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Edited by
M. Christian Green
Jean-Baptiste Sourou
Célestin Gnonzont



8 AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS AND THE PRACTICE OF *MMADITSELA* MARRIAGE NEGOTIATIONS: BRIDGING AND RESOLVING ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN BOTSWANA

Senzokuhle Doreen Setume¹

INTRODUCTION

Botswana is a country that has enjoyed peace despite its many ethnic groups that have intermarried since time immemorial. The country recognises two types of marriages: customary and civil marriages. Both marriages are legally recognised, with civil marriages enjoying more social status among the young and more educated section of the society. While the country has many ethnic groups, only eight had been recognised in the Constitution of Botswana before the constitutional review of 2000. The Bakalanga have been dominated by Bangwato for centuries. There is a historical conflict between the Bakalanga and the Bangwato that partially culminated in the reform of Constitution of Botswana, 2000,² which resulted in the production of White Paper No.2 of 2002. The constitutional reform led to a symbolic reburial of Bakalanga Chief John Nswazwi, who died in 1960 in exile in Zimbabwe. He was banished by the Botswana government as a result of a conflict with the Bangwato regent Tshekedi Khama.

This conflict, however, did not deter the two ethnic groups from intermarriage. An important observation has been made that the Batswana, like most ethnic groups, intermarry across ethnicities.³ The purpose of this paper is to explore how the marriage practice using a *Mmaditsela* mediator is an epitome of reconciliation between different ethnic groups during marriage negotiations. Interethnic marriage occurs when people from two different ethnic groups marry each other. Conflict in the context of interethnic groups is not defined in terms of wars and guns. Inherently, interethnic marriages “produce cultural conflicts, which generate in many folds suspicions, tensions, disagreements, ethnic pride and identity that lead to reconciliation processes in the forms of dialogue and mutual

1 Lecturer, Department of Theological and Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Botswana.

2 See Constitution of Botswana, 2000, ss 77, 78 and 79. The Bayeyi ethnic group were also a “minority” ethnic group that was very instrumental in the review of the said sections of the Constitution of Botswana. See also National Assembly of Botswana, Balopi Commission. 2002. Government White Paper No. 2 of 2002.

3 Werbner R. 2002. “Cosmopolitan Ethnicity, Entrepreneurship and the Nation: Minority Elites in Botswana”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28(4):731-75.

negotiations.⁴ Therefore, the Setswana provision of *Mmaditsela* – a term that refers to both the practice of mediation and the mediator who performs it – becomes very instrumental in ensuring meaningful, respectful and sensitive dialogue and mutual negotiations in interethnic marriages. The *Mmaditsela* practice is a culture way of bridging a gap between two antagonistic groups in order to build a bridge through which cooperation is possible. In the next sections, I will briefly discuss the history of conflict between the Bakalanga and Bangwato, following this with discussion of the theoretical conception of interethnic marriages at large and in Botswana and how the *Mmaditsela* practice bridges the gaps between families and ethnicities in the process of establishing a new family through marriage.

HISTORY OF CONFLICT BETWEEN BAKALANGA

When explaining the naming of a certain mall in the second capital city of Botswana, Francistown, University of Botswana historian Boga Manatsha explains that “The Nswazwi Mall has sad and exciting historical and politico-cultural significance in the evolution of modern Botswana.”⁵ Historians observe that in 1926, when Kgosi Tshekedi became the Bangwato regent, he immediately, started a war with the Bakalanga by appointing a Bangwato regent to govern Bakalanga.⁶ The chief of the Bakalanga, John Madawo Nswazwi VIII, resisted and protested this decision. Tshekedi further ordered the Bakalanga to build a fence along the Zimbabwe border. This task coincided with the ploughing season, and Chief Nswazwi is cited as having refused the task, arguing that “people cannot eat wire”.⁷ This conflict resulted in a joking insult that has become common to silence a Mokalaka in a conversation: *Tshekedi u no muka* (Tshekedi will rise from the dead). The saying indicates that Tshekedi will rise again or come back from the dead to continue ill-treating Bakalanga. However, this has not stopped the Bakalanga from intermarrying with Bangwato and other Setswana-speaking ethnic groups and vice versa.

