

SEXISM IN THE XITSONGA LANGUAGE

by

TINYIKO MAURICE HLANGWANI

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SUPERVISOR: DR J.R. RAMMALA

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that "SEXISM IN THE XITSONGA LANGUAGE" is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for the purpose of a degree.

Signature: .....

Date: 10/07/2007.....

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the following people:

- (a) Parents: Mdungazi and Sayina
- (b) Wife: Viginia
- (c) Children: Mjikisa, Mafenya, and Vulolo
- (d) Siblings: Tsakani, Precilla, Ivy, and Joster
- (e) Grandmother: N'wa-Ndhengeza

This is my loud dream. Do hear of it.

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Lastly, whoever has had a chat with me over this work, your contribution is noteworthy of. I thank you.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates if sexism exists in the Xitsonga language. It explains with the help scholars from other languages of the world what sexism is. It is on that background that the Xitsonga language is evaluated. The speakers of the language are made aware of the negative effect that emanates from sexism. The study basically seeks to understand male-female relationships within a particular language.

The researcher wants the language and its speakers to align themselves with the Constitution which regards all people as equal regardless of their sexual orientation. Several activities that occur in the medium of the Xitsonga language are targeted for intensive scrutiny. Apart from the provisions of the Constitution, the study makes it possible to realize the disadvantages of keeping up a sexist language.

The study makes generalizations from the viewpoints of the informants who reside in the area under study. It suggests possible means of eradicating sexist language since every aspect of language is examined carefully. It also appeals for readiness for the discriminating group to change and the discriminated group to develop self-esteem. A sense of pride in speaking the Xitsonga language is instilled.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF SEXISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

As an entry to the study, the readers will be introduced to the background study of sexism and its inherent problems. The study will also state its aim and objectives, its significance, delimitation, and the research methodology as well as the review of literature relevant to the topic.

This mini-dissertation explores and analyses the existence of sexism in society, and recommends ways of dealing with its challenges. It explains sexism as a concept and discusses its influence on language. Ideas were drawn from various writers to see what form of sexism is experienced within a particular society.

South Africa and the world at large are staging massive campaigns against sexism. Suzanne Romaine in Kotthoff and Wodak (1997: 71) highlights the campaigns by some of the German women insisting that they be addressed as *Frau* (woman or wife) and English-speaking women insisting on the introduction of *Ms*. These two groups of women express dissatisfaction with the titles men use to address them. The former group feels belittled if they are addressed as *Fräulein* (Miss), whereas the latter group feels condemned to marriage – an institution men employ to impose their dominance. An occurrence that has been gaining worldwide attention such as sexism has proved itself to be a universal problem. Frank and Treichler (1989: 17) see sexism as “discrimination against

women or men". Both women and men experience unfair treatment by one another. Usually, women are the group that is victim to this social ill. Andrea Dworkin's coinage of the term *woman-hating* in Frank and Treichler (1989: 17) acknowledges that sexism prevails, but it is more often intended towards women. It means, therefore, that although it is mostly men who are seen to discriminate against women, both men and women must exercise caution in the utterances they make not to discriminate against each other.

Wodak (1997: 11) suggests that people "must use nonsexist language to identify sexist language and to offer alternative uses that are neither hostile to women nor discriminating". There is a belief that language can be spoken without sounding sexist. Therefore, sexist language becomes something artificial and not natural. It is something people use to attain certain goals, such as stamping male superiority.

This research sought to explore a kind of sexism that surfaces in language, that is, sexism in language. Some languages may be seen as the instruments used by men to oppress women, or vice versa. Littlejohn (2002: 224) writes that "because language is patriarchal, it often creates an unsafe and uncomfortable world for women". Most forms of vocabulary seem to be indicative of men's experience, hence there are many words that suppress or ridicule women. For example, people who use vulgar language to express irritation may say, *U tekele nyini*, referring to "You copied the ways of your mother". The word *nyini* receives high frequency in usage in a range of contexts such as anger, casual talk, and other contexts. The implication that is created by the word *nyini* leads to an instance of giving birth and confinement of females to childbearing environments. All bad deeds by young ones are attributed to their

mothers, even when the latter may be innocent. It is, therefore, unfair to women. In the Xitsonga language, for one to coin the most effective and efficient vulgar phrase, the word *nyini* is attached. Expressions such as *nhloko ya nyini* (your mother's head), *xisuti xa nyini* (your mother's bum), and others are often heard when people show their anger. Especially *nyini* hurts the hearer.

Cooper and Cluver (1990: 740) define sexism as “any action, verbal or non-verbal, that assigns certain roles or characters to people simply on the basis of sex”. Not only words are sexist, but actions as well. For instance, putting a thumb between the two fingers (index and middle finger) may suggest that one is appealing for sexual intercourse. Women are less likely to perform such an action, as it is often men. The action is not only sexist but is also a sign of abusive behaviour by the actor. Cameron (1992: 99) defines sexism as a word used to refer to “ideas and practices that treat either sex ‘unfairly’, or even just differently”. The second definition supports the definition by Cooper and Cluver by stating that once there is a feeling of unfairness by the actions or ideas of a person of the opposite sex, then such actions or ideas may be regarded as sexist. All these definitions of sexist language converge at a similar view that expressions of a language may be used by either sex to exclude, insult or trivialize others, particularly women.

According to the culture of the Xitsonga speaking people, women may be seen to occupy an inferior societal position to men. Women were, in the past and possibly even now, not allowed to say a word in a tribal court unless they were the ones being tried. The following proverb is one of the many proverbs that a society uses to maintain its internal hierarchy which aims at excluding women:

*Vavasati a va na huvo. Rito ra wansati a ri na ntikelo,
ri tluriwa hi ra wanuna ehubyeni (Malungana, 1997: 85).
Women cannot hold court. A women's voice is not as
valuable as a man's in a gathering.*

According to this proverb, a woman's contribution at a traditional gathering is less preferred to one by a man. Men seem not to expect a sound contribution from women on issues pertaining to the society. People's mindset on women needs to be changed because the latter are perceived as people who are unable to control themselves. Junod (1973: 186) portrays how women deal with crisis situations as follows:

*Wansati a nga na hosi.
Hosi a hi hosi eka nsati wa yena. Naswona wansati
loko a kwatile, a nga swi koti ni ku chava hosi.
A woman has no chief.
A woman has no respect even for the authority of a
chief, when she feels wronged.*

This proverb describes a woman as someone who is overcome by anger. Instead of giving emotions a safer outlet, a woman becomes uncontrollable and forgets the honour and respect that should be bestowed on her husband. There may be an alternative to an issue which is hurting a woman, but because a woman cannot bring her anger under control, she wavers the opportunity to resolve the issue in a peaceful manner. Frequently after cleansing herself of the anger by a shouting voice, will a woman listen to a word of advice.

Based on these language snippets, ranging from the expressions people use to vent their anger to the proverbs that serve to confirm societal

beliefs and practices, there is a faint idea that the two sexes (men and women) are not at peace with one another.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sexism in language does not add value to the language but continues to cause division among people. As it is spoken by both sexes, language must equally cater for their needs and place them on an equal footing as human beings. Frank and Treichler (1989) see both sexes as equals but language as a divider as it does not serve all its speakers in the same manner although they both contribute equally to its formulation and maintenance. A tendency in language use that undermines other people will continue to keep women subjected to men. The literature of the language, as a people's expression of their inner feelings, will then not grow. Unity may be claimed to be starting from families themselves where a husband and wife see each other as equals who benefit mutually from each other. People's attitudes will start to change and then children will grow up knowing their parents to be equals. Wodak (1997) condemns the use of language use in a manner that reflects a patriarchal society or as an incapacitation of women. If women are discriminated against, they may not take pride in speaking and promoting the language that discriminates against them. Women are often muted in speech, for they appear to be speaking a sub-language of the language of men. There are very little or no expressions women can use to suppress men. The male sex tends to be rough and swearing, while the female one is polite (Graddol and Swann 1993: 9).

All forms of discrimination are against the South African Constitution. Section 1(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states

that “the country is one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the values of non-racialism and non-sexism” (Act 108 of 1996: 3). The Constitution of the country does not condone any form of behaviour that undermines either of the sexes, but promotes equality between sexes. Therefore, responsible citizens of any country go by their Constitution.

Traditional gatherings, initiation schools, and *b'andlha* (an enclosure where herdboys, men, and grandfathers used to sit in the evening) and marital practices are institutions that may take the blame for the sexism that mars language growth. In the traditional gatherings of the Mtititi Community, women’s contributions have rarely been acknowledged because they are there as observers or listeners. Some praise songs and laws that are sung by the initiates relegate women to nothingness. It is in the *b'andlha* where a propensity for polygamy emanates. Young men are advised not to visit their partners when they are having their menstrual cycle. To have someone to keep company with, they are advised to marry more than one wife. Junod (1973: 176) encourages polygamy with the proverb which states:

*Xikwembu xi haxile, a xi gobangi.
Lava nga tekiwaka a hi vantsongo, va tele.
God has sown plentifully. He has not sown a little.
Young women whom you may marry are many.*

This proverb creates the notion that even if a man does not take care of the one wife he has, there are still many others who need men. Men should be encouraged to stick to their first wives and have the willingness to solve their problems amicably rather than to opt for an unnecessary divorce.

As for marital practices among the Vatsonga people, a woman in marriage is addressed by the name of her father. Her father's name, *Mzamani*, will have a prefix *N'wa-* and she will become known as *N'wa-Mzamani*. Affixation serves two functions. The one function is to consolidate *Mzamani's* ownership of the daughter. The other function marks *Mzamani's* growth that is earned after he has *sold* a daughter to a son-in-law and the daughter becomes a *sold* item. The tagging of women as *N'wa-* thus creates a problem, because the surname shows that they have their origin elsewhere.

Concern about the status of women as influenced by language is prevalent across cultures and languages. In a research conducted among the Tshivenda speaking people, Mafenya (2002: 3) states the findings that Tshivenda folklore treats women as inferior to men, and the former remain inferior to the latter due to influences of culture. If the stories about tradition and beliefs of the Tshivenda speaking people are tainted with sexist, the other aspects including proverbs, idioms, and literature works may also be sexist. The Tshivenda speaking people reside not very far from the Xitsonga speaking people. Their ways as a people who reside next to each other may not be vastly different, and so may be the needs served by their languages. Language needs include, among others, identity marker, cultural preservation, oneness, and others. Unlike in the Tshivenda language, several aspects in the Xitsonga language will be screened for sexism.

People usually put on clothes to prevent their skins against harsh weather and, possibly, have their private parts concealed. Some cultures do not allow the speakers to make audible utterances of words that refer to private parts. Fromkin and Rodman (1993: 303) refer to this type of

words as taboo words. So calling oneself by words that refer to private parts may be equally unacceptable. A certain rugby official was quoted in the *Sunday Times* (23 January 2005: 1) insisting on a female colleague to call him by his nickname “Mr Clitoris”. The female colleague was sexually ill-treated because the rugby official might not be seen as upholding the societal values if he insisted on language that ought to be used in private. Men are very fond of nicknames, especially ones that have sexist connotations. Their fondness does not cultivate respect between the two sexes and must be discouraged.

In another article in the *City Press* (15 August 2004: 32) Mayor Amos Masondo mentions:

It is important for men and women to commit themselves in action towards women empowerment; to meaningful participation in all structures of decision-making; to gender equality; and to challenge the culture of male dominance, sexism, chauvinistic jokes and attitudes.

This contribution confirms that women are, to a certain extent, not placed on par with their male counterparts. People must be wary of using language responsibly. Churches too, are not unique to this debate for they command a large following ranging from youth to adults. In churches that draw from cultural practices, men are alone at the helm of all the proceedings with women playing a relatively passive role. Swatos (1994: 5) argues that the wish to have power over the congregation is a masculine trait, whereas women usually have a will to enhance theirs. Based on the religious perspective, it is as if power-mongering is something man was born with and unwilling to abandon.

The culture of the Vatsonga people seems to leave out women in leadership positions. It looks down upon women as people who have to be home-based, raising children. Nasty expressions are coined to endorse their weaknesses. For example, *Vavasati va fana* (Women are the same), is a common stereotype that prejudices women as people who have the same weaknesses. It is not fair for women to hold this sort of a view on them because it will suppress their innovativeness.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The research aimed at:

Exploring sexism in the Xitsonga language in order to find out whether it is language that is sexist, or people, or both.

The main objectives were to:

Point out linguistic items and expressions in the Xitsonga language which strengthen sexism.

Expose the inequality that may be caused by the use of sexist language which violates the South African Constitution and human rights in general.

Suggest how the same people (speakers of the Xitsonga language) can use the same language without being sexist.

Promote indigenous culture and remove the stigma that one sex is inferior and more immoral than the other.

Promote and nurture the spirit of reconciliation amongst people who are discriminated against and those who discriminate in a sexist manner within the Xitsonga language.

1.4 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question focused on:

What are the real roots of sexism within the Xitsonga language?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will contribute to the ongoing debate and trend on language use to accord women equal status with men in the society. It will also encourage men to change their attitude towards women and begin to see them as capable counterparts and not as their subordinates. The entire Xitsonga speaking community will not be left behind in terms of the strides taken to raise the status of women provided there is a review of the societal practices. Despite having to follow the societal customs such as staging initiation schools and performing dances, screening the songs and dances may help add some dignity, so that the indigenous culture will eventually be sustained. The sex that is discriminated against will regain its respect within the society. The research will bridge the language gap that exists between those who discriminate and the discriminated within the Xitsonga language and that will have reconciliation as its end-product.

1.6. DELIMITATION OF THE SCOPE

The research drew information mainly from Xitsonga language. It was conducted in the Limpopo Province in the Vhembe District at Mtititi Settlement. This area of study is where the indigenous speakers of the Xitsonga language are based. It was easier for the researcher to have access to knowledgeable informants in this area because neither the

researcher nor the informants are strangers to each other. The informants were also able to refer the researcher to other knowledgeable informants within the locality. The population was large enough to offer the required number of informants.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Primary sources

Interviews were used as data collection technique from people who were believed to have contact with sexism in everyday life. Bell (1993: 91) defines a survey interview as “a conversation between interviewer and respondent intended to elicit information from the respondent”. A person who wants information identifies another who is thought to be more knowledgeable in the subject of study. Because information from one respondent might not be sufficient, the researcher had to get other respondents who were matching the initial respondent on the basis of knowledge to support the findings. The respondents were students, lecturers, educators, church leaders, educationists, community members, chiefs, professionals, and other experts.

The researcher targeted twenty-five informants who were believed to be knowledgeable to suit the purpose of the study. The twenty-five respondents comprised a blend of knowledgeable people such as the elders, traditional healers, learners, educators, church leaders, authors, and known active participants in initiation schools.

The data collection technique used for this study was qualitative in nature as it captured firsthand information. De Vos (1998: 240) describes

qualitative research as a technique whose “findings are literally created through the process of interaction between the researcher and the subject(s)”. The researcher arranged to meet the main informants of the study and asked questions that they answered so as to obtain a proper understanding of the subject. The researcher and the informants interacted in the form of interviews for the purpose of helping one another come to a better understanding of certain realities.

Of the many various forms of interviews such as the structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. This type of interview distinguishes itself by functioning in the presence of an interview schedule. De Vos (1998: 299) writes that unstructured interviewing with a schedule is “a guideline for the interviewer and contains questions and themes that are important to the research”. The researcher prepared thematic questions that guided them during the interview process. It was a form of an “exploratory interview” because some questions emanated from the responses of the interviewees (Vockell and Asher, 1995:133).

Bailey (1994) in Makamu (2005: 6) states that semi-structured interviews have numerous advantages. One advantage is flexibility as there is an immediate opportunity to seek and give clarity, whereas the other advantage includes observation of non-verbal behaviour as well as enabling the completion of all the questions.

Also seen as relevant to the qualitative research method is the participant observation that was used to capture utterances that were coincidentally overheard. De Vos (1998: 278) alludes to Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) as one of the first social scientists whose brainchild was participant

observation. It was “his intimate involvement in the daily life of his subjects” that allowed him to obtain first-hand knowledge (De Vos, 1998: 278). By virtue of going into the people’s natural habitat and spending considerable time with them, the researcher became a witness of occurrences of events. A witness is one who sees or hears the event as it occurs. Since it was not possible for the researcher to go to every member of the target group, it was possible to mingle with many of them. Those people (sampled or not) within the target population still had their contributions earmarked because the utterances that they made that had a bearing on the study were captured.

The study confirmed its findings quantitatively by expressing them in percentages. But the study was predominantly qualitative. Creswell (1994: 2) in Leedy (1997: 105) defines a quantitative study as

an inquiry into a social or human problem based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true.

According to Creswell, numbers that enable the researcher to see if the researched phenomenon still existed in a particular area depend on the number of respondents with the particular view. The quantitative study also helped to eliminate “error and bias” when a particular viewpoint was generalized.

1.7.2 Secondary sources

There is a wide range of relevant information that is made available on a particular topic. Some topics have, from particular perspectives, been

researched, revisited, and have new information attached to them. Sources of information such as books, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and government publications (the Constitution and gazettes) were consulted to explore the information that best suited the study. The gathered information was used for comparative and supportive purposes. In some cases, it enabled the researcher to assess what the situation under study had been like in the recent past and how it informed the present and future.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher looked for ideas of a few writers on sexism to be able to make a comparative survey into the Xitsonga language. Much of the ideas are embedded in Western culture and will, therefore, help to see the extent to which sexism is entrenched in the Xitsonga language. It is the researcher's belief that sexism exists in most languages and that there are ways of using these languages without sounding sexist. The authors below were used to surface unfair elements in languages and the suggested alternatives to these shortcomings.

1.8.1 Cameron (1990)

Pronouns are an essential tool that speakers use to substitute proper names in every speech event. There are pronouns that are used to refer specifically to males and those that refer to females. A problem arises when the usage is violated with the use of the pronoun *he* to serve for both males and females in written texts instead of representing males only. Cameron (1990:15) argues that the use of the noun *man* as synonymous with the pronoun *he* and *humanity* causes problems. It is an

English grammatical rule that authors have to comply with. The rule excludes women and treats them as nonexistent.

It will mean that the use of the pronoun *he* must not be inclusive of men and women, but must be used for one sex, namely males. This form of sexism seems to be prevalent in Western culture as exemplified by English in its use of pronouns of masculinity and femininity. It is a problem when these pronouns are not used as they are meant to be understood.

In the Xitsonga language there is a versatile pronoun *Yena* which can be used for either males or females. If the speakers do not use the given pronoun, they have an option of using the nouns *wanuna* (man) or *wansati* (female) and *xinuna* and *xisati* for male and female respectively.

1.8.2 Kuhn (1993)

Kuhn (1993), too, explains that the pronoun *he* is used to refer to either a man or a woman, or both. It is incorrect, according to Kuhn, to haphazardly use the pronoun *he* as if there was no alternative pronoun to refer to females. The suggestion is that the pronoun *he* must be used to refer to a man only and nothing more.

Not only does the *man* pronominalized as the *he* usage tend to confuse users, but it also annoys gender sensitive users and women themselves to have women's natural existence expressed in male terminology. This improper usage nullifies the existence of the female counterpart.

Having cited Cameron (1990) and Kuhn (1993) may assist language users who are not native speakers of the language to consider the usage when they write books and speeches. People will have to be careful of minor errors that may spoil their good work.

1.8.3 West (1989)

According to West (1989), the unacceptable usage of pronouns should be eradicated completely from the daily language use. The following examples are alternatives to generic masculine pronouns that sound sexist:

- (a) Writing the sentence in plural form: Everyone took 'their' book.
- (b) Using one/one's. 'One' must sort out 'one's' problem.
- (c) Using he/she, him/her, or his/her/hers. The book is his or hers.

West's suggested is sexist free because in instances where the user wants to refer to any of the sexes a slash (/) is used between the pronouns. However, the Xitsonga language does not have separate pronouns that refer to male or female. But it uses the pronoun *yena* for either *he* or *she*.

