

# **The Interface of Zezuru Marriage Custom with Modernity: An Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

Marriage is central to the Shona people of Zimbabwe, though the five ethnic groups that make up the Shona tribe all view marriage differently. One of these ethnicities is the Zezuru, who regard marriage as a unifier of families. The communities involved in a marriage share their very existence in that reality, and they become one people. The centrality of marriage among the Zezuru is experienced through the continuous coming together of people through this rite. However, recent developments show that some valued, traditional Zezuru marriage practices have failed to stand the test of modernity, and others are gravitating towards extinction. The question that begs an answer is how has the interface of Zezuru marriage customs and modernity impacted this ethnic group? In responding to this question, the empirical research collected data through unstructured interviews with 20 randomly selected male and female from different age groups and ethnicities. The sample included bridegrooms, brides and traditional leaders. The paper argues that the effects of acculturation and modernisation have given the Zezuru people a modernised understanding of marriage. The paper concludes that modernisation presents Zezuru marriage customs with both beneficial and adverse challenges, with adverse challenges being more pronounced.

**Keywords:** Marriage custom; modernity; Zezuru people; Zimbabwe; bride prize

## **Introduction**

Among African people, marriage is regarded as a unifier of families. Communities involved in marriage share their very existence in that reality,

and they become one people (Magesa 1998). Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, formal marriage is something that is viewed as sacred (Mawere & Mawere 2010:225). The Shona people comprise the Zezuru, Ndaui, Manyika, Korekore and Karanga ethnic groups (Doke 2005:12), each of which has different marriage customs. This paper interrogates the effects of the interface of Zezuru marriage custom with modernity. The reason for choosing the Zezuru ethnic group is because this group is found mostly on the central plateau, an area that includes Harare (Doke 2005: 12). The paper argues that, although the centrality of marriage among the Zezuru people is evidenced by the continuous coming together of people in marriage, the interaction of the Zezuru people with modernity has led to a loss of some valued traditional practices, which have failed to stand the test of time; other practices are inclining towards extinction. Macheya, a participant in this study, explained that one of the reasons for this loss is the failure by some Zezuru marriage practices to counter the pressure that is being exerted by modernity. An acculturation process has had a negative impact on the value of marriage among the Zezuru people. The paper argues that the effects of acculturation and modernisation have robbed the Zezuru people of their identity in as far as marriage is concerned. Some cultural practices have already been obliterated, while others are being abandoned gradually.

## **Methodology**

This paper was a result of presentations made to the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) Harare West Ruwadzano/ Manyano Women's Convention in 2013 and MCZ Harare East Men's Christian Union Convention in 2014. In the MCZ the term ruwadzano is derived from a Shona verb '*kuwadzana*' meaning fellowship and Manyano is the equivalent Ndebele (Mujinga 2017:131). The discussions during Ruwadzano/ Manyano Convention in 2013 sparked interest to the men of Harare East District who later had their convention in 2014. The male delegates invited me to share on the interface of Shona marriage with modernity (Mujinga 2014). After the presentation at the MCU convention, there was a demand to learn more about Shona marriage values which had been ignored by Christians for a long time. A group of women from Greendale Methodist Church in Harare East District invited me to share the paper at a bridal shower – which, according to an interview with one of the female participants, was breaking the cultural barriers, as bridal showers are

traditionally meant for women only.

Three approaches were used to collect data for this study. First, the empirical part of the study used the insider-outsider approach. As a member of the Zezuru ethnic group, the researcher is an insider, which made it easy for him to reference personal lived experiences. According to Robson (2002:297), it is increasingly common for researchers to carry out studies that are concerned directly with the setting in which they live. As a Methodist minister, the researcher was also an outsider, thus, slightly removed from the everyday practices of Zezuru marriage culture.

Second, the empirical study gathered data through unstructured interviews. This type of interview is conducted without a structured guide (Mouton 2009). In unstructured interviews, the interviewer builds rapport with participants, and encourages them to open up and express themselves in a framework of their choice. According to Crabtree (2006:56), ‘unstructured interviewing is recommended when the researcher has developed enough of an understanding of a setting on his or her topic of interest and needs to have a clear agenda for the discussion with the informant’. In addition to providing information, unstructured interviews enable researchers to have their understanding of the area of inquiry opened to revision by participants—thereby, unstructured interviews help to fill in the knowledge gaps (Crabtree 2006:57). Twenty people, mostly Zezuru, were randomly selected; ten male and ten females, among whom four were newlywed two male and two females respectively. According to Mouton (2009: 138), random samples are unbiased, because every person in the population has the opportunity to be selected. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants, and the confidentiality of their information, pseudonyms were used (Liamputtong 2011). The advantage of pseudonyms is that they maintain the integrity of the participants who would have provided information in interviews voluntarily.