This chapter therefore takes the historical conflict between Bangwato and Bakalanga as an entry point to discussing how interethnic marriages can bring allies together. The gist of the paper is to explore how the bridge between two ethnic groups that are

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- 4 Ewelum JN. 2016. “Socio-Cultural Impact of Inter Ethnic Marriages in Nigeria”, *International Journal of Social Relevance & Concern* 4(2):8.
 - 5 Manatsha BT. 2012. “The Historical and Politico-Cultural Significance of Nswazwi Mall in Francistown”, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 44: 70.
 - 6 Ramsay J. 1987. “Resistance from Subordinate Groups”: BaBirwa, BaKgatlwa Mmanaana and BaKalanga Nswazwi”, in Morton F and Ramsay J (eds). *The Birth of Botswana: A History of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1910 to 1966*. Gaborone: Longman Botswana, 64-81; Makgala, CJ 2006. *Elite Conflict in Botswana: A History*. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa; Werbner RP. 2004. *Reasonable Radicals and Citizenship in Botswana: The Public Anthropology of Kalanga Elites*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
 - 7 Manatsha, “The Historical and Politico-Cultural Significance of Nswazwi Mall”, 71. He was referring to the wire that people used to erect the fence between Botswana-Zimbabwe border.

diverse in language and culture bridges the differences as they create new kinship ties of affinity. The next section is a theoretical conception that lays foundation on what has already been known about interethnic marriages and how they have been conceptualised in academic circles.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTION OF INTERMARRIAGE

The study of intermarriage has resulted in the construction of theories for purposes of analysis, such as Intergroup Contact Theory. Intergroup Contact Theory was developed by American psychologist Gordon Allport in 1954, a time when other scholars had been grappling with the same concept out of a concern to explain ways of reducing conflict among different groups. One possible solution was to bring the groups in contact.⁸ Allport's main contribution to the development of the theory was the idea that for optimal contact to happen, the following prerequisites must be met: (1) equal status within the group, (2) common goals, and (3) intergroup cooperation and support of the authority. Political scientists Leila Demarest and Roos Haer point out that in most African communities, conflict has been along ethnic group lines.⁹ Interethnic marriages have therefore become an "indication of the position of groups in society", such that "the study of marriages is an important way to gain insight in the structure of ethnic and racial relationships".¹⁰ Prevalence of interethnic marriage is an indication of assimilation and integration, while lack of it indicates a high level of tensions between the ethnic groups. Interethnic marriages, therefore, can contribute to "reducing prejudice and violent behaviour towards other groups". Intergroup Contact Theory explains that the best way to reduce "existing negative attitudes and behaviours between members of different antagonistic groups is to bring them in contact with each other".¹¹ This contact is important because it makes possible for the two groups to acquire more knowledge about each other, and such knowledge then alleviates fear and reduces the feeling of being threatened this increasing intergroup empathy, trust and tolerance.¹² Exogamy then becomes a positive contact. Many scholars have argued for the importance of interethnic marriage.¹³ Though many studies have been carried out

8 Dovidio JF, Gaertner SL and Kawakami K. 2003. "Intergroup Contact: The Past, Present, and the Future", *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 6(1):5-21; Pettigrew TF. 1998. "Intergroup Contact Theory", *Annual Review Psychology* 49:65-85.

9 Demarest L and Haer R. 2022. "A perfect match?: The dampening effect of interethnic marriage on armed conflict in Africa", *Conflict Management and Peace Science* (39)6:686-705.

10 Smits J. 2009. "Ethnic Intermarriage and Social Cohesion: What Can We Learn from Yugoslavia?", *Social Indicators Research* 96(3):420.

11 Demarest and Haer, "A perfect match?", 687.

12 Brown R and Hewstone M. 2005. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Contact", in Zanna MP (ed). *Advances in experimental social psychology* 37:255-343.

13 McDoom OS. 2016. Horizontal inequality, status optimization, and interethnic marriage in a conflict-affected society, Word Institute for Development (WIDER) Working Paper 2016/167. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER; Nkomazana 2006; Nkomazana F. 2006. "The story of King Sechele I and the missionaries", *Journal of Religion and Theology in Namibia* 2:95-109.

on the importance of interethnic marriages, there is lack of understanding of how the barriers are actually crossed, hence the contribution of the present study on the practice of *Mmaditsela*.