The sexism discussed above is unique to English and other languages that have such generic masculine pronouns that may be used to refer to both male and female simultaneously or a male only.

There are two issues that Xitsonga language users and other speakers should be aware of. Firstly, the users who speak English as a second or third language must be aware of the alternatives for pronouns so that their usage may be nonsexist. Secondly, if there are alternatives to these

aspects of English, solution may be found in the Xitsonga language areas that are affected by sexism.

1.8.4 Thanasoulas (1999)

There are instances where languages are in accord concerning sexism. Thanasoulas believes it is a common trend in most languages for men to use of strong expletives while women use more polite ones. Expletives are words or expressions people use to express annoyance, endearment, and other strong feelings. Thanasoulas claims that in communities where men are socially superior to women, such superiority is proven in their linguistic differences. Men are often distinguished by the use of expletives such as *damn it* and *shit*.

The Xitsonga speaking men usually utter the same words and expressions as *demete* and *xiti*, the English *damn it and shit*. But the most natural expletives men use in Xitsonga are *nhloko ya nyini* and *n'waku* (derogatory word for mother) to express annoyance just like the given expletives do. Women in Western culture use words such as *dear*, *honey*, and others, to express love or sympathy. The most commonly used word by African women to express shock or sympathy is *n'wananga* (my child). According to Thanasoulas, the gentle expletives used by women are said to be protective of the needs and wants of their own and those around them.

The examples the researcher has cited from both sides indicate that sexism is rife in communities. Some women may say, *Ntirho lowu wu lava vavanuna* "This job is suitable for men", when men may say, *Tikhomi rhambu ra xinuna* "Behave like a man". This shows that women

and men tend to regard women as powerless and helpless. These expressions confirm that women are generally perceived as weak, soft, or polite. Similarly, expressions such as *Mthavini i wanuna* “Mthavini is a man” are uttered to credit a woman whose achievement matches that of a man. She is then compared to a man because all good is associated with men.

1.8.5 Crawford (1995)

Crawford (1995: 24) quotes Lakoff (1975) who has noted in women their propensity and excellent vocabulary for colours such as mauve and plum, and other traditionally female specialties in cooking such as sauté, knead and in sewing a whipstitch.

If the father in the family can prepare food, a situation may arise where the children may ask for some more. There is nothing wrong in letting a father to cook so that during times of illness the family would be able to have food without having to rely on one member.

In areas where women seem to handle situations with excellence, men seem to show little or no interest in them, such as with colours, wool or sewing fabric. Although the Vatsonga men do prepare meat for a *braai* when they drink or when they are out in town, they may not do the same at home for the family members to get a taste of what they are capable of preparing. Their reluctance may be attributed to fear of friends who may despise them for a loss of their manhood.

1.8.6 Pelesa (2004)

Currently, the stereotype that a woman's place is in the kitchen is met with great resistance. Pelesa writes that women have begun hatching out of their cocoons to walk alongside men in the workplace in terms of filling positions. The excerpt from *City Press* (26 September 2004: 07) substantiates the filling of certain jobs on the basis of sex in the following manner:

I want to dispel the myth that urology is for men only", said the doctor who is affectionately called "the plumber" by her friends. "They know that she unblocks their pipes ... a medical field previously seen as a no-go area for women doctors.

The author wants to indicate that men must begin to see women as human beings who have similar capabilities as men and not belonging to a lower class. Not only are there only a few female doctors, but there are also very few men who are willing to undress to be injected by a female nurse. The small number of women in the scientific and highly-valued professions may be attributed to men's greed to occupy all the important positions at the expense of women.

Long before the coming of medical doctors who were usually males to traditional areas, traditional healing had been in existence, being practised by both males and females. The Vatsonga people were effective traditional healers who cured numerous dangerous diseases. Females were among those traditional healers who commanded a high degree of respect in terms of effectiveness. Livestock theft, for instance, was brought under control during the time of certain female doctor who would set up the so-called *xidobana* (a ritual intended to handicap a thief).

1.8.7 Waldener (2004)

Waldener mentions that the churches are called upon to join and help create a new dispensation for women. Waldener (2004: 27) cites Father Mkhatswa, who stated in *City Press* (14 November 2004) that “Also outdated was the belief in a “God-given” male superiority, ... We need to discuss the fact that we are all equal.” These words clearly reveal that there is no justification for the tendency to underestimate and exclude women from partaking in life. The church must open its doors for discussion on how to elevate the status of women. If priests begin to urge the churches to transform, other institutions such as government, colleges, technicons, universities, and community meetings where women are the majority, must include women in leadership positions.

To let the Vatsonga people and their customs grow the contribution of both men and women should be regarded as worthwhile to cater for what women need. Women are the people who know best what is right for women.

1.8.8 Eagleton (1986)

Men appear to be unaware that they are leading the way and that women are behind them. Men may have the misconception that women are part of what they are doing. Eagleton (1986) warns against such a tendency by stating that “... women are the secret to be discovered, they are the fissures. They are the source where no one has been.” This citation should warn men that women, who should be moving alongside them, might not even be supporting them. The fissure, which women are said to have, can

be a symptom indicating to men that women have become increasingly dissatisfied. Men should do something before an eruption occurs.

In the Xitsonga language, insulting proverbs, idioms, and names are hurled at women. Sometimes these labels on women do not have a justifiable basis. For example, there are women who, despite being beautiful are unmarried and staying at home, are called *dzingamuti*. There may be nothing wrong with them. Men cannot stay with them, while they are also painstakingly trying to keep a man of their own. If people knew what these women are going through, they would not continue the trend of calling them names. Surprisingly, women do not pity other women who are going through the same ordeal.

1.8.9 Moi (1986)

It raises some concern when people who are always together do not know each other well. Within the group there are those who have to be subservient in order to secure their membership regardless of the little attention they receive. Moi (1986: 138) writes that women are “reduced to the role of the silent Other”. Men, according to Moi, do not bother to get to know who women are. Their presence is of little or no significance.

Many of the Vatsonga people are caught up in situation where the sight of a woman is a representation of a collective whole. Women seem to be conditioned to an extent where their silence is even noted by young men. The labels below are used to address women collectively:

- (a) *Va ka-Mhani* (Of my mother)
- (b) *Genge leyi* (This gang)
- (c) *Rixaka leri* (This type)

All three labels show disrespect for women. Despite being addressed collectively, the most appropriate title for women is *vamanana* “mothers”. In (a), the address regards women as being typical of the speaker’s mother. In (b), they are downgraded to a level of naughty boys. Finally, in (c) whatever women do, characterizes their being women. These descriptions are usually uttered when women have faltered. It is a sign that men are not taken by surprise for a woman’s fault.

1.8.10 Molema (2004)

If church gatherings emphasize the worth of women, it will be an eye-opener among other traditional leaders who still do not recognize the worth of women. Molema (08 August 2004: 32) in *City Press* refers to the power struggle between the sexes:

The man at the centre of a dispute over chieftaincy of the Valoyi tribe in Limpopo Province is sticking to his guns and insists that Tsonga customs can’t be changed to allow a woman to become a Chief.

This is a violation of the Constitution of South Africa in that the woman in question will not be allowed to occupy her rightful leadership position owing to an unfounded claim that women cannot assert authority. All institutions have to mobilize masses, men in particular, to view women as God’s creatures and as having the same value as men before the Creator.

1.8.11 Junod (1973)

In his collection of proverbs, Junod (1973: 190) suppresses women by citing the proverb: *Loko (homu) ya ntswele yi rhangela mahlweni, ti ta*

wela xidziveni “If a cow leads the herd, all cattle will fall into the pool”. This proverb needs attention because those who study and use it, will continue to look down upon women. Due to the influence of this proverb, among the Vatsonga women will never ascend the throne. The Rain Queen Modjadji VI of the Bolobedu people, also in the Limpopo Province, was a living proof that the current generation witnessed as a symbol of women’s ability to take up the reigns. It is high time that women and men should come together and decide to stop using proverbs and sayings.

In Vatsonga culture, it need not be only men who have to take the lead in community structures. Women too must be given a chance to lead. They must be allowed to be a chairperson of, for example, a community civic organization, development forum, community policing forum, and other formations. It may be agreed that if a man led an outgoing structure, the incoming one has to be led by a woman. The attitude of all members of the community should change so that women should be allowed to participate in the organizations.

1.8.12 Littlejohn (2002)

According to Littlejohn, it is not enough when people are aware of the drawbacks in their languages but they do not do anything about them. He has acknowledged and commended the creation of new words in *Ms* and *herstory* (2002: 227).

Littlejohn is in line with what the proponents of a nonsexist society appeal for. As for *Ms*, it is in use and enjoying high usage frequency. But the researcher differs with Littlejohn’s approval of *herstory* because the

new word *herstory* will reinforce sexism. Men will also feel they are excluded with the new coinage.

As for the title that comes before a female's name, it is usually *Manana so and so* "Mrs so and so" for married women, the husband's surname and *Sesi so and so* for unmarried females. Their first names are usually used. For females, elderly people use the prefix *Nwa-* before the father's first name. The title with the prefix is one that is fair because it does not implicate one's marital status.

1.8.13 Malungana and Babane (2001)

In their poetry, Malungana and Babane have unfairly titled their poem *Vatshiveri*. The title itself does not allow women to move from the kitchen into the economic and other influential domains. Women are to remain dependent on men for their economic needs despite the fact that women are equally capable of taking part in the economic sphere. The first line reads: *Vatshiveri swiluwa swa vavanuna*. The line advocates the idea that women are to be owned by men, instead of living together in harmony. These poets see no other purpose in women except that of beautifying which is also not worthwhile.

In the last stanza, these poets state:

Ko va sweswi mi nga vaveleki.
A hi ta mi khanya hi va tinghwenda."
Just that you are child-bearers.
We would deliberately ignore you and be bachelors.

These poets seem to be fed-up by having to stay in marital relationships with women. The grouses are very disturbing and probably launched on men's behalf because were it not for the reason to procreate the children they would free themselves from the marriages.

1.8.14 Malungana (1997)

Malungana notes a variety of songs that are sung during the initiation period for either men or women. Although the ones sung by men are kept as private as possible, women's songs are heard by all and sundry. Many of these songs, both male and female ones, are sexist.

At times men have families but are without jobs to fend for their families. So during school holidays a song that ridicules unemployed men reverberates and echoes, and thudding feet and clapping hands accompany it in the initiation school for women. The sound is a marvel to hear, but the words are unbearable to men. It is unwise to ridicule someone's being jobless, irrespective of one's sex.

1.8.15 Tulloch (1996)

This author has made a long list of words that can be used as synonyms for *prostitute*. She has also defined a *synonym* as a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another in the same language. English has a long list of synonyms for *prostitute* such as *harlot*, *whore*, *slut*, *jade*, *hussy*, *trollop*, *drab*, *call-girl*, *fallen or loose woman*, *streetwalker*, *lady of the night*, *lady of easy virtue*, and others.

There are also many words in both Xitsonga that suggest that women, whether married or unmarried, sleep around. At times, it is not because these women want to change men like men do with women. But because men usually desert women with reasons like *A ndzo twa munyu* “I wanted to get the feel” or *Lahaya ndzi hundze khale* “I slept with her a long time ago”. Seeing the number of children they have to feed, often being without employment, women tend to move out of such marriages. So there is no justification in calling them names such as *heku-heku*, *dabadaba*, *dlakuta*, *nghwavava*, *gele-gele*, *xifevi*, *xiphukuphuku*, *nghwadlha*, *ngenji*, and many others depending on where people live. There are, however, no such lists of names for men despite their sexual immorality.

1.8.16 Ntsanwisi (1985)

Idiomatic expressions also play a significant role in enhancing sexist language in both Xitsonga and English. Ntsanwisi (1985: 95) cites this idiom that degrades women: “*Mbilu ya xisati* (womanly heart) or effeminate behaviour.” This idiom portrays women as people who do not persevere during trying times. Certainly, men may want to fight if these words above are used about them while some people even cry. In some cultures, men’s tears are a taboo. So men whose tears are seen rolling down, may be regarded as having a womanly heart.

1.8.17 Uys (2000)

Uys depicts a woman’s authority in a family set up through the use of an idiom (a phrase whose meaning is not deducible from the individual

words) in the following way: *To be under petticoat rule*: (To submit to the authority of a woman or women).

Idioms such as this fuel domestic violence, for men will not want to be seen as subservient to their wives. A lively family is one which is run by a husband and wife.

In the Xitsonga language, there are several idioms that are probably used to keep husbands wary of their positions as family heads and that they are not ruled by their wives. The idioms below serve such a purpose:

- (a) *Ku ambexiwa jasi ra nsimbhi* (To be dressed in an iron jacket).
- (b) *Ku jikisiwa hi tshuka* (To be led round an anthill).
- (c) *Ku kokiwa rhimila* (To have mucus drawn out).

In all three instances the perpetrator is the wife who applies some mysterious means to take control over her husband. In (a), the husband portrayed as one who does initiate anything for the family, but rather waits for his wife to suggest. In (b), the husband cannot see what other people are seeing of his wife because he is on the other side. In (c), the wife has successfully tamed the aggressive husband, for she can play with any of his parts without being bitten. People should begin to allow a husband and wife to complement each other in order to have a happy family life.

1.8.18 The National Language Policy Framework (2003)

Schools are the places to cultivate a sexism-free generation. The National Language Policy Framework (2003) describes the language policy as based on the principle that prevents the use of any language for the

purpose of exploitation, domination, and discrimination. The government clearly discourages all forms of sexism. It now remains the task of the people on the ground to speak in one voice against male domination through the use of language.

The next chapter discusses concepts and theories that feminists use to explore sexism.

1.9 CONCLUSION

The government wants people to develop their (indigenous) languages to be able to perform all educational, economic, political, and social functions. If Xitsonga is to grow to the level of other official languages, it must cater for all its speakers. Women can make a significant contribution if they can master the language of both men and women. Words and expressions that seem to trivialize other people must be avoided.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER 2

Being regarded as the architect of language, man is portrayed as being at the helm of making language pliable in a way that gives him an advantage over women. Women and their general characteristics are often portrayed in such a way that they are degraded. They may not be accorded equal recognition as men. The chapter also states a woman's exact position in the society and in the church.

CHAPTER 3

The Vatsonga people, their language, and culture, are closely examined to determine aspects that are abusive to a certain gender. Proverbs, idioms, lexical items, names, and taboos are the language components that are used to determine if the language is sexist or not. The Vatsonga culture has been narrowed down to look at specific issues such as the roles of men and women, the upbringing of the children, their community gatherings, and songs used in their initiation schools.

CHAPTER 4

The society was divided into groups of inhabitants that were distinguishing themselves by their daily activities. These groups included, among others, educators, learners, churches, traditional healers, village elders, authors, and the traditional office. These people were interviewed in order to establish if they were aware of sexism and its effects especially in their midst.

CHAPTER 5

The last section of the study refers back to the findings in order to suggest solutions to the societal weaknesses, particularly those of the Vatsonga people as highlighted in each of the chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF SEXISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The argument in this section revolves around a link between language, culture, and society as well as the Constitution of the country. It also looks at how men, women, and children, including their daily activities, relate to language and culture. Most of the concepts and theories that feminists use to discuss sexism have been mentioned and clarified in this chapter.

Sexism is a concept that is increasingly gaining interest in all spheres of life. The concern is to change the status quo concerning male-female relationships by beginning to see each other as human beings and not as men and women. It is an attempt to dissolve the existing barriers that prevent either of the sexes the opportunities that life yields from time to time. The belief is that whatever is available on earth equally affects all in one way or another. Unfortunately, language which is available for all humans in the society, “treats men and women unequally, rather than differently” (Herbert 1992: 335).

2.2 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Culture may be seen as having a large bearing on the mindset and customary practices of its people. The way people think, behave, and respond to their routine encounters is a salient reflection of who they are,

what fragmentations exist in their society and what view is held on their relations as males and females. It is, therefore, also through the study of language that people may have a deeper understanding of the inner construct of a particular society.

Basil Bernstein (1970) in Burke, Crowley, and Girvin (2000: 448) detects a link between language and culture as one that has “particularistic order of meaning”. As opposed to a universalistic order of meaning where meaning is explicit and public, a particularistic order of meaning is one whose meaning of content is tied to the local social structure and is implicit. These people are said to have a common meaning in their restricted codes because they share a contextual history.

According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) in Burke et al., (2000: 438), “written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries”. What people are able to put down in writing or recount in speech is a carrier of culture. The stories that we read are a way of life for a particular people. Hymes (1964: 36) states that the culture of a society is what people “know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves”. Therefore, culture may be considered to be everything people do but that which may be ascribed to a particular group of people.

In order to capture the real position that men and women occupy in the society, people may consider utterances, semantics, morphology, syntax, phonology, idioms, proverbs, the literature of various genres, and the entire cultural and religious performances and other practices such as those of initiation schools, the community and church gatherings.

2.3 LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

Language proves itself to be an integral part of every society through which the hierarchical strata are held together. The societal strata are mirrored through language for purposes of maintenance and sustenance. The fabric of every language is put under a continuously tremendous strain as decades come and go. As pressure piles up in a society (which is believed to be one and not divided into layers), layers begin to show. The society then divides its people according to its two biological sexes, namely men and women.

The language of society enables its speakers to distinguish between groups to which they belong. Graddol and Swann (1993: 10) regard the following the function of language in society: "Language does not function simply as a mirror of society. Rather, it is strongly implicated in the construction and maintenance of social divisions and inequalities." It means, therefore, that men and women do not have equal status in society. As men and women continue to use language, which is believed to be treating the two sexes as unequal counterparts, they encourage dominance over one another.

Knowing the language of a particular society makes it possible to know its internal organization better. It is language that binds society together and differentiates one society from another. On the role of language, Kotthoff and Wodak (1997: 07) mention that:

... social groups often define themselves by means of their common language which plays an important role in identity creation and for subcultures, serves as a means of differentiating themselves from the outside world.

This view thus regards language as undoubtedly glue that binds together people with common traits. It creates solidarity and mutual respect between members of one group. Those who have the same linguistic orientation may often reflect a relatively common interactional and conversational behaviour.

In addition to what these authors argued, Edwards (1976: 62) states that “no speech is entirely ‘free’, because part of its meaning will be implicit, supplied by the background knowledge”. It is worth mentioning that people may speak the same language but their places of origin have an influence on the underlying meaning of the comments they make. For example, the proverbs, idioms and lexical items that people use are an identity marker for a particular society.

Finally, it is hardly possible to speak of society without considering its language. There may not be a tool as prominently effective as language in trying to describe society in a more distinctive way.

2.4 LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Section 6(1) of The Constitution of the Republic South Africa Act, 1996 (Act No. 108 of 1996) recognises eleven spoken languages and sign language as official languages of the country. The eleven official spoken languages form a broad band of speakers whose language groupings may give more or less eleven forms of culture. Therefore, these cultures, whether expressed through word of mouth, ceremonial dance, or other forms of practices, must be in line with the Constitution of the country. No language may be viewed as being above the Constitution. If there are

sayings within a language that violate the Constitution, such sections need to be reviewed to be line with the Constitution.

According to Section 30 of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, 1996 (Act No. 108 of 1996) “everyone has the right to use language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights”. The Constitution of the republic of South Africa also recognises people’s cultures as well as their speech communities. However, the practice of such cultures may not be in a way that discriminates against other members because that would be a violation of the Constitution.

According to the Constitution, people may not be left out of all the country’s influential spheres on the basis of language, gender, or sex, while no culture may be deemed to be above the Constitution. In other words, the Constitution is protective of all people from all forms of oppression.

2.5 MEN AS THE ARCHITECTS OF LANGUAGE

Men, as opposed to women, are seen as being at the forefront and as the sole architects of language. The nature of language proves to be a purposive and unidirectional. It is purposive in that it is to the benefit of man in their quest for superiority over women, while it is unidirectional as almost all the words are coined from a masculine mentality.

