## Societal Conflicts: Marriage as a Possible Conflict Resolution Mechanism in the Zezuru Culture of Chikomba District

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### Abstract

Having realized that most of the marriages are focused on achieving procreation, sustenance of the family name and promotion of life amongst others, the study sought to establish how the same institutions were working towards the resolution of some conflicts is society with a particular bias towards the Zezuru people in Chikomba district. The study was achieved through a qualitative focused Mixed Approach method. The study employed 12 respondents from Warikandwa ward who were asked to define marriage, establish its roles in society and how it served as a conflict resolution measure. The study established that marriages are a renowned endogenous conflict resolution mechanism that helped to resolve some of the prominent conflicts in society ever since time immemorial.

**Keywords:** marriage, conflict resolution, Zezuru people

### Introduction

Marriages are daily phenomena that are witnessed in most societies. Some of the marriages are being blessed by strangers while some are strictly conducted in the rural homes as a way of ensuring that ancestral spirits do solemnize such unions. Marriages are unions between two or more parties who seek to bear rear and promote life and the extension of relations to other interested parties.

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This study focuses on the types of marriages within the Zezuru culture with a view to explore how various conflicts that have been recorded could be resolved. The study closely looks at some of the marriages and how they have attended to some of the conflicts in society. It is also appreciated in the study that not all marriages do have the capacity to resolve conflicts, rather some actually fuel hostilities.

## Background

In the Zezuru communities, there have been some conflicts which were getting to resolution without much deliberate effort by individuals so much so that some of the successes have been attributed to either miracles or the works of God. Very little effort was ever directed towards the possibility of the marriage institution having played a role. Various studies have been conducted on marriage (Holleman, 1952, Mbiti, 1969, Chigwedere, 1982, Ayisi, 1997, Bourdillon, 1998, Megasa, 1998, Mvududu, 2002, Kambarami, 2006, and Chireshe and Chireshe, 2010) and others but with specific focus on the role of marriage and how it is conducted. Most of these studies have failed to dig deeper into another silent dimension which has existed since the beginning of the institution itself. It has been repeatedly documented that marriages are for procreation and other purposes and rarely to serve as an effective endogenous conflict resolution measure that has always been inherent in the local traditions.

It is against this background that this study was carried out to explore the conflict resolution element within the marriage institution. An attempt was made to qualitatively elaborate the extent to which marriage has been important in resolving conflicts in societies within the Zezuru communities.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by the belief that marriages by their nature are supposed to bring people together thus ending conflicts '*kuroora kuvaka ukama'* (marriage builds relations). This coming against a background where people improve their relations following marriage so much so that they even change terms and salutation of addressing each other is believed to build long lasting peace and harmony in society. This study argues that all moral and blessed marriages in whatever form should create a society that is cooperative, progressive, procreative and promotional of life.

It does not discriminate whether the relationship is heterosexual or homosexual; a marriage is one that brings together two or more parties to live as partners.

## Methodology

This study was conducted in Chikomba district of Mashonaland East province, Zimbabwe in the Zezuru community with a view to establish the role that marriage plays in resolving conflicts within the Zezuru society. To achieve the study, a total of twelve traditional leaders were purposively sampled from one ward of Warikandwa. Of the twelve, 5 were females (spouses of village heads). The study followed a Mixed Approach method and implemented qualitative technics to analyse and gather data. Besides informal face-to-face interviews, the study also employed archival material as it had invaluable data relevant to the study. To some extent, there was an element of observation given that the researcher looked at some of the marriages and scenarios where hostile relations were improved following a marriage.

## Marriage

From a layman's point of view, marriage is the coming together of two or more parties geared towards procreation, rearing of children and promotion of life. Deliberately, I avoided particularization to men and women for I am convinced that marriage could still be between men and men and women and women. This argument attracts a lot of controversy especially in most African countries, Zimbabwe included. However, my argument is flowing from a realist perspective. There are other strong contradicting voices though.

The kinds of unions in Zimbabwe; civil marriage which is monogamous and provides almost equivalent legal protection and rights to partners in the marriage, registered customary marriage deemed directed by cultural regulations and that a man is allowed more than one wife and legally acknowledged custodian of the children. The third type of union is unregistered customary marriage, which is not lawfully acknowledged. This has become the most common type of marriage in Zimbabwe. It consists of two parties living together as husband and wife after satisfying traditional marriage formalities like dowry payment, but minus signing the legal marriage register (Ndlovu, 2012).