UNDERSTANDING INTERETHNIC MARRIAGE

There is extant and extensive literature on interethnic marriages.¹⁴ These studies focus on the assimilative and integrative aspect of marriages, but they do not specifically explore how the bridge between the ethnic groups is built: how is it possible for two different ethnic groups to converse successfully concluding a marriage? This is what this chapter attempts to do through the study of *Mmaditsela* in interethnic marriages in Botswana.

Marriage is a rite of passage. A rite of passage is pregnant with rituals. Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep has explained that each rite of passage has three stages or phases: pre-liminal, liminal and post liminal.¹⁵ Significant and detailed rites of passage take place during the liminal stage, a stage that enables one to cross over from one stage to another. It is particularly during this liminal stage that *Mmaditsela* plays a significant role of ensuring that marriage rituals are done properly in accordance with laid down customs.¹⁶ Anthropologist Victor Turner focuses on the liminal stage and further explains the transformational nature of this stage where proper rituals need to be carried out.¹⁷ Since marriage establishes a family, most African societies do not leave this important task to the couple, establishing a marriage becomes a communal and family affair, at times with minimal involvement of the couple that is getting married.

Renowned sociologist Anthony Giddens opines of marriage that it is a “very pervasive social institution”,¹⁸ a position that has been, recently, largely disputed by the rise of non-marital unions.¹⁹ Historically, in some parts of Africa, chiefs forged peace with rival tribes by marrying from such tribes. Polygamy in Africa was for political reasons, where chiefs would marry relatives of chiefs from other ethnic groups to “create friendship and peaceful political atmosphere” between

14 Bugelski BR. 1961. “Assimilation through Inter-marriage”, *Social Forces* 40(2):148-153; Kalmijn M. 1998. “Inter-marriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:395-421; Lambert WE and Taylor DM. 1988. “Assimilation versus Multiculturalism: The Views of Urban Americans”, *Sociological Forum* 3(1):72-88; Smits, “Ethnic Inter-marriage and Social Cohesion”.

15 Van Gennep A. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

16 Denbow J and Thebe PC. 2006. *Culture and customs of Botswana*. London: Greenwood Press.

17 Turner V. 1967. “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage”, in *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

18 Giddens A. 1989. *Sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 389.

19 Mokomane Z. 2005. “Formation of cohabiting unions in Botswana: A qualitative study”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 23(2):193-214; Setume SD. 2017. “Cohabitation in Botswana: challenging methodological nuptialism in anthropology”, PhD thesis, Leiden University.

ethnic groups.²⁰ Religion scholar Fidelis Nkomazana explains that polygamy common among chiefs in Botswana where chiefs will have up to seven wives.²¹ Marriage is a socially acknowledged and approved sexual union between two adult individuals.²² Turkish sociologist Mehmet Nuri Gültekin defines marriage as the oldest established form of human behaviours providing kinship ties and an avenue for peacemaking between tribes.²³ They further explain that “contains its own acculturation, assimilation and integration process in accordance with its social environments”.²⁴

Family is important, as “virtually everyone is raised in a family context”.²⁵ Family is important because it is the primary source of socialisation, identity and offers a source of belonging. The family further plays a fundamental role in the “cultural transfer to future generations of the traditional social structure”.²⁶ Hence, Gültekin summarises the importance of family: “Marriage establishes family and is like a bridge, with effects growing down through the generations and over the years.”²⁷ The socialisation in culture and tradition for the young generation is important for the substance of any ethnic group. The first president of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama of Botswana, has poignantly captured the importance of culture with the statement that a nation without a soul is dead.²⁸ A family, therefore, plays a fundamental role in the transfer of cultural beliefs and values to children who, in turn, will socialise future generations. It then becomes of great interest to note how the process of socialisation happens in interethnic marriages. This question has been addressed by many sociological and anthropological studies.

Gültekin carried out a study in which he was analysing marriages between two ethnic groups in Turkey, the Kurdish and the Turkish.²⁹ His studies concluded that there was domination of one culture by the other as the Kurdish assimilated into the Turkish culture – a position that was enhanced by political, economic, educational institutions and urbanisation. He further explained that one form of assimilation relates to the learning and teaching of language: the dominant language in the interethnic marriages already subjects the transfer and transmission of one culture

20 Nkomazana, “The story of King Sechele I”, 276.

21 Nkomazana, “The story of King Sechele I”, 266.

22 Giddens, *Sociology*, 390.

23 Gültekin MN. 2012. “Debates on inter-ethnic marriages: assimilation or integration?: The Turkish perspective”, *Papers* 97(1):152.