The activities of men or women are ascribed to one gender or the other. However, all these ascriptions are said to be “male-defined” (Frank and

Treichler 1989: 15). Men may be seen as holding a stick and pointing at all creatures (living and non-living), giving each one a name. Such names will eventually be internalized by whoever intends to master that language. Women may be seen to be observing men naming all the created. Therefore, men may be viewed as prescriptive to women.

Dale Spendour in Cameron (1990: 18) also regards language as “man-controlled” or “man-made”. This view elevates man to an authoritative stance and leaves women with no option but to give in to men’s words. Androcentric definitions make men-oriented words to have positive connotations and women-oriented negative ones. The definition of *clitoris* as failed or vestigial penis (Cameron 1990: 51) is evident of masculinity and negativism in naming. Rubbing salt into the wound *vagina* in Latin refers to “sheath” where a sword is kept (Cameron 1990: 108). These two words are defined in a way that seeks to include men in a women’s existence and render women invisible. In the first case, a penis is man’s reproductive organ, whereas in the second meaning men are the people who carry the dagger in the sheath just as a penis rests in the vagina.

In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, witches have always been associated with women irrespective of the fact that witchcraft may be practised by either of the sexes. It is clear that men have always tried to marginalise women to an inferior or abusive position. In *Macbeth*, Banquo refers to the witches as “weird” women (1978: 61) and Macbeth calls them “midnight hags” (Shakespeare 1978: 75). These characters have had contact with the female witches. Shakespeare’s birth and his use of witches in the sixteenth century mean that the art of the sorcery has been an ancient exercise. However, Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft, is a woman. More

often than not, as language proves, a super being should be a male. But here, the super being in witchcraft is a female because the practice is regarded as extremely evil.

2.6 WOMEN'S WORLD

Since men have seen themselves as superior to women, they have placed women in a position where they will always provide all that men need. Men feel that women are too feeble to work and they will therefore provide women with food and other necessities. This may be a strategy to confine women into the home environment.

Bain (1993: 131) notes that “men busied themselves with power and competition in the market place, but they also needed housekeepers”. According to Bain, women’s environment was in the home as men went away to work. Within the home environment, the common chores for women have included childrearing and cooking. Childrearing includes, among other things, the passing of the very oppressive language to the child to become either a man or woman as well as bringing them up. The woman’s environment is small and bleak. It makes them economically uncompetitive and politically dependent. Men make use of their fiscal advantage to gain authority over women.

2.6.1 Women’s roles as prescribed by societal practices

The belief has long existed that there is no tangible value in a woman except that of being a copulative attraction to a man. Luce Irigaray in Sellers (1991: 22) mentions that “her role is split between the triptych of mother, virgin, prostitute”. In other words, a woman is judged on the

basis of her readiness to bear children, her ability as a female parent or her failure to provide a man with a family, therefore becoming a wanderer in the streets. She is regarded man's property and defined in terms of her involvement or non-involvement in sexual matters.

These three descriptions of a woman do not see her outside the home environment. Like a fruit that ripens to be eaten up, so is a woman who as a girl resembles a fruit. When her time is up she begins to involve herself in sexual matters, eventually loses her virginity and later becomes a mother or a prostitute. Prostitution is construed as a social misconduct. It is immoral as it debases a woman's womanhood.

The leaders of the political parties in the 2005 South African National Assembly used sexist words to vent their anger during floor-crossing. The words were, as captured in the *City Press* (18 September 2005), among others, *prostitution*, *crostitution*, *Judas Iscariots*, *hypocrisy*, *moral bankruptcy*, and *political adultery* (Mkhabela 2005: 21). The word *crostitution* was invented with the intention of mocking those members who were defecting from one political party to another. Parties that were deserted felt betrayed and they had to find ways of making the floor-crossers see the pain they had caused them. Fortunately, the newly coined word *crostitution* was short-lived as the Speaker of the National Assembly wanted it withdrawn. The word was used with some degree of synonymy with *prostitution* – a sexual immorality associated with women.

2.6.2 Fashion and sewing

Some pastime activities such as fashion and sewing were in the past associated with women. When women began to filter into the industry, it was, according to Jespersen in Cameron (1999:240), in “domestic occupations which did not claim such an enormous output of spasmodic energy”. Cameron (1999: 240) has quoted Jespersen as saying that numerous women have drifted into occupations such as “the care of the children, cooking, brewing, baking, sewing, and washing”. Jespersen in Cameron (1999: 240) describes these occupations as things not demanding “deep thought”. He states that they would best be carried out along with a “chatter” of gossip. Not only were these occupations belittle women’s physical strength, but they also sneered at their mental capability. Women’s talk is neither something men consider as worthwhile nor can one waste time listening to it.

The issue of fashion is aimed at brightening one’s looks in order to attract or fascinate a male partner. Trask (1995: 86) argues that “women spend more time talking about clothes and children, while men talk more about cars and sports”. The point Trask is making shows women’s (unmarried and unemployed) preoccupation with making themselves more presentable in the eyes of their prospective husbands. The idea of sewing has to do with traditional women who cover their husbands’ food with a cloth that is adorned by some beautifully knitted flowers or writing. Marriage is certainly sustained, whereas divorce is hardly heard of among traditional couples as women play their roles in accordance with tradition. Sewing may also be ridiculed in the sense that the sewn articles might never have been taken to the market but could have ended within the home surroundings.

2.6.4 Upbringing of children

Due to the specific roles that men and women play in society, children are brought up as little boys and girls who later become fathers and mothers. A careful study of the toy collage in Goddard and Patterson (2000: 36) features a boy in football attire with his foot rested on the ball, another boy in a karate outfit, another in a robbery clad with a mask on his face, while the last one is next to an assortment of guns. In the same collage, a girl is clutching a Hoover, another one is preparing a meal, another is operating a washing-machine, while one is arranging pieces of furniture in her lounge. Clearly, female children are destined to be house managers, while their male counterparts will venture into business, the film industry, and other challenging professions (Goddard and Patterson 2000: 35). Boys are, without doubt, brought up to enjoy superiority over women.

Morris, Ostrom, and Young (1984: 80) indicate that girls are given “old lace curtains and white dresses to play bride” and never are little boys dressed up “to play groom”. This is an attestation that boys and girls are brought up to perform their respective roles later in life. Furthermore, when girls are asked what they will become in life they tend to respond: “I’m going to get married” (Morris *et al* 1984: 80). Marriage appears to be an institution that gains a woman status in society.

2.7 LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH WOMEN

Language as the product of man’s desire to oppress women has left women with certain shameful qualities that have become well-established elements of their lives. There are certain qualities that society may expect

women to possess. Such qualities confirm their existence as women. For example, if a woman is speaking on the other side without being seen, people must be able to tell that it is a woman speaking just by relying on hearing her voice only. There are vocal characteristics that are naturally found in men and those that abound in women.

2.7.1 Voice quality

Unlike men's, which is hoarse and coarse, women's voices are more often high-pitched. Wardhaugh (1998: 314) maintains that women and men may have different paralinguistic systems and move and gesture differently. Written texts often obscure these paralinguistic features such as rising and falling intonation. But in spoken texts women express questions by the rising intonation and firm statements in a falling intonation. The trend entrenches women's uncertainty and their need not to be instructed on what to do.

Crawford (1995: 25) argues that such rising intonations are at times unnecessary because they are not really questions but declarative statements, such as: "Excuse me, you are standing on my foot?" It is evident that women do not want to sound authoritative. They want to maintain healthy relations between people, particularly with their male counterparts. Men are the ones who have low-pitched voices. According to Wardhaugh (1998: 311), Margaret Thatcher was advised to lower the pitch of her voice so that she could become a female Prime Minister of Britain who would have a similar voice quality as that of a man. Her shrill voice was strongly lashed out against as being womanish. Mills (1995: 38) warns that women discredit themselves from getting promotion at the workplace due to their "whiny, breathing or high-

pitched voices.” The point made by Mills is not acceptable because people may not choose to have a low-pitched voice. It is something people are born with.

2.7.2 Expletives

Men may be presumed as perfectionists who do not expect to be wronged at all. Power, boisterousness, and an inclination to fight help men to opt for stronger expletives such as *damn it, oh shit, and fuck you*. For example, male footballers usually utter the expression *fuck you*, which is not only sexist but obscene. The phrase usually comes out when a referee’s call goes against them. Surprisingly, it is an encounter where there is hardly a female in their midst, but a sexually offensive phrase is used to vent their anger.

Unlike men, women are known for using fairly soothing expletives which are friendly and comforting. Expletives such as *oh dear, darn, and fudge* are indicative of women’s lack of power, security, and a desire not to fight.

2.7.3 Empty adjectives

A number of adjectives are used by women as the group that seeks to conform to the dictates of a particular group. Adjectives such as *sweet, adorable, gorgeous, charming, lovely, darling, and divine* are often associated with women. These adjectives make women soft-spoken and vulnerable to abuse.

2.7.4 *Mmhm*

In cross-sex conversation, men and women tend to use the same reinforcements such as *yeah* and *mmhm* for different reasons. According to Fasold (1990: 108), these reinforcements must not be regarded as interruptions but as minimal responses whose function is to support a conversation. Wardhaugh (1997: 318) cites Maltz and Borker (1982) to indicate agreement with the reasons of the foregoing signals by stating that the *mmhm* a woman uses is indicative of listening, whereas a man uses it to indicate agreement with what the speaker states.

Since men enjoy superiority over women, they may use these minimal responses *yeah* and *mmhm* to conceal their ignorance of what women may be telling them. It must be noted that men may not always agree with what women say because once they disagree men hardly wait for their turn to speak, but immediately interrupt the speaker and introduce a topic of their choice.

Zimmerman and West (1975) have conducted a study to see which sex-group was interrupted the most and their finding is cited in Goddard and Patterson (2000: 99), namely that “females are a class of speakers whose rights to speak appear to be casually infringed on by males.” The interruptive tendency may be viewed as unfair as men use their aggression to gain turns to speak and eventually introduce topics of their own choice.

2.7.5 Politeness

Some of the expletives that women use in their speech reveal their good-naturedness. Men are, in contrast to women, associated with foul language. Cameron (1990: 4), in support of women's politeness, states that "swearing and other taboo ('obscene' and 'explicit') language is still thought more inappropriate for women (and in their presence) than for men". She feels that women appear more polite than men regarding their usage of language. Her feeling also reveals the 'no-go area' for women in terms of language usage. The idea that women are very polite in their speech is also expressed by Robin Lakoff in Cameron (1999: 245) when she gives the following pair of sentences for analysis:

- (a) "Oh dear, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again."
- (b) "Shit, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again."

Sentence (a) shows sympathy of the speaker to the addressee, whereas sentence (b) reveals the speaker's annoyance and intolerance. The difference lies in the expletives *Oh dear* and *shit* as they account for weak and strong emotions. To shed some light on these expletives, Lakoff in Cameron (1999: 245) mentions that "it is truism to state that the 'strong' expletives are reserved for men, and the 'weaker' ones for women". Therefore, language treats men and women unequally because it allows the male sex to use both forms of expletives as if they are the only ones capable of becoming angry.

2.7.6 Hedges and tag questions

A woman's position in the society appears to be insignificant. The language of a woman is not the same as that of man. Men has placed themselves in a dominant position. The quality of a woman's voice indicates insecurity, whereas the utterances she makes reveal uncertainty. A woman may frequently not be conclusive over what she knows to be correct before a man may speak the final word. Goddard and Patterson (2000: 98) state that both men and women do make use of hedges in their conversation, but hedges such as *sort of* and *kind of* are commonly used by women. So both users of hedges may be affected by the context and begin to use in their speech markers of hesitancy and powerlessness. Coates (1998: 250) attests to the use of minimal responses, tag questions and hedging devices as signs of weakness common among women. Such a weakness is indicative of women's inferior position to men in the society.

2.7.7 Insults

There are several language constructs that are intended to insult women and to reinforce their position of being inferior to men. Spender (1980) in Simpson (1993: 163) uses the words *frigidity* and *impotence* to indicate the inequity that word-meaning entails as a way of serving the interests of men. Spender thus regards women as failing to attain sexual arousal, while men "through no fault of their own, are simply unable" to get an erection.

The *bachelor* and *spinster* are considered an asymmetrical pair in that *bachelor* has positive connotations, while *spinster* is being avoided from

everyday usage due to its negative meaning. Morris *et al.* (1984: 81) claimed that unmarried girls use a borrowed opposite word and call themselves *bachelor girls or bachelorettes*. A *spinster or old maid*, according to Morris *et al.* (1984: 81), is an uncomplimentary title that is given to a loser in a children's card game. It must be noted that an old maid does no longer have beauty and youth to attract a partner for a marital purpose, hence she is said to be left on the shelf.

Seeing that a woman is not married to a house as in the word *housewife*, her relationship in the house is expressed by the term house manager and not *housewife* (Goddard and Patterson: 2000). If *housewife* is intended to mean someone managing the house, and numerous men do manage houses these days and the word *housewife* will be inappropriate to refer to them.

2.8 NAMING

It has been argued that man has engineered the language that is in use. Some inventions and natural occurrences have had their qualities associated with either men or women. Goddard and Patterson (2000: 94) quote Jespersen who describes men as "the chief renovators of language". It means that new words and phrases come mainly from men.

2.8.1 Generic *he*

The masculine pronoun *he* has enjoyed high frequency usage over the years as an all- inclusive pronoun of men (men or women). One would not be sure whether women are included in the conversation or not, as such naming confirms the absence of women.

Besides being sexist, Fasold (1990: 112) shows how the use of the pronoun *he* can be confusing through the experiment conducted by McKay and Fulkerson (1979) using this sentence: “When a botanist is in the field, he is usually working.” In the above sentence the respondents were expected to mention if women were included or not. Based on what the respondents already knew they saw the sentence as excluding women. So the profession *botany* seems to be attributed to men only, hence the use of the pronoun *he*.

2.8.2 Sex-paired words (suffixes *-ette* and *-esse*)

It may be expected that pairs of words may have conflicting meanings . For example, governor and governess are two opposing words on the basis of sex. The former refers to someone with political authority in a territory, whereas the latter refers to a child care-giver. The same applies to the following example:

- (a) *Major*: an officer in the army
- (b) *Majorette*: a woman in a short skirt who marches ahead of a band.

As noted in Smith (1985: 40), Miller and Swift mention that the attachment of the suffix *-ette* to a name “diminishes the strength of the name”. There are neutral names that may be given to males or females such as *Lee* and *Chamagne*, and those that are given to a specific sex-group only. Males may have names such as *Paul*, *Henry*, and others, while females have names such as *Mary*, *Grace* and many others.

It is unlikely for mothers to pass on their names to their children, but fathers are allowed to pass on their names to their children due to the fact that “men’s names have acquired more symbolic value” than women’s (Smith 1985: 40). A father named Paul, for example, may name his daughter Paulette, so will Henry to Henrietta. Miller and Swift in Smith (1985: 40) state that the value of the father’s name depreciates as it is given to a female.

2.8.3 Man

Man, just like the pronoun ‘he’, was traditionally used without a feminine equivalent. It was used to refer to either man or both a man and a woman. School subjects such as Biology, Geography, and History still use man as an all-encompassing noun despite the fact that it is hard to imagine the situation of the oft-quoted expression that “man is a mammal that breastfeeds his young and experiences difficulty in giving birth” (Simpson 1993: 168). It is unthinkable that men may be classified as mammals on the basis of the ability to breastfeed. Men’s reaction to this type of usage is likely to be hostile.

The next passage extracted from *City Press* (08 August 2004) is equally misleading because of the inconsistent usage of the concept of *man*:

That *Morning Live* is extravagantly sponsored is evidenced by the Netstar traffic chopper used for their traffic reports, for as long as I remember, this chopper has always been manned by Eon de Vos or Paula Vaughan (2004: 27).

Here the writer has used the verb *manned* in a sexist way because the readers may not know whether both pilots are males or a male and a

female. To avoid the confusion caused by *manned* the writer should have opted for the verb *operated*.

2.8.4 Hurricanes

Hurricanes are violent winds that originate in the sea and often target the United States of America. Before 1979 these winds have been known by female names (U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA National Weather Service). In 2005 alone the US was hit by no less than four storms with almost all of them given female names. They were named Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ophelia, and Welma.

The use of female names for the hurricanes is strange as hurricanes are extremely destructive. The intensity of the damage must be considered since such naming may be done because men are capable of hazardous behaviour. Numerous countries ascribe domestic violence to men. Between 25 November and 10 December 2005 South Africans were embarking on the 16 Days of Activism as a way of curbing violence against women and children. In many instances, women are victims of circumstances, hence giving terribly destructive hurricanes female names may not be a fair exercise.

Findlay of *City Press* (29 August 2005: 22) has cartooned Osama (the allegedly suspect number one in the bombing of the World Trade Centre) as holding hands in celebration with Hurricane Katrina for having swooped past New Orleans leaving in its course hundreds dead and thousands homeless. Looking at the damage caused and being equated to the works of Osama one cannot accept giving female names to the hurricane.

Giving hurricanes female names has not only been a meteorological practice, but there have been other negative connotations attached to the passing of the storm. Suzaine Romaine in Kotthoff and Wodak (1997: 59) has captured newspaper reports describing hurricanes as having “flirted with the Florida coast” and “bad-tempered”. These descriptions are directed at women in terms of their sexuality and morality.

2.8.5 Impis of conquest

Women are preoccupied with the desire to conquer unknown, untouched, and unspoilt destinations. The fact that a young girl who has never involved herself in sexual intercourse is termed a *virgin* has a very important meaning in man. Every man wants to get a virgin bride. This explains why in certain cultures a virginity test is still practised. Not only does it help lessen the contamination of the AIDS pandemic, but it also assures a father of a good price for his daughter when she is married.

The natural beauty of a woman may be a very valuable element that men are obsessed with. Morris *et al.* (1984: 82) consider male as making “a sexual conquest when he deflowers her by taking away her virginity”. In other words, a woman becomes important to a male when she is still a girl in the sense of her non-involvement in sexual matters.

2.8.6 Titles *Miss, Ms, and Mrs* versus *Mr*

Initially, the titles *Miss* and *Mrs* were used to denote female children and all adult women respectively. Thereafter, the use was indicative of whether a woman was married or not. Miller and Swift (1976) in Smith (1985: 41) claim that “the change in the use of these forms to denote marital status arose as a consequence of women’s changing roles during the Industrial Revolution”.

There is no dichotomy in the use of *Mr* as all males of unequal ages are represented by one title. The title *Mr* is described as all-purpose (Morris *et al.* 1984: 80). The absence of a title to refer to either married or unmarried males confirms the notion that at one stage marriage was highly-valued among women. It is evident when Morris *et al.* (1984: 80) state that “men are married just as much as women, but marriage isn’t the centre of their lives”.

Presently, the advent of the title *Ms* enjoys high usage frequency among aged women. There are women who do not want to expose their marital status, and prefer the use of the title *Ms*, as it includes both married and unmarried women.

2.8.7 A woman in a man’s eye

It is argued that “men get more public attention than women do” (Smith 1985: 40). The claim has some truth because women due to their confinement in the home environment have been barred from participation in the influential spheres of the country like economy and politics.

In trying to describe how a husband and a wife relate to one another, people tend to use what Miller and Swift in Goddard and Patterson (2000: 75) term non-parallel treatment. They claim that people describe women according to their appearance and men by achievement. For example, if a man and a woman are walking together and they are seen as *the doctor and his wife* it becomes unfair when the woman is also a doctor.

2.8.8 The terms *hymen*, *menstruation*, and *menopause*

The Readers Digest Oxford Dictionary (1996) defines the three words above as follows:

(a) *hymen*: “a membrane which partially closes the opening of a vagina and is usu. broken at the first occurrence of the first sex” (1996: 733).

