

Law, Religion and Reconciliation in Africa



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9 CONCILIATION AND RECONCILIATION: MARRIAGE AND INTERMARRIAGE AS STRATEGIES IN PURSUIT OF PEACE IN TRADITIONAL SHONA CULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

While the Western world has endorsed standard judicial systems in Africa that include councils of elders, chiefs' courts or open assemblies as forms of dispute settlement, other social institutions, particularly marriage and intermarriage, have also played important roles in conciliation and reconciliation in African societies.³ The institution of marriage in Africa is highly revered; for it is a respectable way in which men and women can officially live together as husband and wife, as well as procreate and live harmoniously with one another. Marriage and intermarriage among Africans are steeped in African culture and oral traditions that contain African cultural values – and this is particularly the case among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Oral traditions contain rich and diverse forms of knowledge, history and cultural expression passed down through generations via spoken words, songs, stories, proverbs and other forms of oral communication. These traditions are an integral part of African cultures, and they have played a significant role in shaping social, political and economic life in Africa. These oral traditions that epics, myths and legends demonstrate the conciliatory and reconciliatory roles of marriage and intermarriage in an African content.

Through examination of the history of Shona marriage and intermarriage, oral folklore traditions in key Shona epics and how this history and tradition is understood by Shona people today, the present study demonstrates how marriage and intermarriage, whether arranged or by the two parties' own volition, can act as a platform for brokering peace among warring parties. It is also meant to prevent potential conflict between non-warring groups whose people have married each other. In this study, we critically analyse the Shona Chaminuka and Nehoreka epics to demonstrate how these show marriage and intermarriage could be used as strategies for peace. The study explores how marriage and intermarriage were used as forms of peace settlement in African societies in general and Shona culture in particular. It also recommends that modern African society tap into these strategies

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3 Ajayi LT and Buhari LO. 2014. "Methods of Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Society", *An International Multidisciplinary Journal* 8(22):138-157.

to improve peace and stability in communities riddled with multiple conflicts. The study, thus, interrogates a critical aspect of African culture which has not received adequate attention and yet is an area which can be used in peace and reconciliation strategies in ways that can easily be accepted by local communities, since it is not an imposed method of dispute settlement, but is one hewn from within indigenous cultures and owned by the people.

MARRIAGE AND INTERMARRIAGE AS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICAN CULTURE

Marriage in the traditional Shona culture of Zimbabwe was considered an important social institution that involved elements of conciliation and mediation. Restitution and forgiveness have been important practices in traditional African culture. If a person wronged another, they were expected to apologise and seek forgiveness. The act of forgiveness was seen as essential to restoring social harmony and maintaining good relationships within the community. Traditional practices for resolving conflicts in Zimbabwean culture were varied and often based on the principles of restorative justice that focused on restoring balance and harmony within the community.

Elders were often called upon to mediate disputes within the community. The elders would listen to both sides of the argument and would work to find solutions that were acceptable to both parties. The elders were respected for their wisdom and experience, and their role as mediators was seen as essential to maintaining social harmony. Comparative religion scholar Oyeronke Olademo and her research colleagues have observed the use of religion and intermarriage as long-lasting and reconciliatory measures that have fostered peace between the Tsare and Sharagi ethnic groups in Nigeria.⁴ Similarly, among the Igbo of Nigeria, marriage was a revered institution that could be used as a peacemaking device.⁵

Marrying outside one's ethnic group was also believed to foster peace. Exogamy was practised, and different ethnic groups would be well acquainted with each other through intermarriage. Marriage across ethnic groups would foster mutual appreciation of respective cultural values that ensure binding relationships among in-laws. Eucharika Eze, a biblical scholar, and Ndidi Okey-Agbo, a linguist, further note that children from the union between two ethnic groups normally identify with both groups, thereby creating peace and harmony in society.⁶ Intermarriage promotes social networks between the marriage communities, thereby improving

4 Olademo O et al. 2016. "Resolving the Tsare-Sharagi Crises Through the Internal Mechanisms of Religion and Intermarriage", *ALORE: Ilorin Journal of the Humanities* 30:103-121.

5 Eze EA and Okey-Agbo NJ. 2016. "Marriage as peace-making device in conflict situations among the Igbo: Examples from selected Igbo plays", *International Journal of African and Asian Studies* 27:109-117.

6 Eze and Okey-Agbo, "Marriage as peace-making device in conflict situations among the Igbo".

social harmony and cohesion. While Eze and Okey-Agbo investigated the role of intermarriages among the Igbo of Nigeria, the present study focuses on the Shona people of Zimbabwe.