24 Gültekin, “Debates on inter-ethnic marriages”, 152.

25 Giddens, *Sociology*, 389.

26 Gültekin, “Debates on inter-ethnic marriages”; Banks DJ. 1972. “Changing Kinship in North Malaya”, *American Anthropologist* 74(5):254-1275.

27 Gültekin, “Debates on inter-ethnic marriages”, 152.

28 Parsons N, Henderson W and Tlou T. 1995. *Seretse Khama 1921-1980*. Gaborone: Macmillan and The Botswana Society.

29 Gültekin, “Debates on inter-ethnic marriages”.

at the expense of the other.³⁰ This study has yielded good results, but it does not explain the processes that enable communication and sharing of marriage rituals and rites between the marriages of different ethnic groups. Other similar studies have been carried out on interethnic marriages and produced conclusions that focus on the assimilation, integration and hybridisation of such marriages without necessarily explaining how cultural differences such as in marriage rituals and language barriers are navigated.³¹ Economists Barry Chiswick and Christina Houseworth carried out a study on ethnic intermarriage among immigrants in the U.S. in which they analysed census data.³² Though the study makes useful conclusions such factors as the effect of educational level in interethnic marriages, its quantitative nature does not allow for the exploration of the power dynamics that happen between ethnic groups in terms of how the concerned ethnic groups make negotiations that surround the marriage rituals. In a study on marriage as a tool of peacemaking, Nigerian scholar Johnson Nnadi Ewelum defines marriage as oldest established form of human behaviour providing kinship ties and an avenue for peacemaking.³³ Ewelum further identify cultural differences as one of the challenges that interethnic married couple faces, but does not explore how the same interethnic differences present themselves and negotiated during the marriage process in order to ensure a peaceful process of establishing a marriage.

A number of studies on interethnic marriages have been done in sub-Saharan Africa. Interethnic marriages are usually shrouded by tensions and conflict. Trevor Noah, a popular South African, comedian comments on how his granny used to hide him in the house due to his skin colour and the politicking of white versus black unions during the apartheid era. International development researchers Sanghamitra Bandyopadhyay and Elliot Green carried out a study on intermarriage in Southern Africa where they observed. "Africa's high level of ethnic diversity has contributed to a long history of inter-ethnic marriages between groups."³⁴ Marriage is a "mechanism of the transmission of ethically specific cultural values and practices to the next generation".³⁵

None of the studies above, however, have attempted to describe processes that would allow two very different ethnic groups to arrange and successfully conclude a marriage, since most of these studies are quantitative, hence the significance of this chapter. The study underlying this data is collected from both secondary sources and

30 Gültekin, "Debates on inter-ethnic marriages".

31 Chiswick BR and Houseworth CA. 2008. "Ethnic Intermarriage among Immigrants: Human Capital and Assortative Mating" Discussion Paper No. 3740; Furtado D. 2015. "Ethnic Intermarriage", *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* 2(8):118-122.

32 Chiswick and Houseworth, "Ethnic Intermarriage among Immigrants".

33 Ewelum, "Socio-Cultural Impact of Inter Ethnic Marriages in Nigeria".

34 Bandyopadhyay S and Green E. 2021. Explaining inter-ethnic marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Journal of International Development* 33:630.

35 Demarest and Haer, "A perfect match?", 689.

selected interviews with the *Mmaditselana* mediators during marriage negotiations between Bakalanga and Setswana-speaking ethnic groups. Significantly, it is based on my own participation in and observation of the practice as a *Mmaditsela*. I got married on the 3 December 1998 and have since participated in thirteen marriages in different capacities as *Mma Malome* (wife to the uncle of the bride or groom) and or as the *Mmaditsela* (mediator). I have been *Mmaditsela* in four (marriages).³⁶ Therefore, participant observation is the main source of data collection. Interviews were done with people who have played the role of *Mmaditsela*. The major finding is that African indigenous ways of cooperation and reconciliation have yielded positive results and are an effective way of navigating cultural differences and building relationships.