(b) *menstruation*: “the process of discharging blood and other materials from the uterus of sexually mature non-pregnant women at intervals of about one lunar month until the menopause” (1996: 953).

(c) *menopause*: “1. the ceasing of menstruation.
2. the period in a woman’s life (usu. between 45 and 50) when this occurs” (1996: 953).

All these stages occur in the life of a woman. But in each naming of these stages there exists an affixation of *men*. It may be indicative of men’s interference in the lives of women since each of these stages tells men something about the condition of a woman. The affixation *men* strengthens men’s desire to exploit the vaginal space (Cixous in Sellers, 1991: 16).

2.9 EMPLOYMENT

It must be taken into cognisance that women have only recently appeared as part of the public working sector. Their role has been in the home rather than in the workplace except as a domestic servant.

That a woman is obsessed with child-rearing practices is true (Wardhaugh 1998: 322). Some of the women's salaries are still very low compared to their male-counterparts, following their late entry into the field of work.

2.9.1 Advertisements

Most jobs in the past were created to be done by a specific sex despite the equal ability that men and women have. The belief that women's prime presence on earth is to give birth is enhanced by Hartmann in Rollins (1996: 1) that "a woman's place is in the home", where they are designated to mainly child-rearing. There is little significant role women play within the home besides child-rearing.

The following adverts are ostracising women from important professions such as medicine and driving, thus leaving them in the hands of men. The first advert states: "Doctors Wanted: Women Need Not Apply" (Frank and Treichler, 1989: 4) in a 1946 newspaper. It creates a situation where female doctors are to be addressed as women doctors.

The second one comes from the road safety posters in London: "Drivers: Belt the wife and kids – and keep them safe" (Smith, 1985: 32). It is clear that women are viewed as incapable of driving the wheel and as needing protection from men.

2.9.2 Professions

Historically, women were left out of the working class since men mainly constituted the labour force. However, there was a very low percentage of women at the workplace, jobs were divided into male-and female-dominated. For example, being a nurse and medical doctor are two related fields, but the former was female-dominated and the latter male-dominated. If a male went to join the nursing fraternity insulting remarks would be hurled at him. Williams (1993: 2) quotes some of the remarks: “Almost immediately, he is suspected of not being a real man; there must be something wrong with him (Is he gay? Effeminate? Lazy?) for him to be interested in this kind of work.” It seems that men who pursue, for example, nursing are seen to be betraying their sex-group. Their manhood is doubted. Their pursuit of the nursing profession is like a cross over as it is unthinkable among men (Williams, 1993: 3).

Medical institutions such as the *Royal Society* of London and *Academie des Sciences* in Germany were founded in 1660 and 1666 respectively, but admitted women for the first time in 1946 and 1966 (Rollins, 1996: 6). These reasons for keeping women in the home to perform child-rearing chores led to women’s exclusion from the medical fraternity for more than three centuries.

Not only were women excluded from medicine, but the topics offered were also selected in favour of men. Rollins (1996) mentions that very little has been known about menstrual cramps owing to women’s exclusion from the medical field until recently.

2.10 THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON WOMEN

Feminists feel that there is no valid reason for the exclusion of women from priesthood and other positions within the church. Cameron (1990: 5) quotes Dr Johnson's position on the unnaturalness of women preachers which he compares to "a dog walking on its hind legs". It is thus clear that men do not want to see a woman behind the podium. Men feel that such a duty is vested upon men only, and not women.

2.10.1 Sinning

Mary Dale (1973) in Cunningham (1990: 107) dismisses "Eve's creation from Adam's rib and of her role in tempting Adam to sin" as Biblical myths. Dale sees these myths as ways of oppressing women and plots to exclude them from leadership positions within the church. It may be correct that Adam was created and then followed by Eve. But people have a choice to say No or Yes to a temptation to sin. Such does not justify that women are the sources of sin although a woman was involved in the story. It is a fallacy that Adam was being forced into committing the sin. Adam should have refused the temptation.

2.10.2 Women's leadership in the church

Men seem not yet ready to work alongside women in the church. The following is a typical scenario of a woman promoted to a leadership position in the church. The congregation was extremely unhappy about her position. Wallace (1992: 155) in Swantos (1994: 20) captured one woman's reaction when men were complaining of the elevation of women by stating: "I know these men. They don't want a woman in

charge. They think all we are good for is cooking in the kitchen, making love and having children.”

These words express the deeply felt unhappiness of women’s feeling on being left out from influential positions. Men’s mentality towards women is also attacked because men usually do not see any positive contribution from women in the business, political, and social sectors.

In support of appointing women in high positions even within the church, Reuther (1993: 65) quotes from the Bible in (John 15:15), which reads: “No longer do I call you servants, ... but I have called you friends.” These were Jesus’ words aimed at warding off the oppression of one person by another. In servitude, the master is being served by his servants without any remarkable remuneration. But when people treat one another as friends, they see themselves as equals.

2.10.3 God’s image

That Adam was born first and born a man seems to be misleading people as giving men the privilege to be superior to women. But women too are God’s creation because they too are humans and born in the image of God. Reuther (1993: 56) uses Phyllis Tribble’s word *rechem* (a Hebrew word for *womb*). It is argued that through maternal or womblike qualities God is depicted as a mother who connects to an inborn. Guided by the nature of the mother’s connectedness to her children one can see the compassion God had for the children of Israel. It may be said that God has a neutral gender (Reuther 1993: 67).

The next chapter focuses on how the Vatsonga people treat men, women, and their children, and how culture is manifested through language.

2.11 CONCLUSION

The argument above is proof of the prevalent sexism in societies where women appear to be the group that is heavily oppressed. Men also seem to use language to protect their superiority over women. Women, on the one hand, are aware of men's power-mongering attitude and have been mobilizing themselves to challenge men's leadership. They feel they are capable of doing whatever men can, for women have rarely been afforded the opportunity to lead before the democratic and humane new dispensation in South Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

SEXISM IN THE XITSONGA LANGUAGE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Vatsonga traditional leadership and its presentation in the form of having only males eligible for the throne in the use of language (proverbs, idioms, lexical items, poems, names, and nicknames), and cultural practices and beliefs in the form of initiation songs and taboos are scrutinized in this chapter.

It is still not clear whether the Xitsonga language is free or not of the social ill of sexism. Some aspects of the Xitsonga language, in particular proverbs, idioms, poems, taboos, traditional songs, and excerpts of cultural practices were examined to inform the study. As a people, the Vatsonga people have their own ways of doing things, and that special way of doing things is that which makes them function as a people different from any other group. They, too, have their own perception of women.

3.2 THE TRADITIONAL CROWN

3.2.1 The Throne

Great leaders such as Nghunghunyane and Ndwandwe are often mentioned in tracing the line of the Vatsonga kings. Presently, there is not one among the Vatsonga people who wears a kingly crown such as Zwelithini of the Zulu Kingdom. Of importance for the study, was to

establish if there could have been a queen among the Vatsonga people as it has been among the Bolobedu of Modjadji, the Rain Queen. The researcher did not come across any female name in the regal line of the Vatsonga people. Such a finding is justified by the claim captured by Molema (2004: 23) in the dispute over chieftaincy stating: “Fofzoa Nwamitwa passed away in 1968, he was left without a heir because Tsonga custom requires a patrilineal chieftaincy.” This claim is objectionable as it may be regarded as one of the cultural stereotypes that women cannot ascend the throne. On the contrary, the complainant who is female and desperately wanting to ascend the throne has the following feeling captured by Molema (2004: 23):

...as the first-born child of her father, she was entitled to assume the chieftaincy ... at that time she did not dispute the move as women did not enjoy the rights as they do now, under a democratic dispensation.

One is bound to believe that most societies, the Vatsonga people included, have a hierarchically arranged system with males at the helm of the daily proceedings. If the defendant in the Valoyi case insists that there are customs barring women from taking the reins, then the Vatsonga customs are oppressive and discriminatory.

It is not only the Vatsonga women who want to be accorded the status of chieftaincy, but the Bakwena-ba-Mogopa of Bethanie as well. In support of the Bakwena-ba-Mogopa the *Citizen* reporter (2005: 3) reported the provincial spokesperson, Cornelius, as follows:

We are appalled by this blatant disrespect for our Constitution and the laws of our land, which are clear on gender equality and the right of women

to ascend the throne should they be next in line.

The Bakwena people have shown respect for the Constitution of the country which serves as the principal law of the land. They have allowed a woman to become a *Kgosigadi* (queen), a step in line with the Constitution. People are just scared of change. If a certain group of people within the same country can do what others can regard as unthinkable and still stand out as human beings, then the rest may follow suit.

The two cases of female ascendancy to the throne by different ethnic groups prove clearly that even in other tribal groups where there has not been open protest, the cracks are gradually appearing. The point is currently made that the one who is next in line must be made king or queen regardless of his or her sex.

A clarion call is being made to discourage the notion of clinging to cultural or religious myths that females cannot perform certain roles in the society. Khathide (2004: 38) wants to see women being elevated to the same status as men by arguing that:

The tendency is to hide behind culture, with men claiming that in their lack of respect for women they are following in the footsteps of their male forebears ... this has been aggravated by the misapplication of religious beliefs.

According to Khathide, if people deprive one sex of the throne on the basis of culture or religion, it has to be viewed as unfair. It would mean that certain sections of the Bible have been misunderstood. Had there been no queens during biblical times, however, females would not be

allowed to ascend the throne. In *I Kings* 10:1 it is written that “the queen of Sheba heard of Solomon’s fame, and she came to test him with difficult questions”. It appears that the queen was highly knowledgeable because she had questions which when King Solomon answered them correctly she would know where to place him intellectually.

Experts such as the president of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa), Phatekile Holomisa, hold the view that “succession should be in accordance with the customs of the tribe” (Molema 2004: 23). The president of Contralesa is aware that either a male or female may be crowned as the chief, and that it is only problematic when the latter is to be put on the throne.

It is possible for a king to die without having been blessed with a son among his children. In such cases, some cultures (who do not allow women to rule) appoint the brother of the late chief as the regent. The Valoyis of Nwamitwa are a typical example. A regent does not have royal qualities since they are qualities passed on through descent. If the practice of forbidding women on the throne continues for years, the regent may not want to step down when the rightful king is ready. Even if a male may be found to rule, the regent may be unwilling to relinquish the title to the rightful heir.

The royal council’s decision as to who should ascend the throne should not contravene the Constitution by sidelining women. If the Constitution is compromised their cultural practices would be deemed to be sexist.

3.2.2 Community meetings

People come together as a community for various reasons. They may meet to discuss issues affecting their neighbourhood or to bury a community member who may have passed away. In each of these meetings, women present are usually the majority, probably because of urbanisation but they continue to be sidelined in the leadership of the community formations. They are usually included as mere additional members.

3.3 PERFORMANCE OF TRADITIONAL RITUALS

Some families do perform traditional rituals such as appeasing the ancestral spirits by pouring some beer on the ground at a place the family has designated as sacred. The eldest member of the family usually performs the practice. In such cases, family aunts usually perform the act when senior male members are no longer alive. One can thus not understand why females are mostly not allowed to ascend the throne when they may be used to help the living make contact with the ancestors.

3.4 PROVERBS

Men and women appear to be up in arms against each other as a community or as a household. Proverbs bear testimony to the claims that these two sexes continue to grapple with each other for power. A proverb is a “short pithy saying in general use, held to embody a general truth” (Tulloch: 1990: 1228). Proverbs are generally an authentic voice of a

particular society. Below, is an array of proverbs expressive of the opinions and beliefs held by both men and women.

3.4.1 Power

The Tsonga people are portrayed as people who perceive a woman and her role as outside governance (family or public domain). A woman's contribution is mostly unwelcome at a tribal gathering. Junod (1990: 188) gives a proverb that shows patriarchal dominance:

*Vavasati a va na huvo: Rito ra wansati a ri na ntikelo
(risima lerikulu). Timhakeni ri nga ka ri nga koti rito ra wanuna.
Women have no court: A woman's word has no value.
In court cases, it will not have the same weight as man's word.*

This proverb is purely sexist, as it does not allow women to pass judgments in the traditional court or gathering. In the Western courts, however, women do preside as judges in complex cases and finally pass judgement. As many women attend the tribal and school community gatherings while their husbands are away in the cities, they must be accorded the opportunity to make a contribution in all on-going discussions.

3.4.2 Infertility

The society seems to have a conviction that a child comes from a man and a woman who engage in sexual intercourse and the child becomes the sole determinant of the family. In his collection of proverbs, Malungana (1997: 92) states:

*Wansati i ku tswala: Loko wansati a nga tswali a hi nchumu.
To be a woman is to bear children: A sterile woman is nothing
in a marriage.*

This proverb may be wished away from culture because it offends and trivializes women who are not blessed with children. Despite procreation, there are many family functions that sterile women can perform in their marriages. Some of these women are employed, thereby becoming breadwinners. Biblically, such women are awaiting answers to their prayers just like Sarah who was blessed with a child in her nineties (Genesis 21).

In addition, it is also not always the women's fault when she fails to conceive, but a man too, may be impotent. Khathide in *City Press* (May 2004: 32) quotes an insult from township lingo, which states that a man may shoot "water bullets". "Water bullets" refer to the weak semen that an impotent man secretes. In the past elderly people did not ridicule such impotent men where they would know of their inability regarding procreation. Instead they would choose a man within the family to impregnate the woman.

Otto Jespersen in Cameron (1999: 239) remarks: "The volubility of women has been the subjects of innumerable jests; it has given rise to popular proverbs in many countries". Societies have a repertoire of proverbs that merely ridicule women. As the generations come and go the status of women remains engulfed in a viscous circle of ridicule.

3.4.3 Failed marriages

The Tsonga people have coined a proverb that tags a woman whose marriage has not been successful and has come back to her people. Yet, there is nothing to label a man who comes out of a broken marriage. Here is a proverb :

*Xivuya: Wansati la vuyeke hi le vukatini a tshikiwile hi nuna.
The one who come back: A woman who comes back home
after having been deserted by her husband.*

The proverb shows bias against women because there is no proverb to symmetrically refer to male counterparts who become single after an unsuccessful marriage.

3.4.4 Abusive marriages

There is also a belief that the language that a woman understands best is a stick, as Junod (1990: 180) remarks:

*Vukati bya katinga: Mbewu loko u yi katinga ya nonohwisiwa.
Swi tano ni mbilu ya munhu evukatini.
Marriage roasts (hardens): As a seed hardens when you roast it,
so it is with a man's heart in marriage.*

This unfair proverb criticizes men for not looking around for peaceful solutions to settle their differences with their women. Without much thought, they resort to violence as if it were the only way to correct women. Some women who do break away from such abusive marriages later become successful as businesspersons or some other professionals. This shows that with dedication they could have solved their marriages.

Marital differences must help a couple to mature intellectually by exploring negotiated settlements in order to sustain oneness.

3.4.5 Monetary wealth

Despite a need to have security, maturity, and a family within a marriage, women are said to be preoccupied with the root of all evil – money, Junod (1990: 186) points out:

*Wansati u fana ni xigalana emirini: Ku teka wansati swa karhata.
A woman is like a tick on one's body: Marriage brings trouble.*

Malungana (1997: 90) in turn states:

*Mahele ya hanya hi manhlanhla ya swakudya: Vavasati va
rhandza vavanuna lava nga ni mali.
Cockroaches depend on bits of food for life: Women love
wealthy men.*

Both proverbs have one thing in common, and that is parasitism. In the first proverb, women are compared with a tick that depends on the host's blood and in the other the writer uses cockroaches that depend on the bits of food that fall down.

These two proverbs trivialize the institution of marriage as no longer founded on real love but on the accumulation of wealth which is then clandestinely taken to the woman's home. If a marriage is grounded on suspicion as exposed by the two proverbs, it is most likely to be instable and ultimately break down. Today, the work industry employs both sexes and some families are supported by women. If it is the desire to accumulate wealth both men and women should desire to become

successful businesspeople. So the need for money must not be blamed on one sex only.

3.4.6 Unfaithfulness

Some proverbs give licence to men to have love affairs with many women. Men also convince themselves that there are numerous women who are lonely and therefore they have to propose to them, as Malungana (1997: 92) cites in the following proverb:

*Wanuna hi ye wo dya matatana: Wanuna a nge tsandzeki
ku va ni murhandziwa wa le xihundleni.
A man is privileged to eat red figs: A man cannot fail to
have a concubine.*

This proverb is misleading in that men may begin to see many women outside their marriages. These unnecessary relationships have serious repercussions ranging from sexually transmitted diseases, unfaithfulness, and lead to endless fights between husbands and wives. Besides, there is not even one proverb that permits women to have relationships outside marriage.

3.4.7 Beauty

There is actually nothing wrong in seeing beauty as valueless when intending to marry a woman. Some men may get attracted to a woman's beauty, which is also heightened by her complexion and physique. The Vatsonga people usually value good conduct as a yardstick for getting a good wife. Junod (1990: 188) gives the following two proverbs that nullify a woman's beauty:

Kuwa lero tshwuka a ri kali swivungu ndzeni: N'wana lowo saseka, loko a nga lowi , wa loloha, kumbe wa yiva, kumbe wa kariha, kumbe u ni mona.

A red fig does not lack worms inside: A beautiful girl is often lazy, or she is addicted to stealing, or is ill tempered, or wicked.

This proverb does not notice any useful elements in a woman whose beauty is coupled with a light complexion. It appears the facial appearance of a woman is a quality that determines her character. A beautiful woman is seen as predestined to become horribly bad. Women with such qualities may, according to the proverb, be regarded as unsuitable for marriage.

Another proverb in support of this claim cited from Junod (1990: 60) proclaims:

Homu ya ntlhohe a yi na ntswamba: Wansati loko a xongile, loko ji singe, i noyi.

A beautiful woman will probably be either a fool or witch: Beauty without virtue is worth nothing.

Clearly, this proverb too discourages the attraction to a woman on the basis of beauty, particularly light complexion. There may be no man who would like to be known to be having a love affair with an ugly woman. Love is believably initiated in the eye of the beholder and it is true that a beautiful complexion may trigger emotions of love. Beautiful women are portrayed to have the potential of containing ugly qualities such as witchcraft, theft, bad temper and wickedness.

3.4.8 Ugly character dormant in women

People, men in particular, view women as capable of portraying the same character noticeable in another. Weaknesses that are prominent in Woman X may exist in Woman Y and it is with time that these qualities emerge and become noticeable. Two of Junod's proverbs support this claim in the following manner:

() *Mavala ya mangwa i mavala man'we: Vavasati va fana eka hinkwaswo leswi va swi endlaka (1990: 38).
The Zebra's stripes are all alike: Women are all alike in their doings"*

() *Mavala ya mfutsu mavala man'we: Vavasati hinkwavo i van'we. Hambu un'wana a lehile un'wana a komile i vavasati hinkwavo (1990: 54).
The colour of tortoises is all one colour: All women are alike. Even though one is tall, another one is short, they are all women.*

These proverbs create unnecessary fear in situations where men and women are found together. Men appear to be forewarned of the women's character, which is said to be unpredictable. Since families are not the same in terms of the laws that are to be followed, these laws may shape women to become exactly what their men want them to be. So there is no need to be suspicious of one's woman as that will result in family instability.

3.5 IDIOMS

Another area of language that is culture specific and a very salient reflector of bias against sex is idioms. Idioms epitomize what a group of

people have observed as a trend among themselves in the day-to-day activities. Such trends have been repeatedly uttered and enshrined in language in the form of idioms. Fromkin and Rodman (1993: 165) define idioms as: “phrases whose meaning is *not* the combination of the meanings of the individual words”. If a person masters a language through internalizing the lexicon, such mastery will not be complete without idioms because idioms combine everyday words in their construction and one may easily lose their meanings. Idioms are unique in that their construction and usage are collocational, that is, certain words become fixed together. However, the meaning of those words never accurately reflects the meaning of the idioms. The meaning is that which the groups of people have agreed upon. For example, *to kick the bucket* literally means to use one’s foot to hit a bucket, but figuratively it means *to die*. Palmer (1981: 80) confirms this by stating that “the meaning of the resultant combination of words is opaque”. This further reveals that idioms have one meaning that the people have agreed upon.

