). This song implies that the family of the groom view the humbleness of the bride on the first encounter with their people as pretence. The bride is actually capable of displaying a rude character and it is only a matter of time before she reveals her true colours. Whatever her real character is, they are sceptical and suspect her to be of loose morals. They are prewired to receive her as a bad character intruding into their family. Notably, this song is sung by her husband's aunts who will one day end up in their own in-laws' homes. It is actually women subjugating one of their own. Prejudging a bride's character and expecting her to be rude and unmanageable in the future is rampant amongst mothers-in-law as well. In this scenario men just innocently benefit from the women treating each other with suspicion. That is how patriarchy works here, a *tete* when in her natal home is treated as a husband by the new *muroora*.

The next two songs portray the bride as an immoral and ill-mannered person who should be treated with suspicion. *Hanzvadzi chenjera mukadzi wako anoruta takamuona achichachura rongo renyama kwavamwene* (brother be careful your wife is greedy we saw her stealing meat from her mother-in-law's clay pot). The meaning of this song is that the husband must watch out for the bad side of his wife's character. Whatever her character's disposition, the members of the groom's family already have a template against which to measure her morals; the register portrays her as so terrible a person that if left unattended to or unguarded she can steal even foodstuffs. Though the song is intended to mock the bride, one bride we interviewed said such mockery embedded in the songs can make women feel morally and socially inferior to their husbands and consequently, rob them of their self-worth and self-image. The impression given is that the groom is good and there seems to be

nothing good about the bride, which is wrong. Patriarchy emerges from denying women chances to develop their own self-worth (Maimela, 1995). This is clearly the teaching in the song. Women are taught to believe that they are worthy and valuable just as long as they can give images of righteousness to their husbands. The next song cautions the bride not to voice her concerns in the new family.

Muroora ibonga, atipedzera huku. Mumadzira kwati kwati ungati karukodzi wena (Bride is a wildcat, she has finished our chickens. Standing by the walls she looks like an eagle). The singers sing lyrics to show the bride as a greedy character who finishes their chickens. Despite the hard work that awaits her, she is a predator/bird of prey before she starts any interaction with the members of her new family.

Another song goes *Muroora usaite mhere mhere pamusha pevanhu Uri muroora usaite mhere mhere pamusha pevanhu* (bride do not cause havoc by being quarrelsome at the in-laws home). This song is interpreted as the woman is coming into the in-laws home and therefore should not be a cause for concern in any way. This implies that only her husband has the voice and mandate to solve the most difficult problems and make all decisions in the house but it is the woman who makes him the head. This implies that the wife in the home is to be seen only and not heard. She is expected not to take part in decision making even if it concerns and involves her. She is alienated as a *mutorwa* (an outsider in the family). Phiri and Nadar (2009) say that women express resignation to traditional worldviews such as the one that it is their destiny to get married and fulfil their husband's needs because marriage is an essential part of womanhood. Accordingly, in fulfilling their husbands' needs they overlook their own needs and as a result, they might tend become docile in marriage. In a number of cases women who challenge men's views risk getting divorced. The message in this song that she must not be vocal places her on the periphery of decision making thereby portraying her as subordinate to her husband and his family.

It is no wonder that even when a woman goes with a complaint about her husband's behaviour to her maternal mother, the mother usually advises her that in marriage she must endure and commands her to go back to her husband.

The next two songs encourage the bride to work hard. *Muroora usaringe zuva yuvi usaringe zuva pakuita basa, pakukuya, pakubika nepakuenda kumunda, nepakuenda kutsime* (bride do not sit and consistently check the position of the sun for the passage of time when you are working, when you are grinding on the grinding stone, when you cooking, when working in the field, or when you go to the well to fetch water). The meaning of this song is that a married woman should be industrious. She should work hard the whole day and the non-stop work entails suffering. She is the one who prepares all meals for the family. The woman should be grateful for the food although she is the one who tills the land, plants the seeds, weeds and harvests the crops. She must create time in between to dash to the well or river to fetch water for domestic uses. She is the one who pounds the sorghum or millet and grinds it into mealie-meal. She should not find time to sit and watch the sun but toil until the sun sets. The song resonates well with the Shona belief that success of a household depends on the industriousness of a woman (*musha mukadzi*) and this helps to sustain the married couple's children. She works hard to make the man succeed but she does not need to be concerned much about herself. After working hard she will not rest because her husband, who is not compelled to do the household chores, will demand sex later on at night.

Muroora auya, wekutsime nekuhuni. Mazimhino fengu fengu, enge datya rashaya mvura. (our bride has come, she is the one to fetch water and collect firewood. She has big nostrils that flap up and down, like a frog out of water). One respondent commented that the reference to her flapping nostrils sounds like an insult about her looks but brides cannot do anything about it. The bride is portrayed as a most welcome labourer coming to do the household chores

such as going to the well to fetch water for the family's domestic uses such as drinking, bathing, doing the dirty dishes and washing the dirty linen. In this particular community boreholes are located far away, about a kilometre from the village and fetching water is quite a tedious task as women balance twenty litre buckets of water on their heads several times before they collect enough water for a day's use. Firewood is their only form of fuel for cooking and is found at some distant forests about four kilometres from the residential area, making it quite a laborious task to collect it and this is the bride's duty as well. Such a song prepares the bride for a life of servitude.

Conclusion

We observe that fellow women (sisters, aunts and grandmothers) prepare brides to be fearful in marriage. They kneel down and thank their husbands by their totems (*kutenda nemutupo*) after their first sexual intercourse and throughout their marriage. Some men end up asking their wives to tell them everything they were taught so that they decide to choose what they want. Although they also undergo some preparation for marriage conducted by their uncles, men do not go through preparation for subjugation which women experience, so men benefit from the subservience that their wives are prepared for by older women. Although men do not go through such subjugation, they know how their wives should behave, because if they do not behave to expectation, women are taken back to their families as having not been taught properly. Nwachuku (2006:66) notes that such dehumanising acts are taught to young women by "elderly powerful women for the purpose of female discipline in the areas of wifely submission... and for maintaining the aura of femininity." In the name of submission, women are subordinated and indeed Maxwell (1983:89) is right in stating that women are prepared to endure life graciously in a patriarchal society. It is also clear that if practices such as

performance of these songs, amongst other actions, were not used as tools for oppression of Shona women; patriarchy would not have a hold over Shona married women.

This discussion has shown that songs are not just a significant component of *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony but also the essence of it. These songs are crucial because they are used as a tool for constructing the identities of proper womanhood and they also determine how women behave. The lyrics portray a woman as a person who is desperate to get a marriage partner, and therefore should respect a man, should work very hard and not be vocal in marriage. Thus, the songs are a reference point of a woman's life in marriage. If a married woman forgets the teaching on a certain aspect of marriage, the song related to that teaching helps her to remember. We argue that these songs contribute to the perpetration of subordination of Shona women in marriage as most of the songs encourage women to take care of their husbands even at the expense of their own lives.

This study has shown that *kupururudzira muroora* songs have been used to set women for subservience in marriage. We conclude by noting some questions that arise from this study. First, there is the question; how can *vanatete* (aunts) be discouraged from promoting the oppression of women through exposure to contemporary feminist pedagogical teachings? This will help them to find ways of integrating and applying emancipatory principles in their teachings. Second; how can women compose *kupururudzira muroora* songs that are life affirming for women in marriage? Third, there is a need for more empirical studies on factors that contribute to the denigration of Shona married women. Since the chief cornerstone of feminist work is women's experiences, this study of the impact of bride welcoming songs on married women among the Shona people remains essential.

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