UNDERSTANDING MMADITSELA

There is a knowledge gap when it comes to the concept of literature on *Mmaditsela* in Botswana. With so much written on marriage and interethnic marriages, it is unfortunate that this knowledge gap exists. Once the couple has decided that they intend to get married and informs their respective parents, then marriage negotiations are entered into by the two families. These negotiations are done through mediation. There are variations as to how the first step happens. In some instances, the biological parents will visit the bride's family to *kokota* (knock); that is, to present themselves to each with the intention of starting the marriage arrangements. In other instances, close relatives, such as uncles, do the *kokota* visit. Once this has been completed, each family chooses two people, a male and female or a couple, to be the *Mmaditsela* for the marriage. The qualification for becoming a *Mmaditsela* is that the individuals should be married.

Anthropologists James Denbow and Phenyio Thebe give the following glimpse of the historical background to the practice of *Mmaditsela*:

According to custom, the groom's delegation, composed of both men and women, must wait by the nearest stream to the bride's home; they should not cross the stream before getting permission from the bride's family. If the delegation arrives after sunrise or crosses the stream before getting permission, they will be regarded as disrespectful and may be required to give an extra cow when *bogadi* is given. In large villages or towns where there may be no rivers or streams convenient to the bride's homestead, the groom's delegation must wait at the last main road for consent to cross. To ensure that the rules are followed, a man from the bride's family known as the *Mmaditsela* ("the one who controls the roads or paths") will be assigned to escort them across the barrier. After waiting besides, the stream or road, in some instances for most of the day to ensure that proper respect is given, the *Mmaditsela* will grant the groom's family permission to enter the bride's homestead. After waiting besides, the stream or road, in some instances for

³⁶ Though I have been *Mmaditsela* in more than four marriages, it is the four couples that agreed about my involvement in retrospect, when I requested their consent.

most of the day to ensure that proper respect is given, the *Mmaditsela* will grant the groom's family permission to enter the bride's homestead.³⁷

In the account above, it is the concept of "barrier" that is very significant. While in the past the barriers were physical as people married within the same culture today barriers are more complicated and varied in terms of language, marriage rites and rituals. Therefore, the role of the *Mmaditsela* has a wider scope. The two *Mmaditsela* from both sides meet and share what the expectations and ritual are to happen for each side. They then discuss with their side of the family how cultural barriers are to be navigated. I present two scenarios below to clarify how this happens, highlighting only those aspects where there was a clash in cultural practices or rituals.

The majority of marriages are done in two legs: The first leg takes place at the bride's place and the second one at the groom's place. The leg at the groom's place is commonly known as *go isa mosaic*, meaning "to take the bride to her husband's family or in-laws". In this stage, the *Mmaditsela* couples swap families. The two *Mmaditsela* from the groom's side join the bride's side and the two *Mmaditsela* from the bride side join the groom's side. This is done so that the cultural practices, rituals and general protocol for each side are done properly and so that the marriage gets the social acceptance that it deserves. Before I present the two scenarios I will present a sample of what expectations for each part are for each other. This was from a wedding of a close kin in April and May 2024.

Below are extracts from communication between two different ethnic groups about marriage – what each group extracts from the other. This communication is in the form of a letter.

Extract from the bride's letters

As the Pholo family, the marriage procedure that we use is the *Sehurutshe* as we are *Bahurutshe*. We therefore request that you bring the following when you come to ask the hand of our daughter in marriage.

1. *Serufho/pula molomo* – 1 live cow.³⁸
2. Eight cattle for *bogadi*/bride wealth (P3500.00 each cow in cash)
3. Firewood for cooking
4. Shelter for cooking area
5. *Setima molelo* (fire extinguisher)
6. Two blankets
7. Two bedsheets

37 Denbow and Thebe, *Culture and customs of Botswana*, 143.

38 *Pula molomo* literally means "to open mouths", meaning that it is only after the presentation of this cow that the two families for the first time can actually sit together in a meeting to discuss the marriage arrangements.

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8. Two pillows with pillowcases
9. Mattress
10. Paraffin lamp
11. Blue dress (German print)
12. Blanket and its safety pin
13. Head gear
14. Dress your bride from head to toe

Item 5, the *Setima molelo*/fire extinguishers, is very significant as it acknowledges the presence of fire “war” (jealousy, witchcraft, hatred etc.) within a marriage.