Idioms play a significant role in enriching the language through expressions that confirm belongingness to a particular society. Since idioms are part of language, some of them are oppressive, sexist and offensive, as Black and Coward in Cameron (1999: 101) in their review of Dale Spender’s *Man Made Language* state:

Thus, grammatical presumption, sexist idioms, the effect of the sexes of the speaker are all encompassed as essentially the same phenomena, produced by the different relation, which men and women have to language.

Spender’s observation is apt in that both the language idioms and speakers are to blame for sexism. Both language and speakers treat

people as men and women rather than as human beings. Most of the idioms are proof that there is no sound relationship between men and women. Men are favoured by the idioms, hence Spender is speaking of man-made language.

3.5.1 Ridiculing other people's marriages

Most husbands are known to be so strict in running their familial affairs that their wives may stay on in such marriages for the mere fact that their parents have eaten these men's money. In such cases, love is no longer visible to the onlookers while brutality is often practised. But those husbands who show support for their wives and stand in their wives' place when they are occupied are despised by the following proverb in Malungana (1997: 94):

*Ku dyisiwa korovela: Ku nyikiwa murhi hi wansati leswaku wanuna a va xiphunta.
To be fed with korovela: A potion that a woman feeds to her man to make him submissive.*

In this case the man may be said to have lost his manhood, in that he no longer has a say in the family. The wife has taken over control of the family by pouring some *muti* (potion) believed to stupefy him into his food. The husband then seldom features in the running of the daily activities of the family. It is the wife who is actively involved in the affairs of the family. Not having spoken to this woman, one may not be too sure of a complete approval to use the family property, for example, their wheelbarrow.

One of the Tsonga idioms supports Shakespeare's sexist association of sorcery with women, Ntsanwisi (1985: 95) reports:

*Ku mama vuloyi (To suckle witch-craft):
To learn witchcraft from one's mother.*

The notion of suckling is only possible during breastfeeding and only women do breastfeed. The confinement of breastfeeding to women leaves them with the ability to pass on the ugly practice of witchcraft to their young ones. If it were a coveted art, sorcery would be viewed as abounding in the male semen.

3.5.3 Execution of chores

Some family chores are traditionally carried out by women. Changing a baby's nappy, preparing food, fetching wood or water, and washing plates are duties associated with the female domain. If a man performs one of these duties, Ntsanwisi (1985: 96) mentions that the following idiom is used:

*Ku va mbulwa wo khandziyeka (To be a yellow-apple tree
which can be climbed):
To be a docile person.*

The idiom sees women as being able to turn the fortune in the family circles into their favour by giving their husbands a potion to make them take orders instead of dictating how things should be. When the potion has been applied the husband will start to execute female chores without complaining. It is, however, time that men should change their approach and complement their spouses in the execution of family chores.

3.5.4 Calling women names

Some men have the tendency of having affairs with other women besides their wives. Although it may be seen as men's weakness to have a network of relationships outside the marriage those women are ridiculed, as Ntsanwisi (1978: 116) reports:

*Ku tsakela n'wandhindhani (To love skirts):
To have a great weakness for the fair sex.*

Having more than one partner is seen as a weakness. It is good to have idioms that are against such a tendency, but the wording becomes sexist when women are referred to as *n'wandhindhani* (a piece of cloth that is put on to serve as an undergarment). There is a need to treat women and their clothing with respect.

3.5.5 First pregnancy

In the past when schools were introduced in rural communities and a few high schools were built in a few select communities, boys and girls practised unsafe sex. Condoms were very scarce or unknown and it resulted in many girls' falling pregnant. Such pregnancy would be communicated among boys in a way that would not be intelligible to the girls, particularly to the one who had become pregnant. Ntsanwisi (1978:117) uses the following idiom to refer to this situation:

*Ku tshova nhwana nenge (To break the leg of a girl):
To impregnate a girl.*

During those times a learner who fell pregnant would have violated the school rules and regulations and would be expelled. Pregnancies were not as common as they are today. Falling pregnant was almost a taboo hence the coinage of the idiom. However, today pregnancy is not something that is treated with disdain but the addressee may still view the idiom as an insult.

3.5.6 Metaphorically inclined idioms

Some happenings occur in a way that exceeds existing limits. Such happenings are then being compared to something else. For instance:

(a) *Manyunyuy onge u lo tekiwa ka Mkhulu (To be as snobbish as having married into royalty):
To have endless complaints/naggings.*

(b) *Ku tswala onge i mbuti (To give birth like a goat):
To have too many children.*

In the first idiom women who have been married into the royal family are viewed as unreasonably lazy. Their wants are numerous and endless because they do not do things on their own. There are servants who work on their behalf. They are happy to be giving orders and seeing these servants running from end to end in the accomplishment of the chores. In the second idiom women who have many young children are likened to goats as they deliver in twos, threes, or fours. It has been mentioned elsewhere that families have their own laws that govern their marriages. Some families do not allow women to practise birth control and they have no option but to have as many children as possible. Both idioms serve a

comparative purpose, but women in both instances are portrayed as being unreasonable in their acts.

3.5.7 Metaphorical idioms

Some idioms are used to compare a woman to other things that have similar functions. However, such a comparison still places women in an inferior position where they are prone to mockery and insults. The first idiom which attacks women comes from a poem by Marhanele (1980: 1):

*Wansati i gumba (A woman is a white stork):
To be a hunter of greener pastures.*

In this metaphor, the writer compares the behaviour of a woman with that of a white stork. This bird is usually seen in summer when there is plentiful food but disappears in winter when plants lose their greenery. A woman's behaviour, according to the metaphor, is seasonal because she hangs out with men who are financially well-off.

Marhanele is extremely harsh with his comparison because there is no woman who can be happy when her husband is unemployed. A woman has to be angry because she feels for the children who go hungry while their father is alive. Therefore, often she forces the man to go and look for a job or devise some other means to keep the family afloat.

Another metaphorical idiom notes women's plight. Their behaviour often indicates that women want to surpass men, as Maluleke (1991: 55) mentions:

*Vavanuna i xikhongolotana xa nsindziso (Men are a centipede of persistence):
To be a source of annoyance.*

Maluleke opens his poem by indicating that men are an obstacle to women's emancipation because they do not want to give way. Suddenly, the whole poem changes to its focus to ridicule women. They are seen as lacking love. Once a woman starts working she does no longer treat her husband with respect, particularly when the husband is not working or earning less than his wife. If a woman behaves like this, it is certainly not correct. Family stability and organisation have to remain intact without having to be influenced by what is earned by the wife.

Maluleke's attack on women is unfair because he sees them as lacking real love. Men do have the same weakness of having many partners outside marriage. Some even go to the extent of not coming back home on payday. When they have spent all the money on their concubines they come back. So men also have the weakness of spending money unwisely such as using family car to carry concubines and friends to shebeens. If the family car is used to carry concubines then women have to buy their own cars that will serve the family.

3.5.8 Family leadership

It appears that only male parents lead most families. Female parents are grouped together with the children. They have to comply with whatever the father wants. This view relates to that of Morgan (1986: 179) in Goddard and Patterson (2000: 32) which sees the man as the leader and decision-maker and the woman as a loyal supporter and follower. This is evident from the Xitsonga idiom in Ntsanwisi (1978: 33):

Ku va nhloko ya muti (Head of family): The father.

The title father shows that the father is the family head. Every man grows up to become a family head. Such a title is observable when the father's surname or name is pronounced to address his spouse to confirm his ownership. However, it is confusing in the family where the woman's name or her father's name is used such as *Ka-Joyisi* or *Ka-N'wa-John* whereas the family head has another name. In this case the owner's name is seldom pronounced by the residents. Only during his presence will people use his name. Titles such as family head must be scrapped because in some cases the family head is undermined when his name is not used.

3.5.9 Game of *ncuva*

Most communities have a game of stones played by men, called *ncuva*. The game consists of four rows of holes which may go up to twenty-four or thirty-six. Each pair of rows belongs to the player on the either side. Then each hole is filled with two stones or pebbles. But the two inside rows have the first row left empty and the one next to it filled with only one pebble. These openings are at the opposite ends and the game goes in opposite directions so that the flows are able to meet inside in the end and have an exciting battle until one of the opponents remains with one pebble in the hole or surrenders even before that stage is reached. One way of winning the game is to ensure that the opponent is left with, the so-called *xinkuzana* (a young bull) in the outside row, which he has to mind until it connects with the rest of the herd, as Ntsanwisi (1978: 104) reports:

Ku pala ni mana wa xona (To beat it with its mother):

To defeat conclusively.

The young bull is also termed the mother and her child, and it is not clear how a woman comes into a male game. At times, reference to that young bull becomes annoyingly sexist when it is referred to as mother and her child, particularly when one side loses. They may begin to ask whose mother is being referred to with the intention to fight. Not only is the address sexist, but is seriously offensive.

3.6 LEXICAL ITEMS

There are words that usually enter the lexicon of a language due to the advent of certain events or behaviours. If a man has good relations with his in-laws, he may be regarded as biased towards them. Even if he still has a connection with his patrilineal or matrilineal people, people find a way of satirically slamming at such relation with the in-laws. The words below have been coined to attack the relations alluded to:

- (a) *Lwelwelwe* (A husband who is led by his wife)
- (b) *Xitsema-nyumba* (A man who supports his in-laws only without taking care of his own people)
- (c) *Xinyumbadzana* (One-sided man)
- (d) *Xinekwa* (A wife whose husband does not allow her to perform hard chores)

The first three words suggest that the husband has no authority over his wife. The woman has taken over the reins of running the family. The man's finances and other material possessions are channelled towards the woman's people. The man's people are no longer taken care of. This situation is said to arise when *korovela's* effect is prevailing. The man does not take any advice to free him from the situation. The last word

refers to the woman who is much loved by her husband. More often, they hang out together. It seems that the level of love has gone beyond normality because the woman no longer performs her household chores.

The labelling that men earn for their association with their in-laws is unfair because such relations are sustained by being helpful to and supportive of one's in-laws in times of the need. Two families have become one through a marital agreement. The man may become scared of assisting his in-laws for fear of being unfairly labelled.

3.7 TABOOS

Every culture promotes or discourages certain practices that regulate their day-to-day lives. Some of these beliefs that are held have no clear purposes. When the Vatsonga people say “Never sit on the mortar or on a lifting stone”, one only suspects that the mortar carries food and may fart into it or the lifting stone may be very hot sometimes and may burn whoever sits on it. Fromkin and Rodman (1993: 303) explain a taboo as a borrowed word from Tongan, a Polynesian language, referring to acts that are forbidden or to be avoided.

Most languages forbid the use of words that refer to the sex organs and sexual intercourse. *Radio Munghana Lonene* (a community radio station targeting Xitsonga speaking people) combines words that refer to sex organs during health programmes. They speak of *xirho xa xisati* or *xirho xa xinuna* meaning female or male organs as a way of using inoffensive words. This practice confirms the existence of the taboos in the Xitsonga language. Fromkin and Rodman (1993: 303) state that words that are avoided may cause “embarrassment or horror”. It is true that there exist

words whose utterance may cause people to be extremely disappointed. For instance, using raw words for the genital may cause murmuring and embarrassment among the hearers.

Malungana (1997: 107) mentions the following taboos, which are treating women unfairly:

Loko yindlu yi ri karhi yi fuleriwa a ku ngheni vavasati endzeni.

Swa yila. U nga fa mahlo.

When a hut is thatched no woman is allowed inside. It is taboo.

She can lose her eyesight.

The skill of thatching a hut is entrusted to men only irrespective of whether the hut belongs to a man or a woman. It is of no use for the woman to discover that the roof contains perforations, which should have been fixed when the men were still on the roof. Every work of roofing may be said to be complete when inspection has been done. There is actually no clear reason why women may not go in during thatching.

Another taboo whose reason for existence is unclear comes from Malungana (1997: 106) who reports:

Ku kukula xihahlu xa tihuku u ri nhwanyana. Swa yila.

U nga fela hi nuna.

A girl cannot sweep a fowl coop/run. It is taboo.

Her husband may die.

In order to explain this taboo it would be best to simultaneously consider the following undocumented taboo:

Vavasati a va dyi huku kumbe mandza ya huku. Swa yila.
Women cannot eat chicken eggs. It is taboo.

These taboos served as barriers to women when they wanted to enter a chicken fold. In addition, the father was the only person who was allowed to eat certain designated parts of a chicken. Sometimes, the children were forbidden to start eaten before the father had taken those particular parts from the pot. It sounds unreasonable for a grown-up man to be eating the fleshy parts when the children have to struggle with the dry feet.

Culturally, it is a taboo for a woman who is in her menstrual period to enter the mealiefield. The belief is that the crops may not ripen. Commercial farmers rely on the female labour force and the yields are very high. It is obvious that farmers do not go by such trivial beliefs but they get enough to harvest and even a surplus for profit.

3.8 NAMES WITH HIDDEN MEANINGS

If a woman gets a chance to give a name to her baby, she communicates her true feelings. This privilege may be the highlight of her life. The names below depict the mood the women are going through at such an occasion:

- (a) *Mbitsini* (living in misery)
- (b) *Poyilani* (go on spoiling)
- (c) *Maxangu* (misery)
- (d) *Hlupheka* (continue suffering)
- (e) *Vukatimuni* (What type of marriage?)

These names show the sufferings that women generally experience as a result of family or societal problems. It may not be considered a wise

decision to terminate a marriage that has these qualities. Women have to endure these hardships with the hope that things will change later in life. For example, in (b) the reason behind the name is that the family a woman marries into may not be welcoming to her, perhaps due to her inability to execute some of the household chores to their satisfaction and they may be hurling insults at her. The woman's desire not to break up the marriage, which will degrade her people, is seen in the serious name she gives to the baby.

3.9 NICKNAMES WITH NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS

When men grow into adulthood they give themselves certain nicknames that make them famous in places where they live. Tulloch (1995: 1024) defines a nickname as "a familiar or humorous name given to a person or thing instead of or as well as the real name". Nicknames are names that people choose to be known by for unspecified reasons. Some of these nicknames are offensive or sexist. The researcher has identified the following nicknames that sound degrading:

(a) *Xa hlakala.*

It is getting worn out.

(b) *Swa endleka hambu swi lo tala.*

It is possible no matter how many.

In (a) the nickname suggests that the man is able to enter the vagina until it gets worn out, whereas in (b) the man boasts that in a day he can have sex with all his wives irrespective of their number.

Nicknames such as these are reducing the value of sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse need not be spoken about publicly for reasons that the

nicknames suggest. Sex as a topic requires to be treated in a more careful and dignified way.

3.10 SONGS

People often sing songs when they are in a group. *The Reader's Digest Complete Wordfinder* (1996: 1479) defines a song as “a short poem or other set of words set to music or meant to be sung”. Members of the group reveal their oneness through songs. They sing and dance to show their true emotions. It is sometimes a way of marking determination towards achieving a particular goal. There are various areas where people use songs to mark an activity that is going on such as during the struggle for freedom, in church, in the initiation school, and in other places. Songs that are used in the initiation school will be used to indicate the oneness that prevails in the group. However, not only unity will be revealed by the songs, but some elements of sexism as well.

3.10.1 Initiation school for males

An initiation school is an institution where boys are sent to go and acquire lessons on manhood. Throughout the day songs are used when the initiates are being admitted, when a new day dawns, during play, when food is to be collected from the girls, and in the evenings. The following is an example of a song sung shortly before going to collect food from women:

*Va lengalenga mileve va ya kwihe?
Ho va ya kwihhi vavasati?
Where are women dangling their clitoris to?
Where are they going?*

The song informs women that their presence is noted and they must not lose patience since the men are coming to fetch the food and other provisions they have brought. But the language of reception is not fair to women and the young girls who are not yet initiated. Since the names that refer to sexual organs are not to be mentioned publicly. The Vatsonga culture does not approve of parents who discuss sexual matters with their children. Even if it may be done, it will be behind closed doors. It shows that no parent derives pleasure from talking about sex with their children.

3.10.2 Initiation school for females

There are diurnal and nocturnal songs that women sing. At night towards dawn women use dysphemistic songs that revolve around sexual activity and its organs. They slam at men's weak erections and their lack of satisfaction. The following song is an example of those that they sing during the day:

- 1 *Xi le kuweni,*
- 2 *Hoo haa hee ximayimayi.*
- 3 *Hoza Muchangana a wu yi joni.*
- 4 *Awu yi joni.*
- 5 *U tshamela nkambana wa manana,*
- 6 *Ximayimayi.*
- 7 *Loko ndzi swi lava ndzi ngo tlhakela ka Nyamazane.*
- 8 *I yaya-ha-he xi ndzi kumile ka Nyamazane.*
- 9 *Nghamo! Nghamu ya van'wana vavanuna.*
- 10 *Ho-ha-he chovha.*

- 1 It is on top of the wild fig,
- 2 *Mayimayi.*
- 3 *Hoza Shangaan you do not go to Jo'burg.*
- 4 You do not go to Jo'burg.
- 5 You are spoiled by your mother,
- 6 *Mayimayi.*

- 7 If I want I may go and see other men in the Kruger National
Park.
8 Now I have a loving man in the Kruger National Park.
9 Partner! Other men's partner,
10 *Shova.*

Attention will be given to lines 5 and 7 which serve as the heart of the song. Line 5 tells of the wife's anger with her husband who is no longer working. The condition at home has worsened as she can no longer bear to see her children in tattered clothes and eating unhealthy food. In line 7 she sends out a warning that if he does not secure a job in the near future she will give herself to some men in the Kruger National Park.

The song is a clear indication that family roles need to be equitably distributed so that even in times of crisis the marriage does not fail. Not only men should look for employment, but both the husband and wife should go out and fend for the children. It must not be women who raise the children alone but men should also assist. If the roles are not reversed, the norm will be that if the husband is out of work, the wife should involve herself in prostitution. Songs that people may be encouraged are those that provide encouragement, hope, and solidarity during difficult times so that people may stay on without opting for an immoral alternative.

In the next chapter, data collection techniques that suit the nature of the study are explained. Interviews were conducted and the captured data analysed and interpreted.

3.11 CONCLUSION

For language to serve its primary function of communication, it must not cause division among its users. All elements of the language that violate the Constitution need to be revised so that they may be modified or scrapped. The Xitsonga language does not appear clean because of sexist or offensive poems, proverbs, idioms, names and other forms of language that the speakers hear or say. Finally, language must serve all its speakers equally.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOOLS AND PROCESSES OF DATA GATHERING, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section explains and structures the nature of the study as a fundamental process of data gathering within a specific social group. The collected data were also organized, analysed, interpreted, while generalizations were made.

4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The phenomenon of sexism in the Xitsonga language has always interested the researcher, a phenomenon found in most languages and that other cultures along with their languages seem to be plagued by this societal ill. The researcher thus undertook a study to determine whether or not the social ill of sexism prevailed and the extent of its prevalence in the Xitsonga language. The study is qualitative as it was informed mainly by the researcher's ideas and validated by what the other members of the population under study felt and viewed, and as backed up by the literature review.

Creswell (1994) in Leedy (1997: 105) defines qualitative research as: "... inquiry process of understanding a social human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting". This definition compelled the researcher to seek more information from individuals that

were representative of a larger society. The phenomenon that was being studied might be seen to be common in a particular environment. The researcher had to find ways of extracting the required information from the Xitsonga speakers that were thought to be conversant with the subject. Of importance was the inhabitants' perception expressed in the form of words. The researcher's interaction with the subjects aimed at an in-depth discussion to understand the phenomenon investigated.