Table 1 contains a list of the participants by age, gender, ethnicity and marital status.

**Table 1 Demographic information of participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Status</b>
Dadi Taso	36-40	F	Karanga	Single parent
Regai Tunga	70-75	F	Ndau	Widow

Munondii Kasi	66-70	F	Ndau	Married
Rhoda Tandi	70-75	F	Zezuru	Married
Jesca Doro	40-45	F	Zezuru	Married
Tandi Neni	25-30	F	Zezuru	Recently married
Vivian Zuka	25-30	F	Zezuru	Recently married
Ida Muchatuta	50-55	F	Zezuru	Single parent
John Chikokoro	50-55	M	Zezuru	Married
Padi Danda	41-45	M	Zezuru	Married
Ben Feso	56-60	M	Zezuru	Married
Josia Mapu	26-30	M	Zezuru	Married
Nonokai Guri	35-40	M	Zezuru	Divorced
Ruka Macheya	30-35	M	Zezuru	Married
Rongai Jasi	45-50	M	Zezuru	Married
Jasper Chivhu	25-30	M	Zezuru	Recently married
Ernest Chiso	25-30	M	Zezuru	Recently married
Runga Jamu	50-55	M	Korekore	Married
Vimbai Soso	20-25	F	Manyika	Married
Dambudzo Yaku	60-65	F	Manyika	Married

Third, the research referenced existing literature on marriage, in general, and among the Shona people, in particular, to interrogate the effects of the interface of Zezuru marriage custom with modernity. The existing literature presented a variety of marriage experiences among the Zezuru people.

## **Identity of the Zezuru People**

Zimbabwe is home to various ethnic groups, of which the Shona and Ndebele are the majority. According to the Zimbabwean Constitution (2013: 17), there are 16 official languages namely Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa. Shona and Ndebele are the major languages. The five ethnic groups of Shona-speaking people collectively constitute about 80% of the total population, while the Ndebele constitute about 12% (Doke 2015: 12). It is not easy to further divide the five Shona, ethnic groups into percentages, although the assumption is that the Zezuru constitute the largest group, especially in the capital city of Harare. Doke (2005: 12) opines that the

Zezuru inhabit the central plateau of Zimbabwe, the Karanga live to the south; the Korekore, to the north and into the Zambezi Valley; the Manyika, to the east, and the Ndaу in Chipinge close to Mozambique and in the extreme northeast. Geographically, Harare falls in the central plateau, and is a cosmopolitan city. The research targeted mostly the Zezuru people since they are the scope of the study.

## **Understanding Modernity/ Modernisation**

The historical context of modernisation in Africa is based on its encounter with Europe, under the particular conditions of the Atlantic slave trade and European colonial exploitation (Yahia 2016). According to Shilliam (2017: 1), ‘the words modernity and modernisation are frequently used in the discipline of sociology. The terms were created in the nineteenth century specifically to come to terms with ‘society’ as a novel form of human existence’. On one hand, modernity is defined as a condition of social existence that is significantly different from all past forms of human experience; on the other hand, modernisation refers to the transitional process of moving from ‘traditional’ or ‘primitive’ communities to modern societies (Deutsch 1961). The two words demonstrate society’s appetite for renewal, to move from the past and old, to a present, new form of society. Modernity and modernisation assume that the major clusters of old society, that economy and psychological commitment have been eroded, and that people become available for new patterns of socialisation and behaviour (Shilliam 2017: 1) – such new patterns of socialised behaviour are evident in the interface of Zezuru marriage custom and modernity

Huntington (1976 : 30) argues that modernisation is a systematic and transformative process. In order for a society to move into modernity, its traditional structures and values must be replaced totally by a set of modern values. In its essence, modernity has a transformative nature, which builds change into the social system. Since modernity is transformative, its characteristics match that of the enlightenment period, thereby making modernity and enlightenment two sides of the same coin (Lushaba 2006). Yahia (2016) equates modernisation with Westernisation. He states that modernisation requires a change in beliefs about how the material world operates, while Westernisation entails a change in beliefs about how one should live. An interview with Tandi shows that changes in the Zezuru

marriage customs just like any other ethnic group have been affected by the surge of modernisation that has to some extent changed their way of life.