There has of late been another type of marriage called co-habitation '*kuchaya mapoto*' or '*kubika mapoto*' whereby two parties simply move in without payment of '*lobola*' and have children.

## Marriage in Zezuru

One of the most respected institutions in the Zezuru culture is marriage. It is believed that marriage brings together strangers creating strong bonds, sees the continuation of the family name, solves conflicts and brings labour into the family amongst others. In the Zezuru culture marriage is basically the coming together of two or more parties of different sex for procreation. However, other scholars see it differently. Ayisi (1997) argues that African marriages are effected for procreation and therefore, a barren marriage ceases to be meaningful. This is closely related to the three ideals that were propounded by St Augustine; the '*bonum prolis'*, children, the '*bonum fidei'* unity, and the '*bonum sacramenti' which is* indissolubility. Megasa (1998) gives out that societies involved in marriage share their lives and turn out to be one people, uniting their families and clans so that what is done to one of their associates is done to all. Megasa also argues that marriage partners' responsibilities are not restricted to them alone but have a broader application.

From a Zezuru point of view, a marriage is defined by some key aspects which include; handover of a woman's legal rights from her folks to her husband. This implies that a husband enjoys and controls all the rights to the wife's labour, sexuality and offspring's and the rights to demand reparation for the damage done to her by others. Marriage is also understood to adjust and to some extent, break, the relationships between the wife and her direct relatives. The third aspect to marriage is that marriage is a covenant and agreement between two families that serves as a structural link between formerly strange parties (Hendrix, 1998).

It has however been observed that the marriage institution is dwindling and losing its value due to a variety of challenges; single parenthood, divorce, separations, rape, homosexuality, lesbianism and prostitution, (Kyalo, 2012) poverty, employment, human rights definition and equality, modernity, entertainment and dishonesty amongst others. Some '*lobola'* demands by some families are just out of this world as they seek to destroy relationships rather than build.

Araba (2002) has observed that marriages are being transformed and affected by several other factors; families abandoning key traditional practices in favor of modern ones, changes in family structures,  fosterage, migration, changes in marriage ages and increased cases of polygynous marriages in the form of 'small-houses'. These factors have forced serious transformations in marriage roles and family structures so much so that the concept of male head of the family is almost non-existent in the present families. Equality and how partners contribute economically into the family has also played a role in the changes (Amin. 2002, Eloundou-Enyegue, 2002).

## Types of Marriages

Marriages are found in various types depending on what might have influenced people to come together. Like it was propounded by several other gurus that marriage is primarily for procreation, indeed, many couples marry so that they leave their family names surviving. However, there are several other influences to marriage (Adepoju, 2000). This discussion has deliberately left out polygyny, polyandry, and others as basic types of marriages opting for what is real on the ground.

In cases where a family is forced to hand-over a virgin girl to another family as compensation for a murder that might have been committed before, that type of marriage is first and foremost not planned. A woman simply comes into a family without being courted or asked a hand in marriage by anyone and will have to adapt to suit the available suitor. While the potential suitor might be interested in having sex '*kusvira*' with a virgin so that he breaks virginity '*kuboora*', traditionally, the expectations are to have children especially a boy who will be named after the murdered member of the family (Win, 2004). It must be realized that as the two live, the initial type of love transforms as they get along till probably when they are in that marriage not for either sex or children but for each other, pure affection (Adepoju, 2000).

There are also some elderly people who marry following the death of their respective partners. Socially, it is not expected that a normal and respectable individual live alone hence the need for a partner at whatever age in life. On the part of women, it may be a case of the need for a name and respect in society that one has to find a male partner.

In such instances, both parties might be having their children from previous marriages hence may not need other children on account of advanced ages. Such types of marriages may only be for company, pleasure and support (Ferraro, 1991).

This is however contrary to a case where virgins come together and marry for the first time before a crowd of people. The expectation from both families is primarily having children before anything else. Such marriages are characterized by adventurous sex life, romance, the need to develop and mature and friendship (Ferraro, 1991). This type of marriage is in line with the biblical position that marriage should be a spiritual union of lifetime between one man and one woman who then become two in one flesh as stated in Genesis 2 verse 24 (NKJV, 1982).