Vockell and Asher (1995: 196) view the qualitative approach as most effective for this kind of study because of its methods which "enable the researcher to probe situations in considerable depth and breath, learn the participants' personal feelings and views of activities, determine the social structure and context of the ... setting". According to this citation, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to enter the participants' natural setting and extract valuable knowledge pertaining to the subject of the study.

4.3 DOMINANT VERSUS LESS DOMINANT MODEL

The study was basically quantitative in nature with a few elements of the quantitative research method where necessary. Creswell (1994: 173 - 190) is quoted by De Vos (1998: 360) where he maintains that "the researcher is allowed to do the research within a single, dominant paradigm with one small component of the overall study drawn from the alternative paradigm". The qualitative approach was employed merely to make analysis of the variables in the form of numerical values. The researcher indicated how many respondents were of a particular view in terms of percentages. However, the study itself remained basically qualitative.

4.4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The manner in which the study unfolded and had been described as qualitative classified itself in the discipline of phenomenology. Its classificatory requirement to work with a few informants to unearth a great deal of knowledge qualified it to be a phenomenological research. Leedy (1997: 161) states that in phenomenology “the researcher often has personal experience with the phenomenon and aims to heighten his awareness while simultaneously examining the experience through the eyes of the participants”. The researcher had a slight belief that the phenomenon of sexism was resident in the target population and that through interaction with members of that community, they were most likely to come to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

The number of the informants in the study was small but suitable for the phenomenological approach as it was an in-depth inquiry. Both the researcher and the participants engaged in a lengthy conversation that was intended to clear the cloud obscuring the researcher’s view.

According to De Vos (1998: 253), phenomenology is undoubtedly an effective approach because “in order to gain better understanding of their life worlds, the researcher may decide that in addition a phenomenological or ethnomethodological strategy be used”.

This citation further confirms that the researcher needed to go to the field where diversified and unculled information abounded. Once access was gained, with the few individuals sampled, a clear picture of the broader society evolved.

4.5 TARGET POPULATION

The largest part of the study was confined to the Mtititi Settlement, a part of Ward 7 of the Thulamela Municipality in the Vhembe District. Mtititi Settlement is inhabited by the Xitsonga speaking people whose utterances and other practices are similar to those of the neighbouring communities who share the same language. The community is one of the many that stretch along the Kruger National Park. It is counted among the villages of the Limpopo Province. Being far from Malamulele Township assures one of the real cultural fibre that may weakly or may not be infested with urban linguistic features.

4.6 SAMPLING

Not all people in the target group participated equally in terms of informing the study. It therefore meant that the researcher had to first categorise the study into perspectives. The activities that formed the core of the daily livelihood of the community had representatives taken as principal informants of the study, while the other remained a subsidiary group. The complementarity of the latter group would be explicated in the discussion of the data collection methods. Kerlinger in De Vos (1998: 190) defines sampling as “taking any portion of population or universe considered for actual inclusion in the study”. The researcher thus selected a limited number of individuals from the pool to work with. The researcher set up criteria as to whom to leave out or to include in the research. Members of the same community were viewed as having the same attributes on the basis of belonging to one community. Therefore, those in whom the attributes of community identification were most

noticeable determined the criteria for the sample. Arkava and Lane (1983: 27) are also quoted in De Vos (1998: 191) in their consideration of a sample as “the element of the population” that one includes in the research. The description of the sample confirmed that it did not have to be everyone in the area under study to arrive at reliable findings.

Vockell and Asher (1995: 170) indicate that sampling enables the researcher “to pick a subgroup from a larger group and then use this subgroup as a basis of making *inferences* about the larger group”. The sample helped the researcher to make assumptions of a bigger whole by the use of tiny bits

4.7 SAMPLE SIZE

The sample was taken from within the Mtititi community out of the subdivisions that the researcher had designated. Education, religion, cultural practices, as well as the traditional authority were the perspectives from which the study was informed.

4.7.1 Education

From the educational point of view, there were four educators (two males and two females) while there were four learners, two girls and two boys. The subgroup had a total number of eight participants.

4.7.2 Religion

Since the churches in the community could be grouped into two, namely indigenous African and Charismatic Churches, there were two representatives from each type of church. Of the four participants one was a female as she was one of those at the forefront in the latter group of churches. Two males and two females also represented traditional healers. The total number of informants in the subgroup was eight.

4.7.3 Cultural practices

Initiation schools for both sexes were chosen as representative of the cultural practices that predominantly drew a line of separation between the two sexes. Two people from each side served as informants.

4.7.4 Authorship

All three authors in the community whose publications are used participated in the discussion.

4.7.5 Traditional office

The traditional office had his majesty, the chief, as well as his *induna* to speak on behalf of his community.

The total number of the participants in the study was twenty-five (25). The sample represents only on those who embarked on a face-to-face participation. Seeing that the data collection methods chosen for the study would be time-consuming, the number of participants was kept small enough to allow sufficient time for the sampled respondents and to have an intensive inquiry with them. Grinnell and Williams (1990) in De Vos (1998: 192) state that “30 is sufficient to perform basic statistical procedures”. On the other hand, Vockell and Asher (1995: 172) indicate that it is unnecessary to aim at thousands of respondents when the result that can be obtained from 25 – 50 representatives may be far more useful. So twenty-five respondents were within the range the scholars suggested. Once the study may be, according to De Vos (1998: 192), viewed as an “exceptional phenomenon”, the minimum number of participants may range between twenty and thirty.

4.8 TYPES OF SAMPLING

4.8.1 Purposive sampling

The researcher chose specific individuals as the participants in the study. Because the study had been organised into themes, each of these themes had defendants that were believed to be highly knowledgeable. Patton (1990) in Leedy (1997: 162) states that “purposeful sampling is done to increase the utility of information obtained from small samples. In other words, the researcher had a smaller number of participants to work with, and therefore, experts within the focal population were given preference to laymen. The use of judgement on who should be included in the study is advised (De Vos, 1998: 198). The judgment enabled the researcher to select target persons who had typical attributes of the population.

4.8.2 Accidental or convenience sampling

Accidental or convenience sampling made every member of the population a potential informant though it was not easy for such informants to be contacted. Singleton *et al.* (1988: 153) in Leedy (1998: 198) state that accidental samples are those that happen to cross the researcher's path and have something to do with the phenomenon". Information that presented itself having to do with the study was also important for consideration.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

It must be noted that the researcher's preconceived idea on the subject of the study needed to be validated in comparison with what other people's experiences and perceptions are. The researcher employed interviews and observations as major strategies of collecting data.

4.9.1 Interviews

With interviews, the researcher came into real contact with persons who had information on the phenomenon. Then the researcher and informant embarked on a meaning-search activity. The researcher initiated and facilitated the discussion through penetrative questions. Bharritt (1986) in Leedy (1997: 162) mentions that the 'interviewee takes the researcher to "the heart of the matter"'. In other words, much talking was done by the informants, for they were thought to be information-loaded.

An unstructured interview with a schedule was used as it was seen to have numerous advantages. One such advantage, according to De Vos (1998: 300), is that unstructured interview with a schedule ensure that important data are not forgotten. Every theme that was put on the schedule to be probed would be discussed. The other advantage was to get an insider view of the social phenomenon as well as to explore other avenues of research emerging from the interview. This method of data collection allowed the interviewer's spontaneity to capture and interrogate further new ideas that surfaced during the discussion. The interviewees' contribution was considered to be an insider view because they were thought to be deeply immersed in such social realities.

Vockell and Asher (1995: 133) see the reduction of ambiguity as another advantage of any interview since the interviewee can ask the respondent to make clarifications on some issues that may appear blurred. The physical presence of the interviewer enabled the respondent to remain within the scope of the topic. The researcher was certain that the work was being done at a satisfactory level despite the amount of time that was spent discussing the phenomena. The amount of work covered was immense despite the small number of participants.

4.9.2 Participant observation

All members of the target population were to be under observation. Occurrences that came by unexpectedly bearing relevance to the study were recorded. The strategy captured whatever act or utterance that crossed the researcher's path. Vockell and Asher (1995: 198) explain

observation of participants as having to do with “seeing and hearing events that people take part in, not asking after the fact what people have done or why”. The observer did not interfere with the natural behaviour of the participants so that the concrete situation could reveal itself fully. Things such as reactions or calling for elaboration on a relevant remark were avoided. Only instant memory was relied upon and note-taking of such an informative act was done afterwards, so as not to disturb the normality of the situation

According to Vockell and Asher (1995: 197), through mastery of language, phrases, and vocabulary, the observer was no stranger to the setting under observation because he understood the way of communication. Observation of the participants brought the researcher to reality as raw information was readily available. There was no tension in the situation as it was only the researcher who knew what was going on in terms of putting the whole area under surveillance. The participants expressed their true selves whilst the observer captured the data clandestinely. Therefore, the data captured during participant observation might be deemed to be without bias. To give credence to participant observation, De Vos (1998: 280) cites Jorgensen (1989: 15) who describes it as a method that enables ‘observance of ordinary, usual, typical routine or natural environment of human existence’. For example, the observer saw how the participants reacted with strong emotion of anger or happiness. Thinking that there was no one spying on them, the participants reacted freely to their anger. The researcher was afforded the opportunity to observe the inhabitants’ true selves because they were not aware of the presence of the person who was studying them.

4.10. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.10.1 Data collected through interviews

4.10.1.1 Education

The educational environment is seen as the second home of the child because that is where they spend most of their time and it is another base apart from home where language is acquired.

It should be noted that A represents Male Respondents and B represents Female Respondents.

4.10.1.1.1 Educators

Themes being investigated:

Awareness of sexism.

Duties allocated to learners.

Attitude towards sexism and female leadership.

1. What kind of impact does culture have on males and females in an educational setting?
 - Respondent A1: "In society, males are running the affairs of their families and their community, whereas females have to be concerned with washing (cleanliness) and childbearing. In the school, unlike male educators whose attention is on both male and female learners, female educators' attention is more on female learners than on male learners."
 - Respondent A2: "We have to treat both sexes as male or female learners because education does not have to clash with tradition. We assign learners roles that suit their sex. We want the learners to be able

to make a living out of cultural items such as wooden spoons, clay pots, grass mats, and so on.”

- Respondent B1: “Nowadays females put on a pair of trousers as a way of moving out of cultural bondage. Imagine during chilly days with a skirt and legs exposed to cold. I think culture does no longer have too much influence on women.”
- Respondent B2: “Things have changed and these people need to interact more freely with one another. The community needs to be workshopped on issues of culture and democracy. Cultural practices have to be incorporated into the school curriculum but in a humanistic way. For example, cultural dances along with the corresponding attire are performed with the aim of identifying learners who can make a living out of them. ”

2. How often do you hear speakers using the Xitsonga language in a sexist manner in the school environment?

Respondent A1: “The Xitsonga language is rich in cultural sayings that unite its speakers. But it depends on what you use the language for. Vulgar utterances are often heard among the learners during break. One may conclude that male learners think they are more powerful than the female learners. If learners do not fight they resort to obscenities.”

Respondent A2: “Both male and female learners do make use of derogatory language. We have discussed the code of conduct with them in order to warn them against the use of offensive language but when they are on their own you will hear it. *Bhum!* ”

Respondent B1: “It depends on who you are, where you come from, and how you want to sound. Boys prefer to be bullies and do shout offensive or swearing expressions. Girls do use swearing expressions in the form of defence against bullies.”

Respondent B2: "We still have a long way to educate our learners not to use language irresponsibly. It depends on where they come from. Some do utter these vulgar words. Words for female genitals are used in venting their anger."

3. To what extent are the literature materials affected by elements of sexism?

- Respondent A1: "Literature creates awareness on certain aspects of life where people show a lack. It serves as a reminder or mirror."
- Respondent A2: "Literature reflects the true nature of life. It cleanses women of their weakness and evil. And that is reality."
- Respondent B1: "Authors do write to attack women. Particularly male authors, their focus is on women as if women were the only people who are fallible."
- Respondent B2: "Literature helps in marking identity as a people and showing a way of life during a particular time period. But I do not think there are authors who may continue to write to endorse male-domination because it is outlawed. But I would like to see publications that help both men and women undo the old negative mentality on women because we are in a democracy now."

4. What are you doing as educators to solve negative perceptions of women?

Respondent A1: "Learners are very fond of arguing against one another as opposing sexes. But often boys are on the winning side. It is a mother who these guys value and not a woman."

Respondent A2: "You will never change that. It is something you were born with. Man came first."

Respondent B1: "All our activities cater for both sexes. But girls do not have self-confidence. We need to change the mindset of both girls and boys to see each other as equals. Essays and debates give them a chance to defend a particular sex. And a female is a person whom they all like. Even boys are grouped with girls to defend a particular sex."

Respondent B2: "Our girls are shy. When presented with an opportunity to lead they refuse. Maybe with time they will realize their important role in society. Everything is about women now."

5. How would you as an educator value female leadership, for example, being led by a female principal?

- Respondent A1: "It would not bother me much as it would be at my place of work. But a woman would tend to be stricter to enforce her authority."
- Respondent A2: "She would be biased towards men. She would not treat her female colleagues fairly. You know, women want to feel and be felt that they are in authority, particularly at the expense of their own gender."
- Respondent B1: "We, women, are emotional but are able to lead exceptionally well if given a chance."
- Respondent B2: "It is women's turn to show what they are capable of. We are looking forward to that opportunity."

All the respondents were aware of the existence of sexism. But two (50%) of the respondents did not see either of the groups under some form of oppression. The other two respondents (50) felt that women were trampled under men's feet. All the respondents agreed with one another that the duties allocated to the learners did not help them emancipate

themselves from societal stereotypes that were perpetuating male-dominance. All four respondents viewed sexism negatively.

4.10.1.1.2 Learners

The letter A represents male learners and B female learners.

The researcher wanted to examine the following:

Awareness of sexism by teenagers.

Upbringing in the home and at school.

Youth's vision on sexist attitudes.

1. How does it feel to be a boy/girl? What are the pleasures and hardships?

- Respondent A1: "I am happy to be a boy. I know I am destined to become a family head. The chores that I do prepare me for that stage. Things such as looking after cattle, not being overindulged, and going to the initiation school hone a man."
- Respondent A2: "It feels good to be a boy. I am not subjected to strict household rules. Girls have to be home before darkness and are being prepared for marriage. They have not much of a choice in life. They remain obsessed with serving the needs of their masters (husbands)."
- Respondent B1: "I am happy to be a girl. We are taught to be responsible. But there is no time for play/leisure just like there is for boys."

Respondent B2: "I feel happy. We do not have the physical strength. Maybe that is why parents are overprotective. We would be able to stop boys from talking any nonsense that comes to their heads. "

2. Do you think your society is fair and just in the treatment of boys and girls? Motivate.

- Respondent A1: “Yes, I am exposed to hardening activities such as attending the initiation school which lasts for a month. Society prepares me to face the demands of my family and the community without fear. At this age I have begun attending community meetings and girls are not there. They have to carry out some household chores.”

Respondent A2: “Yes, we start honouring community meetings at an early age and girls never attend gatherings. So one sees the leading roles that lie ahead of a man.”

- Respondent B1: “No, women are not involved in leadership roles. Boys have unnecessary pleasures such as being exposed to alcohol at an early age. Despite their tender age, they are never denied to buy homebrewed beer and they drink with the elderly. No meeting has ever been held to stop them from drinking alcohol.”

Respondent B2: “Yes, but there are very stringent rules that govern girls in the household. If ever you want to move out you will have to get permission from your mother after she will have checked that all the chores are done. You will never finish household chores.”

3. Are you satisfied to see a boy/girl as the president of the Representative Council of Learners?

- Respondent A1: “Yes, a boy is a good leader as he understands his roles as a leader. Girls are too emotional. They will personalise the leadership. At boiling point they will just cry.”

Respondent A2: “Yes, women do not have leadership qualities. They are too emotional and short-tempered.”

- Respondent B1: “No, a boy’s leadership does not run throughout the year. It is as if they do not represent us as learners. Maybe they are a threat to the school management.”

Respondent B2: “No, this is the ideology that is transferred from the family into the school environment that man is the head. We must share the leading role.”

4. How do you (boys and girls) relate to each other in the school environment?

- Respondent A1: “We are aggressive towards girls. We tend to threaten them. It gives one some respect. It is unfair. But you would not allow them to be all over you.”

Respondent A2: “Boys tend to bully girls. Girls always have to be careful of what they say to us, but we do not have to.”

- Respondent B1: “Boys are bullies and intimidating. It is their nature. Maybe they think other boys will undermine them if they are more cooperative with girls.”

Respondent B2: “Boys have a tendency to use vulgar language towards girls unnecessarily. They love begrudging girls.”

5. Is the school doing enough to treat you (boys and girls) as equals? Motivate.

- Respondent A1: “No, it is girls who clean the classrooms. Only during misconduct are boys made to remove the weeds or dig a pit. The rest of the times we just go home without doing anything to assist the girls. What one reads is that neither are boys and girls equal nor are they groomed to see each other as equals.”

Respondent A1: “No, school is an extension of roles women perform at home.”

- Respondent B1: “No, boys, for example, do not put on proper school uniforms and nothing is being done to correct that. We are the ones who clean the classrooms and surroundings, but boys just come and go.”
- Respondent B2: “No, we do a lot of cleaning and that role is never extended to boys. Maybe it is because boys do not clean at home.”

All the respondents (100%) were aware of sexism within their society, which in turn, drifts into the school and it has a bearing on the allocation of duties to the learners. Both groups (100%) were not satisfied with their upbringing as it does not aim to change the oppression of women by men.

4.10.1.2 Religion

The letter A stands for Male Respondents, B1 is a Male Respondent, and B2 is a Female Respondent in both churches and traditional healers.

4.10.1.2.1 Churches

According to Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in *Wikipedia*, an indigenous church is one that is “self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating”. This type of church does not get financial aid from the government and its manner of operation is almost in partnership with the cultural practices of the local society. The cultural practices may include avoiding sexual intercourse on a day before going to church, excluding

women from leadership positions, and not attending services when observing menstruation. *Wikipedia* explains charismatic churches as churches whose features are, among others, speaking in tongues, healing, and miracles. The practice of speaking in tongues is subjected to harsh criticism. Those tongues are said to be *glossolalia*, that is, the people doing it are just speaking anything that comes to mind. Their speech may be lacking in meaning and intelligibility to the audience.

The following themes were the focus of the interview:

Roles of men and women in the church, particularly in terms of preaching and healing.

Filling leadership positions.

Gender ascribed to God.

1. Do men and women play the same roles in the church? Substantiate.
- Indigenous Respondent A1: “No, see I Timothy 2: 12. It is the Bible which is the principal Constitution of the church that prevents women from playing the same roles as men. Women cannot preach in the presence of men. Once they are given a chance to preach to men they will never listen to men anymore.”
 - Indigenous Respondent A2: “No, they cannot teach but listen to the word of God being taught by men. They are the ones to be guided so that they can apply it to raise their families.”
 - Charismatic Respondent B1: “Yes, things are changing and there is a need to keep up with the changing times. Women were the first to see Jesus rising from the grave. A widow fed Elijah. Then there is no reason why we should not allow them to perform these roles. They

must preach the word, pray for the sick, and baptize the converts. Presently, they have not started doing so.”

- Charismatic Respondent B2 (Woman): “Not sure. But given a chance women can do some of these duties. Irene Tshifiwe is healing the sick in the church in Thohoyandou, but she is a woman.”

2. Are there situations where women can and/or cannot preach? Substantiate.

Indigenous Respondent A1: “Yes, in the church where the congregation includes both men and women, they cannot preach. But at funerals every person can comfort the bereaved. Even in prayer gatherings for women only, they are on their own and the purpose is to guide and help one another to live in harmony in their families, so they can preach. ”

Indigenous Respondent A2: “Yes, Paul said so. Then we cannot change that. Women can only preach in their own gatherings as women only.”

Charismatic Respondent B1: “No, there are many churches that are run by women. Even in those churches that do not allow women to preach, women membership is the majority.”