Modernisation, as a process of transformation and development, with its characteristics, be it in social, economic, religious, political and cultural environments, is being advanced technologically and ideologically to meet international standards (Eze-Uzomaka & Akintunde 2017: 82). Zezuru marriage custom has borrowed some aspects of modernisation, which means some cultural aspects of the tradition are rapidly losing meaning. For example, as Tunga explained during the interview, traditionally, *roora* (bride-wealth or dowry) was charged in cattle and ploughing equipment, such as hoes, but today *roora* is charged in cash and kind. Another participant, Jasi, explained:

the marriage that used to take place in the rural area in a round hut has since been relocated mostly to urban areas using modern methods of payments like swipe, Real Gross Time Settlement (RTGS) and mobile money transfer platforms like Econet Wireless' EcoCash, Telecel Zimbabwe's TeleCash and NetOne's NettCash.

The money transfer systems used today enable owners of mobile phones to carry out financial transactions, such as sending and receiving money, paying bills and other mobile transactions, and this means people have rejected the cultural system that involves paying *roora* using real money instead of 'plastic' money (Munyanyi 2014 :258). The hut used to be the central place of marriage, given its round shape, which represents a relationship that never ends, Tandi explained. Zezuru marriage is considered to be a contract between two families as well as between two individuals. This environment of living together was expressed by Zuka in the Shona proverb, *rooranai vematongo*, literally, [marry someone whose background you know]. She said, 'a prospective husband would pay *roora* to his fiancée's family, as a gesture of gratitude for raising her and as compensation for the loss of her labour'.

The effects of acculturated Zezuru marriage custom is also evident in advertising slogans, such as, *mukuwasha chaiye anouya ne chicken slice*, literally, [a genuine son-in-law brings a chicken slice on the day of marriage], as explained by Kasi. The advertisement suggests that the traditional slaughter of chicken as a way of confirming the relationship of the families being joined by the marriage through the blood of the chicken and eating together is now archaic, and that fast food is now common.

The suggestion that Zezuru marriage custom has been acculturated means that it has embraced Western styles of appreciating the rite. This point is reinforced by Castro and Rudmin (2017: 2), who argue that ‘acculturation is when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups’. In this paper, acculturation refers to the interface of Zezuru marriage custom and modernity, and the possible dilution of the Zezuru culture, because ‘Zezuru marriage custom is losing its meaning each day of cultural intercourse’, Doro explained in her interview. The principal effects of modernity as a process are being experienced as the community moves from a traditional, agrarian, rural society, to a more secular, urbanised society that is prone to changing the values, beliefs and ideology of a community (Eze-Uzomaka & Akintunde 2017: 83). Consequently, modernisation is a process of diffusion that draws a heavy line between traditional and modern societies – modernisation believes that the former is inferior to the latter (Offiong 2001: 38 - 39).

## **Shona People’s Understanding of the Concept of Marriage**

In contemporary Zimbabwe, marriage is understood to be a union between two people of the opposite sex. According to (Mawere & Mawere 2010: 225), heterosexual relations are often prized over homosexual ties, for their procreative capacity to bear children. Under the influence of the traditional Shona understanding of marriage, the late, former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, in 1995, spat venom and attacked sodomists as being worse than pigs and dogs (Gunda 2010:375). Mugabe claimed that homosexuality is un-African; it is linked to colonisation, and Westerners were the originators of homosexuality, and they brought it to Africa (Gunda 2015:1). This research is aware of recent scholarly debates among Shona-speaking people, by the likes of Taringa (2015), Shoko (2015), Mangena (2015) and Mapuranga (2015), who declare that the definition of marriage goes beyond heterosexuality, and includes homosexuality. For the purpose of this research, the definition of marriage by Mawere and Mawere (2010) was accepted, without the intention of disparaging the possibility that marriage can also involve homosexuality (West 2016).