Extract from the groom’s letter

According to our Ikalanga culture procedure, when presenting the new bride at her groom’s place, we need you to bring the following:

1. Two bags of *disholwana*/fine grain particles³⁹
2. Firewood – 1 dyna load
3. Chair for the groom.
4. Relish for the groom.
5. Traditional brooms

The items are symbolic of the duties that the bride is expected to perform in respect of her husband, they are not meant for the groom’s family.

It is notable that item 1 from the bride family is a live cow. It is very significant. It is called the cow of *serufho/chinyadza melomo*. The literal meaning is to “open and wet the mouths” for discussions. This cow allows the bride and groom families to sit together and start marriage negotiations. While *lobola* cattle can be brought in monetary equivalent, this particular one must always be live. Without the presentation of it the marriage negotiations will not take place. The cow allows for a conversation to happen between the two “enemies” for the first time.

It is notable that items 3 from the bride’s and item 2 from the groom’s presents significant cultural differences. While on hand among the bride culture, Bahurutshe, it is the man’s husband who should provide firewood for cooking, on the other hand, among Bakalanga it is the duty of the wife. This is where *Mmaditsela* from the groom and brides’ sides need to negotiate. At times the negotiations are smooth

³⁹ Making meal from sorghum or millet grains is a process that includes pounding to remove husk from the grains, secondly pounding again to produce meal, at this stage some fine grain particles remains. These particles are called *disholwana/ditshetshetla*, *mase*, *shogwana* and other terms, depending on the ethnic group. These particles are the heart of sorghum or millet grain therefore produce a very tasty delicacy when cooked, hence food fit for a husband. This is the reason it is included in the list of what a bride should come with to her husband’s house.

but at times are complicated. In this particular marriage the mediators were not able to reach an agreement and agreed that the issue will be resolved at a meeting for both parties during the first leg of the marriage in April 2024. Items 6-9 relate to the solemnisation of marriage (in the past these items were used for virginity testing as well). As shall be demonstrated in Scenario Two. The solemnisation of marriage rituals can also pose a challenge among interethnic people.

Scenario One: Firewood practice

The groom was a Mokalanga while the bride is a Mokgatla. This couple had a child before they got married; therefore, when the marriage happened both families were relatively familiar with each other. Among the Bakalanga, it is the duty of the wife to gather firewood for cooking and to make the heater by the fireplace. During the second leg, the family of bride must include firewood in the list of items to take the groom's family. However, among Bakgatla it is the duty of the husband to gather firewood. After lengthy negotiations through Mmaditsela from both sides it was finally agreed that each family should do in respect of their child what is culturally expected so that each side would fulfil the practice properly. Therefore, firewood was exchanged both ways.

Scenario Two: Cultural consummation of marriage

During this marriage, I was not assigned any specific role, but I was part of the delegation. I was from the groom's side. One of the items in the list of items that the groom had to bring, in addition to the cattle, was a blanket and a set of sheets. However, an issue arose because there was no mattress, which the bride's family had assumed to be obvious to include. The groom's family argued that since the mattress was not in the list, it was difficult for them to have known. This argument could not suffice, because our Mmaditsela should have explained the need to include a mattress. After a lengthy argument, it was agreed that the omission needed to be rectified. We were penalised, fined and demanded to buy the mattress – and we did. The mattress was important, as it was part of an important ritual that was to happen in the evening. The groom's delegation then asked the Mmaditsela what this ritual was. The explanation was that after all the bride wealth protocols were concluded, in the evening around nine o'clock, the groom must go and spend the night with the bride to consummate the marriage – to have sex.⁴⁰ There was a lot of excitement among the younger generation at the thought that the consummation of marriage rituals was taking place in full knowledge of everyone present but concern among the elderly, as suspicions about involvement of traditional doctors ensued. The groom's family requested that the practice be explained, and it was made clear that there was no traditional doctor involved and all were comfortable with the procedure. However, in some cases if a common ground is not reached then a different way for navigation is sought.