Charismatic Respondent B2 (Woman): “No, our church has very few men most of whom are young. Therefore, we have to take the lead. If we wait for men our church will close down.”

3. What gender can you ascribe to God? Motivate.

- Indigenous Respondent A1: “A male. God created Adam first and then Eve.”
- Indigenous Respondent A2: “A male. Adam was created in the image of God.”

- Charismatic Respondent B1: “Masculine qualities. God always appeared in the image of man.”
- Charismatic Respondent B2 (Woman): “Male; in our prayers, we say God, the Father.”

4. There is a belief that some sections of the Bible, particularly sections that encourage male-dominance as a God-given right, are outdated. What is your view on this?

Indigenous Respondent A1: “No section of the Bible can be outdated. All these times are recurrent.”

Indigenous Respondent A2: “No section in the Bible is outdated. That males are leaders will never change.

Charismatic Respondent B1: “All sections are relevant. But our interpretation needs to suit the times. A woman is man’s companion and their interaction must maintain the companionship.”

Charismatic Respondent B2: “Every section of the Bible suits a particular situation or time. The Bible was there before, is still here today, and will continue to exist so long as people continue to exist.”

5. Government calls for the placement of women in influential positions. Is the church intending to give women positions that will put them on par with men? Motivate.

- Indigenous Respondent A1: “These are entirely two separate institutions. The government cannot tell the church what to do. But it is the church that can advise the government on how things should be done.”
- Indigenous Respondent A2: “We cannot violate what God has put in writing.”

- Charismatic Respondent B1: “Women deserve to be leaders too. They are capable of any position, including in the church.”
- Charismatic Respondent B2: “Given a chance to lead we can try. Many women are in leading positions. So I do not see a reason why they should fail in the church.”

Two respondents (50%) indicated that men and women did not play the same role in the church and there was nothing wrong with it. The other two respondents (50%) felt that women must be given the same roles as men. The one half did not allow women to occupy leading positions in the church. The other half wanted women elevated to leadership positions. All the respondents (100%) saw God as having a masculine image.

4.10.1.2.2 Traditional healers

Themes under investigation:

Relatedness of both male and female traditional healers to their healing equipment.

Cultural respect shown to people who come to consult.

1. How does a male or female traditional healer relate to his or her equipment such as herbs and bones?

- Respondent A1: “To stay holy, one must avoid touching dead bodies of all animals (particularly those that die on their own). Making love does not weaken the effectiveness of the healing equipment. Otherwise traditional healers would never have families.”

- Respondent A2: “Contact with a woman sexually does not forbid contact with traditional healing equipment. Look at how large the families of traditional healers are. The only forbidden thing is contact with a dead body of person or anything that has died on its own.”
- Respondent B1: “You cannot go there being in your menstrual cycle or when coming from a funeral.”
- Respondent B2: “Men may touch their equipment consistently because they are not subject to a woman’s natural cycle.”

2. How do you ensure that women who come to consult do not spoil their equipment’s good standing?

- Respondent A1: “Only death within the family may spoil the equipment’s standing.”
- Respondent A2: “We know that some come to destroy our art of healing and our effectiveness. So we stay armed.”
- Respondent B1: “Usually outsiders never spoil the equipment, and we do not allow women to touch the medicine if they are in their menstrual cycle.”
- Respondent B2: “Unless they touch the equipment (medicines) outsiders cannot spoil anything during consultation. Before we issue out the stuff we check with women if they are not in observation of their menstrual cycle so that they must not touch it.”

3. How do you treat men and women in the consulting room in terms of showing cultural respect?

- Respondent A1: “In the consulting room we do not treat men and women but human beings. They are all equal as it is other ‘foreign’ people’s territory. It belongs to the ancestors. We all sit down to show respect to them.”

- Respondent A2: “The consulting people, be it males or females, all sit on the mat and take orders like clapping hands and singing *Siya Vhuma* (We accept). No one is given a chair.”
- Respondent B1: “I may be a woman but serving the consulting people from a masculine or feminine influence depending on the spirit that lives in me. Already I am above them because I combine human and supernatural spirits. However, it is only the ancestral spirit that is shown respect by sitting down.”
- Respondent B2: “The consulting room does not belong to me who you interact with but to other spiritual beings. So with the spirit that resides in me elevate me. But with the mat the people who consult sit on it, and it shows men and women are equal.”

4. How do you relate to the people who graduated into the art of healing through your guidance?

Respondent A1: “We instill a sense of respect to one another. All my products are bound to bow down and make a clicking sound with their fingers. My mentor is a woman but I do the same.”

Respondent A2: “Bowing down and clicking your fingers are signs of respect compulsory to both men and women to their mentors.”

Respondent B1: “Even men do heed the manner of greeting before women.”

Respondent B2: “For fear of being cursed everyone complies with the ‘salute’ shown to the mentors. For example, you may experience poor consultancy for not adhering to the rules.”

In traditional healing, all four respondents (100%) agreed that men and women are equal, be it the traditional healers themselves or the consulting people. No sex enjoys an unfair superiority at the expense of the other.

4.10.1.3 Cultural practices

It must be noted that represents Male Respondents and B represents Female Respondents.

The following themes were investigated:

- Status accorded men and women in the society.
- Impact of initiation schools, in particular the songs, on societal organisation.

1. What is a woman according to the Vatsonga culture?

Respondent A1: “A woman is a man’s companion. It is someone whose significance lies in a man. Without a man she is counted as worthless irrespective of how old she may be.”

Respondent A2: “A woman is a man’s property. This is someone who looks after the family when a man is away to work. A woman is not supposed to work because she has a lot of work to do in the home. Look now, they do no longer marry as a result of education and employment.”

Respondent B1: “A woman is a man’s home/family. Even a man cannot claim maturity without a woman.”

Respondent B2: “Someone who bears and raises children in a family.”

2. Can a woman be elevated to the status of a chief? Motivate.

- Respondent A1: “I am sure they are not even dreaming about such a thing. That has never been heard of.”
- Respondent A2: “In our culture they even do not enter the traditional court where the elders discuss village issues.”
- Respondent B1: “Culture does not allow women to be chiefs”
- Respondent B2: “In our culture, I only know of one woman who is an *induna* at Matsakale. That of a chief, no.”

3. How is the relationship between men and women, particularly in marriage?

Respondent A1: “A woman is not your mother’s child. So be careful. As a man, you have to keep on reminding her of what you expect of her. She loses familial focus easily.”

Respondent A2: “Women can only relate to other women. They are another type. You cannot understand them.”

Respondent B1: “Men always exclude women in many things like in decision-making.”

Respondent B2: “Men usually want to dictate and they never listen to women.”

4. What impact do the initiation schools have on the relationship of men and women with reference to the songs?

- Respondent A1: “Through songs, initiation schools prepare a man to venture out into the wilderness to support and protect his family. They teach you how to look after your family (wife and children).”
- Respondent A2: “You are taught to be a soldier and to run the affairs of your family. You learn to establish and honour rules that will govern your family.”

- Respondent B1: “We are taught cultural values and to look after our families. The songs are there to enliven the activity.”
- Respondent B2: “The initiation schools draw us closer to each other as men and women. The songs heighten our mood. Songs are the same in both camps.”

5. Do you envisage a society where men and women can live together as equals? Motivate.

Respondent A1: “No, women have too many shortfalls. They do not know exactly what they want.”

Respondent A2: “There are so many cultural sayings attempting to regulate women, but they do not change. Great leaders have fallen victim into women’s traps. So be warned”

Respondent B1: “A man needs to be shown the respect he desires as he too will show it back.”

Respondent B2: “Families will not stay put if the two are to be equal. So long as he can provide family needs then life can go on.”

All four respondents (100%) were thus in accord that men enjoy superiority over women in the home environment. The initiation schools together with their songs were regarded by all four respondents (100%) as fair.

4.10.1.4 Authorship

All three respondents were males.

These were the authors who were residing within the area under study. Their books have been published and are considered to have profound knowledge of the society in which they live.

Themes under investigation:

- Meaning of a woman.
- Leadership qualities.
- Language and women.

1. What is a woman in the eyes of a writer?

Respondent A: "Without a woman there is no story to tell. They are the influence of everything. But their weakness is embedded in money and love."

Respondent B: "There is neither family nor growth without a woman. Without a woman, man is deprived of his dignity."

Respondent C: "A woman is the object around which life centres. Whatever man does will finally be forwarded to a woman."

2. What is the impact of the Xitsonga language/culture on women?

- Respondent A: "Our culture has never placed women at the forefront and it is not surprising to see our language rife with sound oppressive expressions and words."
- Respondent B: "Women along with the children are to be given protection by men. It is a man who faces the hardships and ensures that women and children remain shielded from harm."
- Respondent C: "There is nothing wrong with culture because adages are based on tested findings. Women are good as that. They are not people you can trust."

3. There are so many poems entitled “Women” whose content tends to undermine them. What is your opinion of this trend?

Respondent A: “Women are generally a weaker sex that is trapped in an uncontrollable love for money. The authors are trying to warn them of this evil.”

Respondent B: “Both men and women are capable of disloyalty. So we must begin to see something better in women. But it has far-reaching effects if married women commit these weaknesses such as adultery.”

Respondent C: “You must not trust a woman. Leave a room for disappointment.”

4. A queen rules the Bolobedu people. Do you think that the Vatsonga people would allow a woman to rule if a woman was next in the line of rulers?

- Respondent A: “Women are never peace-makers. When they are there problems will never end. Talks will not come to an end and the nation will continue to struggle.”

Respondent B: “The Vatsonga people follow patriarchal dynasty. The chief must marry more than one wife to ensure that members of one family never engage in sexual intercourse to *mould* a chief.” (*Moulding* is when members of one family engage in sexual intercourse in order to give birth to a male chief).

- Respondent C: “We were never ruled by a woman. And it will never happen for a woman to rule.”

5. Which elements do you think women should be ridden of if they were to attain the status of men?

Respondent A: “Never will a woman be equated with a man. Britain once tried it with Margaret Thatcher. I am sure they will never repeat that mistake.”

- Respondent B: “Women, particularly under the auspices of grannies, cannot be confirmed because they are used to cheating to ensure that there are children in the family. They even have a tendency to want to have a particular kind of child, more especially if it is a family with a few children. They will as a group get a man ‘to donate the seed’.”

Respondent C: “Women are all the same. You cannot change them.”

6. Is there something the traditional society is doing to elevate woman?

- Respondent A: “God put man first. And a woman is Lucifer. A woman can only be entrusted with raising her family and not the society. I am sure the Constitution will also be revised in its call for the placement of women into leadership positions.”

Respondent B: “As long as they are not enslaved by man, I think things are alright.”

- Respondent C: “Politics and tradition parallel each other. The lifestyle of a particular people to be seen as a tribe depends solely on those people. Neither an outsider nor paper can tell them what to do. ”

All three respondents (100%) viewed a woman as someone who attaches value to a man and his life. All the respondents (100%) did not envisage matrilineal leadership in the Vatsonga dynasty. All the respondents (100%) agreed that language is a true reflection of the internal organisation of the Vatsonga people.

4.10.1.5 Traditional office

It must be noted that the letter A represents the chief and B represents the headman.

These are the responses from the Mtititi Traditional Office which may be regarded to form an epitome of the other traditional offices of the broader society among the Xitsonga speaking people.

The focus of the investigation:

Identity through language.

The status of women in the society.

1. How true is the proverb: *Vavasati a va na huvo* (Women have no court).
 - Respondent A: “As a tribal or traditional office we do not recognize a woman instead of her man. Women have no say in a traditional gathering because that is where men and the elders discuss highly sensitive matters. Women just listen and comply.”
 - Respondent B: “If we are to follow tradition, it is true that women do not form part of the discussion. Look at how they settle their differences with one another and see if they can be part of the traditional court.”
2. Since a queen traditionally rules the Bolobedu tribe, will a woman ever take over the reins provided there are no males to be chiefs in the royal house?
 - Respondent A: “The Vatsonga people are very intelligent. You will notice that the chief has children within and outside the family. So if the males are not there in the immediate family the tribe will screen if

the chief did not have a child outside. That indicates that the chief has to protect patriarchy during his reign.”

- Respondent B: “Women, particularly of royal descent, may play part in the ‘moulding’ of a chief in those cases. But that is very rare these days. But in terms of ruling the royal council may appoint someone to take over until a chief is born.”

3. The Constitution states that women may not be marginalized on the basis of sex. Is the traditional office ensuring that women enjoy all their rights?

- Respondent A: “We cannot all go to parliament because we have representatives. In the traditional gatherings, men represented by their women. Even in the Bible, God used male leaders and it is still the case even today. Chiefs are not elected but born. We serve the people as families or as a community not individuals.”
- Respondent B: “The Constitution is just coming in today. The tribe has been here for quite some time now. So we cannot change because someone is saying something out there. That document keeps on being amended. It means it has flaws too.”

Both respondents (100%) agreed that the Xitsonga language satisfactorily served the needs of the speakers in accordance with the way the traditional office viewed their rule. The two respondents saw the status of women as properly placed in the society.

4.10.2 Interpretation of the data gathered

4.10.2.1 Education

4.10.2.1.1 Educators

Themes being investigated:

Awareness of sexism.

Duties allocated to learners.

Attitude towards sexism and female leadership.

Learners' mentality is also culturally stained. The layering of the society haunts the school where boys do not show adequate respect to female educators and learners because they may use vulgar words in the presence of female educators. It is proof that at home boys show insolence to their mothers.

Language is used to reinforce male-dominance in the society. It appears that if a male learner were to physically bully a female learner, he would feel satisfied by swearing at her since he would have manipulated her *vaginal space* in his utterances.

Literature is seen as an endorsement of male bias and their negativism of women. It treats females as morally weak. It incessantly promotes in women behaviour that pleases men and emphatically censors women's behaviour that men dislike.

The educators are aware that women's status needs to be elevated. Even if female learners are put into a position alongside male learners, the former will never pursue such leadership role fully. The female learners feel that once a male is there he will execute all the roles satisfactorily.

It is evident that women are beginning to awaken from a state of ignorance and inactivity. But men still show some reluctance to give way to equally capable females.

4.10.2.1.2 Learners

The researcher wanted to examine the following:

Awareness of sexism as teenagers.

Upbringing in the home and at school.

Youth's vision.

From the research it is obvious that the female learners are aware of the gaps that exist in the society and that they have too many stages to go through if they want the existing gaps bridged. They have to start in the home with the mother and then come to the father. They also know that their chances of succeeding are narrow as they are not part of the community gatherings.

Both learner groups concur that boys want to appear superior to girls by using their physical strength or foul language. Such a tendency continues into adulthood where male-dominance is professionally engineered in publications, films, and other forms of audio-visual material.

One-sided roles that people complain of in the home front are also prevalent in the school environment. Cleaning as well as cooking during school functions is still executed by female educators while the learners are depictive of the image of the broader society.

In addition the learners are aware that the society prepares them for specific roles later in life. Overprotection of female learners by parents prepares them for marriage as well as subservience to their husbands.

4.10.2.2 Religion

4.10.2.2.1 Churches

The following themes were the focus of the interview:

Roles of men and women in the Church, particularly in terms of preaching and healing.

Filling leadership positions.

Church and the Constitution of the country.

Gender ascribed to God.

In the church, men, and women do not seem to have the same status. Based on what the first two and the fourth respondents stated, women play no active role in the church except to listen to men preaching the word of God. The third respondent has just begun seeing a need to allow them an opportunity but he has not done so yet. The last respondent felt women should be given a chance. The general picture is that women have no significant role to play in the presence of men.

The first two respondents felt the Constitutional directive to create a non-sexist society did not affect the Church and saw the Church in isolation from other institutions. The other two respondents were aware that powers in the Church are vested upon men and saw it as the right time to give women a chance to prove themselves.

Going by the Bible (I Timothy 2: 12), as the first two respondents alluded to, women do not have to preach. This one woman who sometimes preaches is perhaps an ad hoc preacher until the young male members have matured enough to take the pulpit.

All respondents agreed that God has masculine traits, for He created Adam first and He is addressed as Father. But of importance is that He has equal love for both men and women. Man rules because God chose him to name all other creatures.

The respondents were in accord that the Bible is a document or word that suits all times. The first two respondents did not see any ambiguity or inconsistency to an extent where the stance on women may be revised. The third respondent called for interpretation in order to apply Biblical wisdom appropriately.

4.10.2.2.2 Traditional healers

Themes under investigation:

Relatedness of both male and female traditional healers to their healing equipment.

Cultural respect shown to the consultancy.

Both male and female traditional healers have to be cleansed of whatever is deemed unholy before they can go into their sacred consulting rooms. Both of them have to comply with their sacred rules to remain effective and efficient so as not to anger the spirits. They can equally render inefficient the strength of the equipment by attending a funeral and

(women) observing their menstrual cycles. All people are equal in the traditional healing service.

Traditional healing may be seen as an art that is free of discrimination because it can equally be practised by both men and women. Both male and female juniors have one way of showing respect to their mentor, thus bowing and clicking their fingers. If one still wants to pursue the traditional healing fraternity, salute is normative and one may avoid it by turning into Christianity or other forms of religion. So the fraternity is sexism-free.

4.10.2.3 Cultural practices

The following themes were investigated:

- **Status accorded men and women in the society.**
- **Impact of initiation schools, in particular the songs, to societal organisation.**

The respondents agreed that a woman is someone whose life is accorded recognition when she enters marriage and bears children. They viewed a woman as someone under man's care.

The respondents were not used to seeing women in traditional leadership. But all of them were aware of the exception at the nearby village of Matsakale where a woman was in charge as an *induna*. They also made mention that the elderly mothers who were attending traditional gatherings were not allowed to speak.

According to these responses, entry into the institution of marriage in the past required fully grown-up women. In the past marriage was full of hardships. Today the institution of marriage is viewed as having lost its value because it has turned into a money-making institution, mostly by women. Men want their fellow men to stay warned when living with women. Women, on the other hand, complain of being sidelined when important decisions are taken.

These people appear to be using the initiation schools as the platform for raising their concerns through derogatory songs. The songs keep on reminding them of what needs to be sorted out. The ideas of the respondents indicate that traditional women are satisfied with the state of affairs regarding women.

4.10.2.4 Authorship

Themes under investigation:

- **Meaning of a woman.**
- **Leadership qualities.**
- **Language and women.**

The group of authors regarded a woman as a life-maker whose activities enabled people to see life taking place. Respondents A and C regarded women's weaknesses and strengths as things without which life would be boring and not worth living, while Respondent B saw the place of a woman and her role in the home.

Their responses are worth noting who exactly women are in terms of their incapacities and social needs such as for security. A woman is viewed

as someone who does not deserve exposure to difficult situations. But it is someone who is home-based enjoying what her husband provides.

When it comes to monetary issues, the responses regarded women as loose because they act without thinking. The poems and other forms of writing were used to signalling to women to hold back and reconsider their movements.

The researcher used the Bolobedu dynasty to model how the Vatsonga kingdom would look like under the leadership of a queen. The model did not seem to convince the Vatsonga folk of a successful woman in power. Women are viewed as having a common weakness and the respondents are afraid they cannot elevate a woman to any position. Women's weakness appears to have been rubbed into them in their creation. So the many poems entitled *Women* are an attempt for men to stay forearmed.

4.10.2.5 Traditional office

The focus of the investigation:

Identity through language.

The status of women in the society.

The representatives of the traditional office gave responses that viewed a woman having some important roles to play elsewhere but not in the traditional court. The traditional court is definitely informed by the viewpoints of men. The respondents believed that women were fully taken care of in their families, while men represent the traditional office as leaders in their families.