According to the participant, Danda, ‘marriage among the Zezuru people is considered as a covenant between two families that serve as a structu-

ral link of the formerly strange parties'. Chikokoro, in turn, mentioned that, 'a man marrying a woman from the Zezuru culture has to observe the bride wealth commonly known as *a roora* – dowry, or *lobola* in Ndebele'. According to Mawere and Mawere (2010: 224) the normative marriage customs of the Shona people are characterised by negotiation and payment of *roora*, which is the basis of marriage and family obligations. Doro emphasised that 'bride wealth is the most tenacious of all Shona customs that was established because of the marriage taboos that were found in the kinship system'. *Roora* among the Zezuru, said Feso during the interview, is a sign of love and affection, and requires a man to save up resources and marry his beloved. *Roora* is also considered as a noble custom that functions as a safeguard against marital dissolution, because it generally needs to be repaid upon divorce, a recently married participant, Neni, explained. Among the Zezuru people, the payment of *roora* also gives man custody of children resulting from the union and rights to genetic inheritance (Meekers 1993: 36). An interview with Yaku, one of this study's participants, from the Manyika ethnic group, elicited that 'the payment of *roora* was analysed from a Eurocentric perspective and the missionaries who took this approach missed the mark in their attempt to interpret a foreign culture without enough tools for the local language'.

Bhebhe (1979: 112) presents an example, that of Father Prestage, a Roman Catholic Church missionary who came to Zimbabwe prior to 1890. Prestage viewed the payment of *roora* as indistinguishable from the purchase of a wife by a man for the purposes of begetting children, of whom the girls, when marriageable, in turn, are disposed to obtain *roora*, which is used to purchase other wives, the final objective being to acquire position and substance through the possession of women and children. Chigwedere (1996) refutes this assumption as misdirected, and a misunderstanding of the Shona culture by the missionaries. For Chigwedere, 'marriage is not buying a wife but the services of the wife'. Chigwedere (1996) chides that, 'if you hire me to build a house, you are not purchasing me but you are purchasing my services'.

In contrast, Muchatuta asserted in an interview that,

African patriarchy has very little if any consideration for women. They are viewed and treated as sex objects. The payment of *lobola*, in cash or kind by a prospective husband or the head of the family, undertakes to give to the man more powers and this is a first step to be castigated as the 'selling' of a woman to a man.



Muchatuta concluded that, ‘in view of this patriarchal tendencies among the Zezuru people, single life is therefore ideal, ‘you hire and fire boyfriends as and when you like’’. Such statements testify about the impact of modernity on Zezuru marriage custom. According to one of the participants, Soso, in the marriage process, women are not allowed to justify being single, since, among the Zezuru, being married is regarded as being ‘morally normal’.

Scholars such as Holleman (1952), Meekers (1993), Bourdillion (1998), Chabata (2012) and Dodo (2014) generally agree that Shona people are commercialising *roora*. For Chabata (2012), this commercialisation of the cultural rite in contemporary Zimbabwe is a challenge for both men and women because a limited number of potential husbands can raise the *roora*. The commercialisation of *roora* means that the rite has undergone a radical transformation. Payment has changed, according to Chivhu, from a simple cultural practice into a highly commercialised venture. Three case studies of exorbitant *roora* processes by prominent politicians suffice to justify this claim. In 2011, the vice president of Zimbabwe, Costantino Chiwenga, paid *roora* worth US\$ 47 000 to marry Mary Mubayiwa (*Newsday*, 28 October 2011). In November of the same year, the former prime minister, the late Morgan Tsvangirai, paid US\$36 000 to marry Locadia Karimatsenga-Tembo at a traditional ceremony (*Nehanda Radio*, 22 November 2011). In 2013, the former Zimbabwean president, the late Robert Mugabe, charged USD 35 000 *roora* for his daughter Bona (*Newsday*, 15 August 2013). Mugabe and Chiwenga are from the Zezuru tribe, while Tsvangirai was from Manyika ethnic group. Commenting on the cost of Karimatsenga-Tembo’s *roora*, *News Day* (22 November 2011) states that,

What is eye-popping is the amount paid for Locadia’s lobola US\$36,000 is a lot of money and for a woman who was once married and has a child (*mvana*). In fact, it is a lot of money for any woman, to be fair. It is obvious that they looked at the status of the Prime Minister and they decided on a price.

Hefty *roora* charges, according to participants Zuka, Taso and Guri, are contributing factors to marriage breakups. Guri argued that, ‘decisions about the bride price, which are made by the bride’s father, take into account the likely effects of the amount set on the risk of ill-treatment of the wife and the risk of marriage failure’. Obbo (1980: 106) declares that,

It is not surprising from this background that some women prefer to remain single although, marriage remains an important indicator of female status, and some women believe that an unsatisfactory marriage is as good as not being married at all.

In an interview, recently married Chiso opined that, ‘the majority of women feel that *roora* demonstrates love and commitment of men in marriage, builds affinity and social capital rather than creating animosity between families’.