Marriage that is brought about by cohabitation is different from the rest altogether. Such type of marriage is usually by parties either from previously failed marriages, widowed or married elsewhere. Therefore, none of the parties may be prepared for any children as the union may not be meant to last long. In other cases, it may be one of convenience where one party is motivated to join solely for the love of another's possessions like money (Chirawu, 2006, Adepoju, 2000). Such kind of marriage is bound by the existence of valuables so much so that once they are no-more, the parasite partner immediately disappears. Such marriages are engaged by people employed far away from their families and only meant to keep company and help in some household chores (Preston-Whyte, 1993). However, most women who get into such relationships are very good at making men happy both socially and sexually because of patience '*murume anonon'onwa mazino*' woman picking man's teeth, tolerance and sexual antics '*chikapa*' sexual gyrating, '*murume anogezeswa muviri*' a man is bathed, '*murume anosvisvinwa mboro*' blow job and others.

There are also some marriages that seek to attend to the need for company and sexual pleasure only. In such situations, partners are nor primarily driven by the need for children but company and sexual gratification. In the event that the need for children comes in later, they easily and quickly think of adoption (Madhavan, 2001). Such marriages are common with gays and lesbians who know that they never procreate (Adepoju, 2000).

## Marriage Procedure in the Zezuru Culture

Marriage in the Zezuru culture is a process that is structured and sequential having been developed over a number of years. All the items that are talked about have been seen to be of importance to both the parents and the girl being married. Both the bride and the groom understand the importance and so appreciate their role so much so that no-one disputes. What may be of concern are the figure charged and not the item and its relevance.

A successful marriage is determined by a variety of factors chief amongst them being leadership through consensus; allowing everyone in the clan to have a voice so that in the event of challenges in future, everyone will be able to address the problem from an informed position. However, what must be appreciated is one's ability to follow the proper sequence when charging *lobola* items. The items are presented as follows;

'*Ndiro*' (plate) - this is the plate in which all the money will be placed as the transactions proceed.

'*Dare*' or '*nhongo yedare*' (marriage council) – this is a levy that serves as the allowance paid to all the bride's male members in attendance. It is charged depending on the number of people in attendance.

'*Kupinda mumusha*' (entering into the village) – this is the fine charged the groom for allegedly illegally entering into the bride's village during courtship period.

'*Vhura muromo*' (initiation of talks) – this is a fee that is charged to engage into marriage talks with the groom.

'*Makandidzwanani*' (how did you get to know us?) –this is charged to the groom as a penalty for getting to know the bride's family.

'*Sunungura homwe*' (allowing the groom to pay) –this fee is charged to allow the groom to be able to start payments as they will be demanded.

'*Matekenya ndebvu*' (tempering with the father's beard) – this fee is charged to the groom for marrying a bride who would have tempered or played with her father's beard during her childhood.

The above items are paid to the general council led by the bride's father who then shares 'dare' equally with the rest of the members. The items coming below are paid to the mother of the bride or her representative.

'*Mafukidza dumbu*' (covering the pregnancy) – this is charged as a fee for having the bride covered in her mother's womb during pregnancy.

'*Mbariro*' (roof) – this is a penalty demanded by the bride's mother for sleeping on her back during the period she got pregnant which resulted in the bride's birth. It is actually a charge for the sexual encounter between the bride's parents.

'*Mwenje*' or '*rambi*' (lamp) – on the day that the bride's parents had sex which probably sired the bride, they used a lamp or some form of light. It is that light which is charged as lamp.

'*Kunhonga kwemusikana*' (bride's levy) – the only time that the girl has had an opportunity to contribute in the family is when she is asked to charge a fee to her husband-to-be.

'*Kunhonga kwatete*' (aunts' levy) – following the girl's levy, the aunt is also asked to charge a fee for her role in the upbringing of the girl and all the advice from an aunt.

'*Pasuru*' (grocery) – during all the proceedings, the family would have incurred some expenses which obviously have to be reimbursed and it is the groom who pays to the mother in the form of groceries. The list of the required groceries is given to the bride well before the ceremony so that the groom is able to buy the items for presentation during the ceremony.