4.10.3 Data collected through participant observation

The following expressions were overhead and captured during participant observation:

- (a) *Wanuna wa marhaku?* (A man with buttocks?)
- (b) *Ndzi ta ku raha hala hanshi.* (I will kick your bottom/from below)
- (c) *Ndzi dyi dyi ngopfu dabadaba leriya.* (I ate much of that prostitute)
- (d) *Ku rhwala nomo.* (To pout one's lip)
- (e) *Ku caca swa vavasati.* (To shout sorting out an issue is women's practice)
- (f) *Why u teka wansati wo dyondza u nga dyondzangi?* (Why should you marry an educated woman when you are not educated?)
- (g) *Dyi tekele mina.* (He copied from me)

These expressions were picked up from a number of conversations the speakers had. In (a), the speakers are surprised of what they see. They do not approve of a man who has bulging buttocks. Having protruding buttocks is a feature they attribute to women. One wonders whether buttocks are features that may be used to determine a person's biological sex. In (b) a male learner is angry with a female learner. The former threatens to kick the latter's bottom. Bottom is used by the speaker to refer to a vagina. More often people express their anger through swearing, especially by using female sex organs. In (c) the speaker boasts having had sexual intercourse with a prostitute and thinks he has given her a tough time. But the reference to the woman he had sexual intercourse with as a prostitute makes him to a prostitute too. In (d), the expression sounds to be an idiom. It is a practice that is attributed to an angry woman. She is said to show her anger by pouting her lips. In (e), women are portrayed as people who have a weakness when it comes to

resolving their differences. Instead of sitting together, perhaps behind closed doors, and sorting out the problem, they blast at one another to an extent where they mention things that listeners or passers-by are not supposed to hear. In (f), some men believe that once a woman becomes a professional she should be married to another professional. They take it that an uneducated man deserves an uneducated woman and an educated man can make a choice whether to marry an educated or an uneducated woman. In (g), it is the father who boastfully claims sole ownership of the child after noting its good achievements, and therefore regards that as being emulated. But if the child had misbehaved, it would be seen as copying their mother's ways.

Based on these expressions the users of the Xitsonga language do have sexist tendencies and that makes language sexist too.

4.11 OVERALL IMPRESSION

The participants, both males and females, gave information that helped the researcher to see social layers that exist among the community members of the area sampled. Their view of the two sexes is one that puts men on top of women. Language is used to endorse these social positions. It also keeps women in check should they want to take any step against the existing social arrangement. If women behave the same as the sayings state, people are not taken by surprise because the belief is that with a woman anything can happen.

The last chapter will be devoted to recommendations so that there may be harmony between men and women as mirrored through language and culture.

4.12 CONCLUSION

The undertaken research study has shown that tradition, the church, and the Constitution are separate entities whose influence on one another leaves much to be desired. If the Constitution is to be seen as the supreme law of every society, then traditional institutions and churches must make recommendations so that the three entities can be intelligible to one another.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALTERNATIVES TO SEXISM IN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter enables the researcher to project the findings, make recommendations and finally give an indication as to whether or not the Xitsonga language contains sexism. It is a person's growth from infancy to old age that is indicative of the movements that may be attributed to sexism.

5.2 FINDINGS

5.2.1 A child

The birth of a child marks the type of family as a smaller unit representative of the broader society they are born into. It is a creature to which parents devote much time in trying to shape.

5.2.1.1 Naming

The names that parents give to their children, particularly those that make people think when they pronounce them, generally come from the mothers. Mothers should learn to discuss their frustrations and unhappiness with their loved ones and not to use children as pawns by making them bear unhappy names. Cultural names should be benign or symbolic of certain realities. Ghanaians use days of the week to name

their sons and daughters. For example, *Kofi* is the name given to a boy born on a Friday while *Afi* or *Afua* is for a girl.

5.2.1.2 Upbringing and the roles of children

The bringing up of children is traditionally still largely left in the hands of women. It appears that women do not think of breaking into the world of work unless they are widowed and there is hardly enough to sustain them and the children. The manner in which the children are brought up continues to classify them as boys and girls. For example, the toys are the usual doll or gun which foretells that the daughter will have to be a mother or a nurse, whereas the boy must become a police officer. There is little or no involvement of fathers in the upbringing of the children, hence there is no elevation of the status of women.

Roles such as sweeping, fetching water, and collecting firewood continue to be entrusted to female children. The boys are given no household roles to play. Communities do not give girls a chance to take part in sports as this will prevent the parents from supervising their daily movements. Boys on the other hand are free to go to the only sports field of the rural communities, which is for football. The roles that these children play are monotonous and stereotyping. Cricket, netball, rugby, swimming, boxing, and other kinds of sports that are included in the Olympic games must be introduced in one facility or sports centre at strategic points to serve a cluster of nearby rural communities.

The children's upbringing and roles may be blamed, as Junod (1990: 74) states with the following proverb:

Nhwanyana i huku yo khomela vaendzi.

Nhwanyana loko a tekiwa u ta siya muti exivundzeni.
“A daughter is a hen to be caught for visitors.
When a daughter is married, she leaves her village.”

According to this proverb, parents are obsessed with preparing their daughters for marriage. They do not consider other things that they can do in life besides marriage. In some cases, obsession tempts parents to pre-arrange marriages for their children. Such marriages are not founded on love but on living in luxury.

5.2.2 Status of women in society

Women remain the majority in the rural community but their lifestyle hinges on practices such as childbearing and subsistence farming. The population of the community grows because of women’s natural capability. Their unique capability is frequently not valued in the society, but is one that is used to exclude them from influential positions.

5.2.2.1 Women in the tribe

The society still does not see women as people who may be given the opportunity to lead because they are people who have to be home-based. These are people who raise families. If they are given other roles to perform they will be overloaded, as Junod (1990: 160) states:

Ambilu ya muti i tshuri.
Hi vona vasati lava nga mbilu ya muti hi ntirho wa vona
endyangwini.
“The heart of the village is the mortar.
Women are the very centre of the family through their work
for the household.”

This proverb confines women to the home where they will ensure that there is food for the family members. Women have to pestle the mealies in the mortar so that they can have something to cook. Their leadership does not have to go beyond the family surrounding.

Khosa (1995) in Mawela (1995: 11), in the poem titled *Vukatimuni n'wananga* mentions:

Tlhelela u ya tisola, u tivula phuphula;
Tlhelela u ya khinsama, u xavelela vukati;
Tlhelela u ya u tlhela u ya n'wi swekela;
“Go back and apologise, humble yourself;
Go back and kneel down, beg for marriage;
Go back and return to cook for him;”

This poem depicts a mother who begs her daughter to go back to her husband and serve him as his wife as society expects of her. Those qualities of a humble personality and preparedness to serve in the kitchen are called for in order to keep the marriage. The mother does not see her daughter becoming successful in life outside marriage. The hardships her daughter may have experienced are regarded less important to marriage.

5.2.2.2 Women in the church

The church environment shelters many women. At the top is one man in a congregation of a few men and numerous women and children. A woman's leadership in the church is regarded as forbidden. The respondents in the indigenous churches do not allow women's leadership. Having looked at Respondent B1 of the Charismatic churches, the researcher established that the respondent had to travel to three villages on one Sunday to preach to the congregations. The respondent indicated

that women should be absorbed into the leadership, but he did not give way to set an example. The respondent might perhaps be sticking to maintain his sole leadership because preaching is his second job.

Khathide in the *City Press* (21 November 2004: 36) gives the reason for the exclusion of women from church leadership as follows:

For example, some female students of one theological college told me that some congregations would not allow them to preach while menstruating ... found the whole rule primitive, discriminatory and unappreciative of God's creation which includes the female cycle of menstruation.

The reason shown here may be one of the many that guide numerous churches to exclude women from leadership positions. A woman is viewed as unholy when she is menstruating and it is believed that she will defile the temple if ever she turns up being in that condition. The menstrual cycle is usually a period that is experienced by women on certain expected days of the month. When they are heading toward that period, women may begin to avoid going near the pulpit so as not to spoil the holiness of the temple. But when they are not menstruating, they may serve as preachers or go to any section of the church.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Men and women must begin to see one another as equal human beings who can live in harmony. People must not continue to live without doing anything to their gender relations because it will have serious repercussions on the broader society.

- Language needs reform to directly or indirectly address societal imbalances. Ruth Robins (2000: 30) writes that “women, deprived of real social functions, have no stake in society, are mere nothings; who live bored and wasted lives”. Men cannot claim to be happy and safe when the women with whom they interact are unhappy. Society should make its members enjoy equal status and opportunities.
- As community structures are put in place, women must be included in leadership positions and such leadership must be given adequate support for it not to fade away. Men should refrain from making remarks that discourage women from availing themselves for elections into positions. For example, James Graff (2006: 24) quotes a French former Prime Minister who inquired as to who would be taking care of the children when a French woman campaigned for the presidency. The remark at this age is ill-timed because people have not yet seen what a woman can do for her electorate and the country at large.
- No culture must remain rigid when other cultures are purging themselves of unwanted practices that tend to oppress or exclude one sex. For example, there are divided feelings among Muslim women on the putting on of a *niqab* (a full body and face veil). Although Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2006: 60) could not show what his feeling was, the disadvantages of putting on a *niqab* he noted were, among others, that women “cannot eat in restaurants, swim in the sea or smile at their babies in the parks”. Not only does the *niqab* deprive the Muslim women of these pleasures, but is also viewed as a way of concealing the scars of their husbands’ beatings. Some authors in a number of countries feel the terrorists may use the *niqab* to mask their faces. The

fact that so many negative things are said about the wearing of the *niqab* could infer that people are no longer supportive of such a cultural practice. The same author laments that immodest cultural practices are taking people back to the Dark Ages. It is up to the Vatsonga people to redress their cultural practices that are unprogressive.

- The upbringing of children must not be left to women only, but it should begin to draw men into the practice. It is no surprise when male actors or footballers are given awards and they dedicate these awards to their mothers. It is because women struggle alone in raising these kids. Men do not give themselves time to be close to their children, listen to their problems, and give them the guidance and support they need.
- Families must begin to dispense all roles to the children irrespective of their gender. For example, if a boy washes kitchen utensils, they must not be discouraged by stating that it is the duty of women. Communities must ensure that most recreational facilities are available and that girls too are released to take part in them.
- Marriage must not be seen as the ultimate destination for women. The various professions must be made known to children so that they can aspire to become one and not rush into marriage to spoil the husband as if he were a super being.
- Schools must be supplied with computers that are connected to the Internet so that learners can be in a position to know what girls or women are doing in other countries. It will help transform their

attitudes and continue to clamour for equal consideration in all forms of leadership. Hawkins (2002) gives an example of a Muslim girl living in Mauritania who recommends the use of the Internet as taking them to people, places and realities as a “way of escaping from our closed society”. One can see that children are not pleased with the manner in which societies raise children, especially girls, because it deprives them of freedom and knowledge of the broader society.

- Cultural practices also need review in order to outlaw or modify practices that continue to hold one particular gender backwards. Things such as initiation schools must do away with vulgar language. Vulgar songs are described as adding joy to the initiates and proponents of the initiation schools. But it is just a myth as their theme revolves around sexual intercourse which is prematurely introduced to the young initiates. No culture is so rigid that it cannot make changes. Megan Power in *Sunday Times* (21 November 2004: 33) writes:

At best, South African society could become more progressive, with traditional gender roles blurring in a world which will see men changing nappies and both parties going out to work.

The writer calls for men to change their mindset to begin to do work that was traditionally known to be in the women’s domain. There is nothing wrong with the father changing his child’s nappy. Men must learn to accept new roles in order to elevate women to where they should be.

Cultural greetings too must be revisited. Traditional women are made to bend their knees and speak in a shrill voice when they exchange greetings with men. The practice strengthens their inferiority to men.

Educated women do not undergo the same ritual. They violate the abusive form of greeting and do it hurriedly without observing those trivial tunes and knee-bendings. If culture is to be observed by uneducated women, who on the other hand are in the majority, it is oppression.

- The churches should also begin to elevate women into the leadership. The Bible must be interpreted in a way that suits the present time. *The Times News Service* (09 October 2005: 12) reports that the Catholic Church was warning the faithful that “some parts of the Bible are not true ... that they should not expect total accuracy”. The bishops of the Catholic Church have begun to notice the misinterpretation that people have of some sections of the Bible. It is this misinterpretation that also leads to male domination. For example, the book of Ecclesiastes 7: 28 states: “I have looked for other answers but I have found none. I found one man in a thousand that I could respect, but not one woman.” King Solomon was the greatest king that ever ruled in the world. He was making his personal opinion of women. It does not mean that his opinion was the norm. If people take the extract at face value the interpretation may go wrong. Perhaps the king was showing concern for the non-visibility of women in leadership positions. People must have a new look at women to live together in peace. Everyone must look at a woman and see one’s mother. Women may then have an equal status as with men.
- Women in top positions, with the support of men, have to unite with women on the ground and address their plight across the country and continent. Khuthala Nandipha (2006: 12) in the *City Press* of 12 July quotes the words of the deputy president of the ANC Women’s

League, Mavivi Myakayaka-Manzini, stating: “Voices of women in the rural areas are not heard. They are excluded from the economy.” The deputy president of the ANC Women’s League has noted the correct situation regarding the status of women in the rural areas. With no education, women and their formations in the rural areas are ignored and excluded from making a contribution to the economy.

Women must begin to empower themselves by embarking on community programmes where they will also have a platform from which to voice their common problems. Joel Sherzer in Phillips *et al.* (1987: 103) shows the social organization of the Kuna Indians of Panama as follows:

It is at men’s gatherings that most important political matters are discussed and resolved. Women attend these only when they are accused of wrongdoing, accused someone else of wrongdoing, or are witnesses.

These Indian people are very consistent with their cultural practices. Although men and women attend different meetings, there are other meetings and formations that are specifically meant to meet the needs of women and to include them in the economy of the tribe. Women are said to be involved in the making of *molas* (reverse appliqué cloth blouses). *Molas* are cultural garments that are made, worn, and sold by women. The same thing is called upon for the Vatsonga women to seriously get involved in the making of clay pots, beadwork, and basket and mat weaving as a way of making themselves economically independent.

- Authors must be encouraged to write fiction and non-fiction on themes that cover collective successes of males and female in science,

business, humanities, theology, aviation, and other fields that were traditionally a male domain.

- There is also a need for communities to establish what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 57) have termed community of practice. A community of practice refers to “an enterprise” in which people get together. There is a whole array of activities in the enterprise that people may regularly embark on. The activities are, among others, being a family, playing music, learning a language, telling and developing little jokes, greetings, nicknames, and funny ways of pronouncing words. It is through the practice that activities of the speech community are coordinated and refined. The issues of the community that hurt most will be raised in this practice and a well-concerted effort to arrive at amicable solutions will be found.
- When people attempt to change certain aspects of the language, Labov (1972: 179) is quoted by Ehrlich and King (1992) in Cheshire and Trudgill (1998) as mentioning:

... if the group in which the change originated was not the highest-status group in the speech community, members of the highest-status group eventually stigmatized the changed form through their control of various institutions of the communication network ...

This citation suggests that no change may be implemented, unless the affluent groups are made part of the movement to effect change into the language. It remains the duty of the inferior groups to devise means of

bringing the superior group on board because the latter cannot initiate anything as they are comfortable with the state of affairs. Community structure such as the royal council, the council of the elders, youth formations, and others have to tackle issues that suppress women and mar their culture.

For all members of the society to have a true sense of belongingness the language should be cleared of unwanted elements, particularly aspects that treat women as people of an inferior status. Robbins (2000: 30) remarks about frustration that women go through: "... women, deprived of real social functions, have no stake in society, are mere nothings; who live bored and wasted lives." Robbins thus mentions that, women do no longer see themselves as part of any society as well as having a reason for continuing to live. They have no significant roles to play in the society since their presence is not recognised. The society must open up positions for women to have a stake in the running of their lives.

Haslett (2000: 41) advocates the introduction of changes in the language and culture by stating that "any current curse word can become a word of praise". Life may once more become more interesting for both sexes if women are also given an opportunity to state exactly what offends them and to say what the solution may be. She further cites Mary Collier's poem in which a woman's hectic day is put under scrutiny. According to Collier it is unfair for a woman to go to the fields to make hay with a baby on the back, prepare dinner for the husband, feed the pigs, and mind the children, all day. Some of these roles have to be shared. Most women feel tired throughout their lives.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The many proverbs and idioms that channel women towards marriage away from tribal leadership and business are an indication that the Xitsonga language, as a mirror of the culture of the Vatsonga people, is sexist.

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5.6 APPENDIX

5.6.1 Interview questions

The questions of the interview will be semi-structured (What, How, Where, When, Who, and Why). But there will be lead questions on the schedule to capture important data. This will enable the researcher to formulate questions based on the interviewee's responses. Every response will be probed fully.

5.6.1.1 Education

5.6.1.1.1 Educators

1. What kind of impact does culture have on males and females in an educational setting?
2. How often do you hear speakers using the Xitsonga language in a sexist manner in the school environment?
3. To what extent are the literature materials affected by elements of sexism?
4. What are you doing as educators to solve negative perceptions of women?
5. How would you as an educator value female leadership, for example, being led by a female principal?

5.6.1.1.2 Learners

1. How does it feel to be a boy/girl? What are the pleasures and hardships?

2. Do you think your society is fair and just in the treatment of boys and girls? Motivate.
3. Are you satisfied to see a boy/girl as the president of the Representative Council of Learners?
4. How do you (boys and girls) relate to each other in the school environment?
5. Is the school doing enough to treat you (boys and girls) as equals? Motivate.

5.6.1.2 Religion

5.6.1.2.1 Churches

1. Do men and women play the same roles in the church? Substantiate.
2. Are there situations where women can and/or cannot preach? Substantiate.
3. What gender can you ascribe to God? Motivate.
4. There is a belief that some sections of the Bible, particularly sections that encourage male-dominance as a God-given right, are outdated. What is your view on this?
5. Government calls for the placement of women in influential positions. Is the church intending to give women positions that will put them on par with men? Motivate.

5.6.1.2.2 Traditional healers

1. How does a male or female traditional healer relate to his or her equipment such as herbs and bones?

2. How do you ensure that women who come to consult do not spoil their equipment's good standing?
3. How do you treat men and women in the consulting room in terms of showing cultural respect?
4. How do you relate to the people who graduated into the art of healing through your guidance?

5.6.1.3 Cultural practices

1. What is a woman according to the Vatsonga culture?
2. Can a woman be elevated to the status of a chief? Motivate.
3. How is the relationship between men and women, particularly in marriage?
4. What impact do the initiation schools have on the relationship of men and women with reference to the songs?
5. Do you envisage a society where men and women can live together as equals? Motivate.

5.6.1.4 Authorship

1. What is a woman in the eyes of a writer?
2. What is the impact of the Xitsonga language/culture on woman?
3. There are so many poems entitled "Women" whose content tend to undermines them. What is your opinion of this trend?
4. A queen rules the Bolobedu people. Do you think that the Vatsonga people would allow a woman to rule if a woman was next in the line of rulers?
5. Which elements do you think women should be ridden of if they were to attain the status of men?

5.6.1.5 Traditional office

1. How true is the proverb: *Vavasati a va na huvo* (Women have no court).
2. Since a queen traditionally rules the Bolobedu tribe, will a woman ever take over the reins provided there are no males to be chiefs in the royal house?
3. The Constitution states that women may not be marginalized on the basis of sex. Is the traditional office ensuring that women enjoy all their rights?

5.6.2 A letter requesting people to participate in the research study

Reference: 2006/01

Enquiries: Hlangwani T.M

Cell number: 083 549 7470

P O Box 09

FUMANI

0937

10 May 2006

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

As a citizen of South Africa, I request to share with you twenty minutes of your hectic TIME by engaging in an interview any day in July - August 2005. The aim of the interview is to enable me collect data that will inform my research study to satisfy the requirements of Master's degree with the University of Limpopo. The subject of the activity is centred on sexism in (indigenous) languages, in particular, Xitsonga.

All the information will be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for this research. Whatever information you divulge will not be used against you in whatsoever way or condition.

I hope you will assist in the study.

Yours truly

HLANGWANI TINYIKO MAURICE