### **Types of Marriages Practised by Shona People**

Although this study focused on Zezuru marriage customs, almost all Shona ethnic groups practice the types of marriage customs discussed here, though they may use different terms to describe the practices for example, the Karanga use the term *rugaba* to refer to the bride prize while the Zezuru use the term *rusambo*. In this paper, Zezuru terms dominate the discourse. Traditionally, Zimbabwe recognised a number of marriages as valid by the indigenous people. However, the colonisation of Zimbabwe influenced the general understanding of marriage by Shona people (Bhebhe 1979). Marriage was redefined using Eurocentric terms and vocabulary, with the aim of mystifying the custom. In the process, some marriage practices were labelled as ‘civil’, while others were called ‘traditional marriages’, with the assumption that the latter were outdated, as Jamu explained in the interview. The Marriage Act of Zimbabwe legalised marriage and divided it into *civil marriage*, registered customary *marriage* and unregistered customary *marriage*, (Marriage Act [Chapter 177 of 1963]). The Marriages Bill (2019) which repealed and replaces the Customary Marriages Act [Chapter 5:07] and the Marriage Act [Chapter 5:11] maintained the same position. The government is represented by the minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, and magistrates’ courts. The magistrates and designated marriage officers are used as extensions of the government’s efforts to legalise the custom of marriage according to Christian, Jewish, Islamic or Hindu rite or the rites of any religion (Marriages Bill 2019:6). Instead of a hut in rural areas where marriage rites were conducted, churches, halls and cathedrals are now venues for solemnising marriages.

The Marriage Bill (2019:5) diverted the definition of marriage from its proper African definition of union, to the Eurocentric term solemnisation.

According to the Marriage Bill (2019:5), a marriage shall not be solemnised or registered in terms of this Act unless each party to the marriage has given his or her free and full consent to the marriage. In view of this, the researcher, is of the opinion that marriage should not be registered in order to be a marriage but partners must live in harmony even without a registered marriage.

The Marriage Bill also states that,

Any marriage officer who knowingly solemnises a marriage in contravention of this Act or any person who makes, for any of the purposes of this Act, any false representation or false statement knowing it to be false, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding level 10 or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or to both such fine and such imprisonment (2019:10).

Given that marriage in Zimbabwe in general now refers to a wedding (Mujinga 2020), it is evident that the custom of marriage was acculturated, thereby losing its real meaning and value. Therefore, the researcher will deliberate on the traditional marriage custom among the Zezuru people in the face of the Europeanisation of the rite.

The first type of traditional Zezuru marriage custom is called *kukumbira* (requesting). *Kukumbira* is a customary marriage system where a girl of marriageable age who according to the Marriage Act, Chapter 5:11 (78,2:47) is 18 years old marries with her 'informed consent' and that of her parents to a man of her own choice (see also Kileff & Kileff, 1970; Bourdillion 1998; Mawere & Mawere, 2010). A brief summary by these scholars will help us appreciate the negotiation skills involved and the richness of the Zezuru marriage custom, which were also reported on in the process of interviews with participants. According to Chiso, the day of marriage set, the ritual process. It starts with the intermediary explaining the purpose of his visit, which is the intention to marry. He states that *ndinokumbira kubikirwa* [I would like someone to cook for me]. At the same time, the intermediary produces a *badza* [hoe] (these days money can be used instead of a hoe), and hands it over to the companion who is usually the aunt, grandmother or the neighbour of the girl, who then hands it to the father of the girl (Mawere & Mawere 2010:226). The hoe represents *muromo* (meaning mouth, which represents seeking permission to negotiate with the in-laws), according to Soso, a participant. The girl is called upon to confirm that she knows the suitor, and her informed consent is

sought to enter into marriage with the suitor, before other proceedings take place. When this is done, the *munyai* [go-between] pays a certain amount called *masunungurahomwe* [loosening the pocket]. The suitor pays this money in order to start the *roora* process and the process continues, as explained by the participant Macheya (see also Holleman 1952; Kileff & Kileff 1970; Bourdillion 1998; Rwomire 2001; Mawere and Mawere 2010). Although *kukumbira* is still common among Shona people in general, as Danda explained in an interview, it has also been affected by modernisation, and the rite has lost its value. When the colonisers came, they divided marriage into traditional customary marriage, religious marriage, civil marriage and mutual consent union/cohabitation (Rwomire 2001: 124). In an interview, Kasi emphasised that, 'in spite of the semantics in marriage, all these union systems are anchored on the payment of *roora* by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family'.