40 Traditionally this was the time to test if the bride was virgin.

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In November and December 2022, I was a *Mmaditsela* for a different wedding (a cousin's wedding) where a similar issue arose. In this case, however, the bride and groom both did not want the rite to happen, so they took the issue into their hands. Normally, during the critical hours of the wedding, the groom and bride must not travel or leave their families. In this case, the bride claimed that they had run out of money to pay her makeup artist. The groom then explained that the only bank card with funds was the one he left in Gaborone, which was over 150 km from the bride's place, so he had to go and get it. This happened around nine o'clock in the evening, around the time that the groom should go and spend the night with his bride for the consummation of their marriage. The bride was troubled that she cannot do without her makeup the next day, as it was her wedding day. She expressed this to her parents and requested them to allow her husband to be to go back to Gaborone to get the money. Her parents made the request through me, their *Mmaditsela*, which I then forwarded to the groom's *Mmaditsela*. The request finally reached the groom's family, and the groom was allowed to leave with his best man so that he would not have to drive, but and would come back for the ritual. The groom then informed the family that it was impossible for them to leave Gaborone, as it was late, and the groom was not feeling well and wanted to see a doctor. Despite the reasons given, the bride's family was very angry that the ritual was not performed, and the groom's family was fined two cattle. The fine was paid during the second leg of the wedding, as the proceedings could not start before the issue was settled. It was only after the wedding that the groom explained that the couple had intentionally planned not to do the ritual and would rather pay the fine.

Mmaditsela plays a significant role in the bridging the gap between different ethnic groups when it comes to marriages. Though there are many ethnic groups speaking different languages, in all of the interethnic marriages that I have attended, the medium of instruction is Setswana; therefore, the Bakalanga mediators must be conversant with Setswana, but there is no expectations that the Setswana mediators need to be conversant with Ikalanga, the language of the Bakalanga. This is due to the political designation of Setswana and English as two official languages in Botswana. The educational institutions also use Setswana and English as media of instruction. The language barrier does not interfere with the marriage arrangements and protocol, but it does affect the transfer of the Ikalanga culture to children and the status of spouses of interethnic marriages who speak Setswana. This observation is consistent with Gültekin's finding that there is domination of one culture by the other, as the Ikalanga spouses assimilate into the Setswana culture due to political factors that recognise Setswana as an official language to the exclusion of other languages. Assimilation into another culture through the learning and teaching of the dominant language in the interethnic marriages privileges the transfer and transmission of one culture at the expense of another.

Though interethnic marriages cannot be easily characterised as conflict in the sense of war, tensions do arise. In some instances, one ethnic group in an interethnic

marriage might emphasise the weaknesses of the other,⁴¹ and pride and identity may contribute to such conflicts as well. As pointed above, the Intergroup Contact Theory posits that interethnic marriages reduces negative attitudes and behaviours between antagonistic groups. It has also been highlighted that traditionally, chiefs would marry close relatives of rival ethnic groups to forge peace. It is through the involvement of *Mmaditsela* in mediation during marriage negotiations that, on a practical way, differences are identified, negotiated and a common understanding created. Cultural differences are a major course of conflicts across interethnic marriages. These conflicts are a result of a myriad of reasons, such as ethnic pride and identity, even more so in instances where ethnic differences may also be associated with superior and inferior complexities. The availability of *Mmaditsela* in interethnic marriages in Botswana is significant in building bridges where significant ethnic differences exist – it is a way, evidently, through which cultural barriers are overcome.

CONCLUSION

Interethnic marriages are possible largely because of the support of the authorities and parents who approve of the marriages – and, in case of political marriages, chiefs from both ethnic groups are in agreement. The *Mmaditsela* practice in Botswana, a concrete example of Intergroup Contact Theory, is a vehicle that bridges the gaps between ethnic groups, simultaneously playing the role of barrier and solution to conflicts among different ethnic groups. It is applicable to interethnic marriages, since both couples and their parent's expect and perceive equal status in marriage and the success of the interethnic marriage is a common goal for both ethnic groups. The mediatory role that is played by *Mmaditsela* ensures that there is intergroup cooperation as cultures, rituals and practices are shared and negotiated in the process of establishing an interethnic marriage. Botswana has many ethnic groups and has enjoyed peaceful relations with no open ethnic wars or conflicts. The *Mmaditselana* practice is an African indigenous religious way of bridging a gap between two antagonistic groups in order to build a bridge through which cooperation is possible.

41 Ewelum, "Socio-Cultural Impact of Inter Ethnic Marriages in Nigeria", 11.