After the payment of the items payable to the mother of the bride follows the presentation of the clothes for both the parents.

During this ceremony, the parents simply present the sizes and types of clothes that they desire. For the mother, she asks for the following;

One blanket, one executive costume, one pair of shoes, quilt, beret, hand-bag, umbrella, full length cloth and $20 or which-ever is agreed and a pair of pulling socks. In the case of the father, the following items are asked for; one executive suit, one pair of shoes, one shirt, one tie, one straw hat, one umbrella, over-coat and belt.

In cases where the bride would have been a virgin, the family demand for the following items for '*masungiro*' a goat for the mother, another goat to be slaughtered when the bride returns to deliver her first child and this is accompanied by a hen. The father is presented with a cow which is also slaughtered. The mother is presented with a blanket and a full length piece of white cloth which is not pierced at the centre to show that the girl was really a virgin.

When all these processes are completed, what the Zezuru refer to as real marriage begins. This involves the payment of '*rusambo*' (lobola price) which is given to the father of the bride. This is mandatory and usually nonnegotiable as it forms the core of marriage rites. This is followed by the payment of marriage beasts '*danga*'. This where the father demands a herd of cattle while another is paid to the mother called '*mombe yeumai*' (motherhood beast). This is kept in this family but is actually property of where the mother comes from. Having completed all the rites and processes, the two families agree to officially meet and greet.

'*Chiuchiro*' (Greeting) – this money is paid so that the two families (bride and groom) may officially greet each other for the first time. This marks the official acknowledgement of the groom in the bride's family.

## Song and Marriage

Song plays an essential role in rituals of hunting, farming, birth and puberty, at marriage and death, and in rituals of livelihood amongst others. In marriage ceremonies, songs are sung for various purposes chief amongst them being; expressing joy and excitement, communication with God '*Mwari*', keeping cultural traditions (Hassan, 2012) and creating a bond with new members of the family.

In the Zezuru culture, there are some songs that are sung during marriage ceremonies and primarily meant to motivate parties to endure challenges associated with such unions; '*Musha mukadzi mwana iwe'* (a family is made by a woman) and 'Kuti inzi imba, kubatirana nekushinga' (for a family to be, it is cooperation and endurance) and to communicate with ancestral spirits so that they may bless the union '*Makorokoto machata'* (congratulations for the wedding) and '*Vemhuriwe, farai nesu nhasi'* (Oh our family, celebrate today).

## Results and Analysis

The deductions and conclusions from the analysis of the collected data is presented here thematically.

## Marriage

According to the participants in the study, marriage was defined as a situation where parties live together for the purpose of procreation and growth of children. The types of marriages differed but were simply classified as two broad categories; legal and customary. It was given out that some marriages were made of divorcees and single parents '*mvana', 'shirikadzi*' and that such kind of marriages were of low value compared to those made of virgins and those who have not been in marriages before.

Others viewed marriage in two distinct ways; that it was a way of building relations between two families and that it was a way of formalizing procreation in society. The latter way distinguished humanity from the rest of the animals. It was argued that marriages are a sacred institution whereby distant people were not encouraged to interfere in internal problems especially where close aunts and uncles were available.

Three male respondents indicated that most of the contemporary marriages were an abuse of the will of God. The participants condemned the way some people were getting married especially in urban areas without seriously considering the wishes of the ancestors and some family elders.

They added that some same-sex marriages were being solomnised in some families contrary to local traditions and the laws of the country. The three added that marriage institution had been seriously corrupted that it no-longer reflected the ideals of the Zezuru people.

Two female participants gave out that given the level of modernity '*kuchinja kwezvinhu*', marriage modes had changed that any manner that brought two parties together qualified to be called marriage. One of the two said,

'*Nekupararana kwaita mhuri, vamwe vari mhiri kwemakungwa, zvichagoneka here kuunganidza vanhu pakuroorwa kwemunhu? Kana mbudzi yedare ichinebasa here, ichipuwa ani?*' (Given the present day migration, is it still possible to mobilise families for marriage ceremonies? Is the marriage council fee still necessary, to who will it be payable?)

In other words, the women suggested that all forms of coming together be embraced as formal marriage methods given the diversity of lives being followed, cultural diffusion, effects of globalization and levels of education and development.