The second type of traditional Zezuru marriage custom is *kutizira* [running away to elope]. As reported in an interview with Muchatuta, in this type of marriage, the girl is pregnant, and she runs away from home without obtaining the consent of her parents to marry. In this case, *roora* is paid before she gives birth, to avoid the uncertainty of death. The Zezuru believe that dying in this way causes the *ngozi* [avenging spirit] to haunt the family of the boy (see also Obbo 1980; Shoko 2007). In his interview, Jasi emphasised that a boy could arrange *kutizisa*, or a girl could elope without his help. This type of marriage is common among the Zezuru people today (Mujinga 2020). There are a number of factors that lead to *kutizira*, such as the girl being pregnant, peer pressure, poverty, and lack of parental guidance. According to Guri, some parents think that, if a girl comes home late, she was with her boyfriend, having sex, and they will chase the girl away. Among the factors that drive boys to encourage girls to exercise *kutizira* include the cost of *roora*, which has been commercialised.

The third type of traditional Zezuru marriage custom, which is no longer common, is *kuzvarira*. Mapu explained that a poor family that finds it difficult to survive gives a very young daughter to a family that will provide bride wealth, which will enable the poor family to survive. If the girl is mature, she will go to the family she has been married to. If the father of that family is too old to marry the girl, then the girl is given to his son or nephew. In the event that the girl runs away, the family to which the girl was married will demand return of their *roora* (Mawere & Mawere 2010: 227). Holleman (1952: 115-21) calls *kuzvarira* 'a credit marriage'. This type of marriage is now forbidden

by the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013: 38), which states that ‘no marriage should be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouse’. Forbidding this type of marriage implies that modernity has had positive consequences for African women, in general, and Zezuru women, in particular, as their rights are now being respected.

The fourth type of traditional Zezuru marriage custom is called *chigara mapfiwa* [to inherit the fireplace]. Tandi explained that this refers to property of a deceased person, and Doro reported that this type of marriage is also called *chimutsa mapfiwa* [to keep the fire burning]. The marriage implies that cooking for the husband will continue. If a wife dies, her sister or the daughter of the deceased wife’s brother (*atete*) can be given to the husband as a replacement for his wife. According to Taso, a female participant, the deceased wife herself could have requested that her children be looked after by a sister or other relative, instead of another wife of her husband. According to Holleman (1952: 188 - 189), such marriage arrangements are called ‘substitution marriage’. The practice has also been affected by modernity. In the first place, the Constitution of Zimbabwe forbids it; second, the coming of HIV and AIDS has caused this practice to die a natural death, and third, modernisation has encouraged women to fight for their conjugal rights, explained Guri.

The fifth type is *kugara or kugarwa nhaka* [levirate]. In this marriage arrangement, a widow is expected to be looked after by a brother (same father/same mother; or same father/different mother) or other male relative (Mawere & Mawere 2010: 228). Holleman (1952: 234) calls this marriage ‘succession marriage’. For Feso, this type of marriage is closer to *chigadza mapfihwa*, and its effects on Shona marriage custom are the same.

The sixth type was explained by Mapu, and is called *kutemaugariri*. It involves a poor man, who is not able to pay *roora*, living and working at his wife’s homestead for a time, providing his labour in lieu of paying *roora*. This form of marriage is similar to the Old Testament story of Jacob, reported in Genesis 28-29, who worked for 14 years to get his wives Leah and Rachel. In *kutemaugariri*, when the man has fulfilled the requirements, he can settle elsewhere with his family. According to Holleman (1952: 124), this type of marriage can be called ‘service marriage’, since the husband has to work as a way of paying *roora*. This type of marriage has lost its significance among the Zezuru, reported Mapu, because most men can now take a woman in other ways, such as cohabitating and *kutizisa*.

Tandi explained the seventh type of marriage custom, *musengabere* [to carry a hyena and run away with it]. The term refers to a man who rapes a girl in order to force her to marry him. The man takes her to his place and they have sex for a night. The following day he orders the girl to leave. The girl is stranded, and remains at the man's homestead as a new wife, explained Danda. The girl cannot return to her parents' place, because the parents cannot account for where she slept the previous night. Thus, she has no choice but to stay with the man who abused her. This marriage is classified under forced marriage and a girl's family is likely to demand an exorbitant amount of *roora*, or report the alleged rape to the police, Chiso explained. He continued by saying that this marriage is very common among the Zezuru – *roora* is seldom paid and the woman is treated inhumanly, and eventually divorced.

The eighth form of marriage is meant to compensate the avenging spirit of a person who was killed by a relative. The Zezuru, like people speaking other Shona dialects, believe that such a spirit causes illnesses and other misfortune (Shoko 2007: 11). The family suspected of being involved in the killing has to give a daughter to the family whose member was killed. That woman will be married in the name of *ngozi* [avenging spirits]. According to Shoko, the *ngozi* of the spirit of a murdered person usually demands compensation of a person, in the form of a virgin girl (2007: 11). The girl is married to a male relative of the deceased, to bear children, Doro explained. The Shona people believe that, through such a 'ghost marriage', the wish of the angry spirit is fulfilled and, therefore, illnesses and other misfortunes will be prevented (Shoko 2007: 12). Although the *ngozi* spirit is still a common belief among the Zezuru people, this type of marriage is fast disappearing, because of the rise of Pentecostal movements which spiritualise human disorders and exorcism as the answer to 'demons'. This research could not determine how exorcism, which happen mostly in Pentecostal churches, deal with challenges of the evil spirit. However, Shoko (2007) reports that the traditional way of dealing with *ngozi* is compensation.

Although marriage remains central to the Zezuru people, modernisation condemns some of the methods as abusive – some people believe that all marriages among the Shona people are abusive in nature (Bourdillion 1998). Kasi reported the emergence of another type of 'marriage', called cohabitation, *kuchaya mapoto* or *kubika mapoto*, whereby two parties simply move in together without paying *roora*, and have children. The last marriage system is not common among the Zezuru people, because paying

*roora* is valued highly. However, the modernised marriage customs values the conjugal rights of women, too, in contrast to the communal relationships of traditional marriages.

### ***Effects of the Interface of Zezuru Marriage Custom with Modernity***

Africa's encounter with foreign culture culminated in a cruel and disruptive period in African history. From the arguments presented above, it is evident that the interface of Zezuru marriage custom with modernity had both negative and positive impacts. Modernity led to a cultural dualism that often presents itself as a dilemma in real-life situations of the Zezuru people. In other words, the African experience of modernity is fraught with tension at every level of communal and individual apprehension. Reyes (2010: 5) explains that the original culture of Africa has changed over the years, due to the influences of modernisation, which was initiated by contact by the Global South with the outside world. For Reyes (2001: 4), 'the interface of Shona culture with modernity is the Europeanization or Americanisation process which is irreversible'. This acculturation process led to changes in the originality of African culture. Given that, once started, modernisation cannot be stopped, Zezuru marriage custom continues to assimilate modernity, thereby losing its original meaning. Reyes (2001: 4) takes the interface of African culture with modernity further, by claiming that, once third-world countries come into contact with the West, they will not be able to resist the impetus toward modernisation. This claim cements this discourse, given that Zezuru marriage custom is now more aligned with a Western ethos. A case in point is the phenomenon of some Zezuru women refusing to marry as mentioned by Taso. Mawere and Mawere (2010: 229) argue that,

it is worth noting that this option of avoiding formal marriage is only open to those women who have sufficient resources outside of marriage such as professionals, better educated, urbanites, and wealthy women. Rather than contracting a formal marriage, these women prefer unmarried cohabitation or prefer to have lovers who do not live permanently with them because this allows them to maintain their sexual liberty.

On a positive note, the interface of Zezuru marriage custom with modernity brought freedom of choice, which had been suppressed for a long time in Africa.

Mujinga (2014) explained that, in addition to freedom of choice and expression, modernity has led many Zimbabweans to migrate to other parts of the world, South Africa in particular. In any Zezuru marriage process, the role of the father's sister, *atete*, is critical. She represents the strong bargaining position of the maternal or paternal side for a boy or girl respectively, as Tunga explained. *Atete* represents the family genealogies, and has an influencing role when it comes to marriage customs (Kileff & Kileff 1970:25; Stewart 1998:223). The position of *atete* among the Zezuru has lost its value, because of migration, which has been necessitated by socioeconomic conditions in Zimbabwe, and made possible by technology. Doro explained that the place of the aunt has left a vacuum and, in some families, the mother is playing this role, sometimes out of desperation. An example is a family that finds itself alone in another part of the world, or where they face social differences (for instance, witchcraft) or wealth and poverty of the aunt and her brother's family necessitates hatred among family members. Furthermore, the Zezuru communication system has been compromised by technology, as people now use social platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Christianity has also had a negative impact on marriage custom in Africa, in general. According to Murphree (1969: 89ff), 'when the Catholic Church transmitted the Eurocentric position of a godmother in Zimbabwe in order to substitute the influence of *atete* in marriage the role was weakened'. For every female baby, the priest nominated a young Christian woman, according to Christian concepts of purity and respectability, to act as godmother for the baby. She was responsible for the religious education of her godchild, and she had the same right to prohibit an undesirable marriage, as the maternal *atete* (Murphree 1969: 89ff). Christianity challenges traditional belief systems and promotes the diffusion of new ideas and modes of life; it seeks to impose monogamy and the nuclear family as the norm, according to Macheya. The emergence of missionary / mainline churches like Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic in the early years of colonisation, and later, the Pentecostal churches in the twentieth century, also negatively influenced the role of *atete* in both paternal and maternal families. Chikokoro explained this is because the godmothers and godfathers went as far as arranging weddings for their godchildren. According to Kyalo (2012: 11), 'the marriage institution