## Marriage as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Naturally marriages bring different parties together and for lifetime. Usually, the unions besides serving procreation role also address issues to do with relationships, good neighbourliness, sharing and friendships amongst others. In all these, there is an element of conflict resolution and management that is coming out clearly. However, in the present day, due to various pressures especially coming from the West, marriages have become institutions for perpetuation of hatred and hostility between families as some families are demanding astronomical payments not to build relationships but to destroy.

Children have always been considered as a continuation of self and therefore in some way a satisfaction of immortality. Most men and their entire families believe that the name of the family is kept alive by their offsprings who in most cases are preferred to be of male sex. Females are liked for they are said to bring wealth in the event that one is married well. In the event that children are born in a marriage, there will be fewer conflicts both within that couple's marriage and in the entire family than where there are no children.

Infertile marriage is unimaginable for the Zezuru people whose first expectation is to have children. It is generally believed that the coming of children marked the indissolubility of any marriage and the betterment of relations between the two families. Besides, the existence of children binds marriages as both parties feel that they have something to live for in that union.

Marriage is a union between two families. The community dimension of marriage brings together two strange families. In some cases, previously hostile families are brought together through marriage so much so that there will be great friendship and cooperation. This is similar to the arranged marriages between clans, especially warring clans, by elderly Luo women in Kenya (Bob-Manuel, 2000). In others, most elderly parents of both partners find themselves living with their 'children' where they will be getting most of the needed help; financially, medically and socially. That way, inter-family relations are expected to improve.

It must be realized that the bride wealth or '*lobola*' determines the kind of relationship that is created between the families. In some cases, it has been noted that if the bride is given away cheaply, the groom's family begin to question the type of woman that would have joined their family while another who is given dearly also creates a situation where the groom's family begins to expect more than what an ordinary woman would provide. Similarly, in other cases, the more expensive a woman is, the more value is attached to her. According to the participants, the worth and value of a bride defines the nature of relationship that exists between the bride and groom's families. It was established that, confirming Win (2004) charging inflated bride wealth could result in enmity between the two families. One woman (wife to a village head) revealed that,

'*Mukuwasha wavo anogarodzora mumvana wavo achiti akadhurisirwa munhu asina chaanogona*' (the groom always returns her daughter arguing that she was exorbitantly priced and yet she knows nothing).

It was also given out that some marriages especially involving partners in paid labour have helped in the mobilization of resources ultimately leading to the resolution of some conflicts related to money and wealth.

Some of the challenges that are encountered by some people are tied to resources and as soon as they are married and are sharing the burden and mobilizing their income towards one goal, some of the challenges disappear. The happiness that is enjoyed in this couple's home may cascade down to other extended families.

Some marriages were also said to have resolved some cultural disputes with the ancestors. It was given out that there were some families that had lived for ages with conflicts which are culturally influenced and which required a lot of wisdom and will on the part of the family members. Some of these conflicts could only be attended with the solemnization of some marriages. One male respondent gave out that he had witnessed a conflict whereby ancestral spirits in a particular family had demanded that a man from that village marry a girl from another identified family as a way of addressing the conflict. Indeed, when that marriage was fulfilled, all the calamities ceased to occur.

While it is appreciated that most marriages have led to the resolution of conflicts both in homes and in societies as a whole, some have proved to be the opposite. Several scholars and real life situations have presented clear evidence. According to Mester (2008), in order to ensure that every man could manage to pay bride wealth, the colonial government had firstly announced a maximum amount of bride wealth to be paid. However, as soon as this control was removed, prices went up. This unreasonable pricing of bride wealth, according to four respondents, has sparked a new wave of conflicts within society that has ultimately led to record marriage break-downs. These marriage break-downs have subsequently created a series of conflicts down-stream.

One female participant gave out that bride-wealth had turned out to be payment not only for the uterus of the woman being married, but also those of her women relatives who are not allowed to decide the fate of their own reproductivity. She revealed that bride-wealth was being used to take away women's independence over their sexual and procreative health. Another conflict that has emanated in society over marriage emanates from the fact that bride-wealth is being regarded as a woman's everlasting agreement to sexual intercourse; as if the man has bought the right to claim sex from her at any time. It is this kind of mentality, according to the participants, that has subjected some married women to marital rape, HIV infection and domestic violence.

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