is dwindling and losing its value due to a variety of challenges that include; divorce, separations, rape, prostitution, poverty, unemployment, equality and modernity'. In addition, some families demand exorbitant *roora*, as they seek to destroy relationships rather than build them (Dodo 2014:194). Three critical examples, of Chiwenga, Tsvangirai and Mugabe, serve as the blueprints of extortion of Shona marriage customs.

Modernity has led to a discontinuity between the past and the present life. Through a process of social and cultural change, life in the present is fundamentally different from life in the past (Hooker 1996 :228). Hooker's understanding of modernity corresponds with some contemporary Zezuru marriage practices, which have replaced some marriage customary practices, such as *kukumbira*, which is now seen as outdated, whereas *kukumbira* used to be the most valued type of marriage, even after colonisation (Mawere & Mawere 2010).

When it comes to gender issues, just like other contemporary matters, a truth that is not discussed or exposed, is that today's Zezuru man is a product of two traditions and two worlds, namely, the African and Western worldviews. Fanon (1986), describes the contemporary African being as a 'Black skin in a white mask'. The black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow black people, the other with white people. A black person behaves differently with a white person than he does with another black person. There is no doubt that this behaviour is a direct consequence of the colonial undertaking this challenge is not unknown in marriage. The behaviour of some married Zezuru couples has been compromised by interfacing with other cultures in the global world. Contemporary Africans have adopted the values, tastes and behaviour of the coloniser, to the extent that they only appear black, according to skin colour, but think and behave like their teacher and role model, the white man (Makaudze 2015: 141). Consequently, there is a need to verify which of the two traditions has had an impact on the Zezuru marriage custom today.

In Zimbabwe, in general, Zuka explained, migration to other parts of the world, mostly to South Africa, and the fast-track Land Reform Programme of 2000, have dispersed people to the extent that the proverb, *rooranai vematongo* [marry the neighbour] has lost its meaning. In these circumstances, most marriages in Zimbabwe are now cross-cultural as Zuka view the situation. Given this understanding, the Zezuru marriage procedure is no longer consistent. Another problem, in addition to hefty *roora*, is the need for what

Chiso called ‘a sexual space’. Most Zezuru women no longer need attachment to an individual man – they consider that as an abuse of privacy, Guri explained. This attitude has resulted in many fatherless children and single mothers, and as Taso, a participant who was a single mother, explained, some women claim *ndirimurume pachangu* [I am a man in my own right]. In the interviews, however, some married women like Doro rejected this statement as a view borrowed from modernity, given that, among the Shona, a man is treated as a king and a Shona woman is trained to call her husband *shewe* (my lord). Muchatuta reported, some men do not refrain from having sex with other women, which has caused many deaths from HIV and AIDS, and leaving child-headed families which do not have a future, according to Mapu.

To conclude this research; it has been argued that the Zezuru people’s pride in their marriage custom has gone through different phases, and its existence and stability continue being challenged. It is possible that the Zezuru people are likely to lose their identity because of modernity. The acculturation of African culture, in general, and that of the Shona people, in particular, is an indication that the revival of the African identity is essential, and that Africa has been Europeanised. The paper argues that, if the Zezuru people are to retain their identity in a globalised community, it is important to redefine their marriage custom. They should resist the pressures of modernity and, instead, aim to maintain their culture or produce a hybrid Shona marriage custom for generations to come. It cannot be doubted that the crux of the Zezuru marriage custom has changed its face, because of the impact of modernity.

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*Martin Mujinga*

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