Among Africans, marriage and intermarriage have served as agents of peace. Philosophers of African religion, Anweting Ibok and Tony Ogar have observed that among the Somali, if two ethnic groups fight resulting in death, a marriage was arranged to compensate the death of the person from the affected clan.⁷ Such an arranged marriage would bring peace between the two affected clans. Furthermore, Ibok and Ogar also note that in some Somali traditions, “unmarried women called herein from one of the warring clans visit the opposing clan without the knowledge or consent of their families. The ladies would in turn offer to be married by the opposing side. The marriage was conducted, and it was acceptable practice.”⁸ In a study of conflict resolution strategies among the Ondo, a sub-ethnic group of the Yoruba, Ibok and Ogar concluded that home-grown conflict resolution methods have proved suitable and effective.⁹ Furthermore, Zimbabwean writer Charles Mungoshi’s short story in *Writing Still*, has demonstrated that even in modern society this is still possible.¹⁰ Tayeva, a young girl in his short story, opts to join a different ethnic community in a bid to pacify what they believed was believed to be an avenging spirit. This amply demonstrates how marriage and intermarriage were used as form of peace in African societies.

Marriage alliances between rival groups were seen as a way to cement peace and establish bonds of kinship between communities that were previously in conflict. Arranging marriages across ethnic or territorial boundaries helped promote cooperation and interdependence. The exchange of bride price (*lobola*) was an important ritual that sealed these marital alliances. The payment of livestock or goods represented a sacrifice that helped heal divisions and reconcile warring groups, and this formed part of the negotiations that solemnised the union. Marriage was also seen as a way for rival groups to establish family ties. With bonds through progeny from the marriage union, communities had a strong incentive to maintain peaceful relations to ensure the well-being of their offspring.¹¹

In addition to this, the process of mediating a dispute was done through the selection of elders, and this was often based on their reputation for wisdom, fairness

7 Ibok AK and Ogar OT. 2018. “Traditional Roles of African Women in Peace Making and Peace Building: An Evaluation”, *IGNOSI: An interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis* 1(1):41-56.

8 Ibok and Ogar, “Traditional Roles of African Women in Peace Making and Peace Building”, 50.

9 Ibok and Ogar, “Traditional Roles of African Women in Peace Making and Peace Building”.

10 Mungoshi C. 2003. *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe*. Harare: Weaver Press.

11 Chigidi WL. 2009. “Shona Taboos: The Language of Manufacturing Fears for Sustainable Development”, *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3(1):174-188; Dodo O. 2015. *Traditional Taboos Defined: Conflict Prevention Myth as and Realities*. Bindura: Bindura University Press; Tatira L. 2016. “The Shona concept of marriage with special reference to procreation and fertility”, *South African Journal of African Languages* 36(1):123-127.

and impartiality. These elders were respected members of the community who had demonstrated their ability to resolve conflicts and maintain social harmony. Thus, conciliation refers to the process of initiating or resolving a dispute or conflict between two or more parties through peaceful means, such as negotiation and mediation, before the dispute degenerates into a broken relationship. It involves the parties coming together to discuss their differences and working towards finding a mutually acceptable solution. Therefore, conciliation is a proactive and preventive method to resolve conflict, particularly if done before the conflict deteriorates or escalates. Reconciliation, on the other hand, refers to the process of restoring a ruined relationship or resolving conflicts between individuals, groups or nations after a period of tension or disagreement.

In this chapter, we take conciliation as a preferred measure because it prevents serious conflict. Accordingly, intermarriages in traditional society are regarded as conciliatory measures aimed at avoiding conflict and preventing the more drastic efforts of reconciliation. Marriages were arranged by the families of the bride and groom, and the process of negotiation and agreement often involved the mediation of elders and other respected members of the community. Accordingly, in Zimbabwe, traditional marriage practices also involved elements of conciliation and mediation. This largely depended on the type of marriage, and usually there were types of marriage that were predisposed to deal with conflict as discussed in this paper.

Among the Shona, marriage is very important.¹² The two individuals who get married do it not for themselves but for the whole ethnic group.¹³ However, while folklore and indigenous knowledge scholar Levison Tatira's concept of marriage focuses on procreation and fertility, there are other uses for which marriage was reserved, and these include marriages for peace and conflict management purposes, roles that a significant number of women enjoyed fulfilling.¹⁴ For some women, however, there was potentially latent conflict, especially among those who did not willingly submit to this arrangement. All the same, it was clear chiefs and kings in traditional times would offer their close relatives in marriage as a genuine gesture to pursue peace. In the two epics *Chaminuka* and *Nehoreka* the chiefs, Lobengula and Makate offered their niece and sister, respectively.

The paper thus focuses on Shona oral traditions, with special emphasis on the two epics, the *Chaminuka* epic, as recreated in *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* by historical novelist Solomon Mutswairo¹⁵ and the *Nehoreka* epic, which is more sparsely documented. Reference is also made to *zviera* (taboos or avoidance rules) that prevented potential conflict and hence ensured peace. Information from the latter was drawn from interviews with purposively selected participants. The two

12 Gudhlanga ES and Makaudze G. 2012. "Gender Issues in Some Traditional Shona Marriage Customs: An African Womanist Perspective", *Quiet Mountain: New Feminist Essays A Journal of Women's Writing* IX(V):1-16.

13 Tatira, "The Shona concept of marriage with special reference to procreation and fertility".

14 Gudhlanga and Makaudze, "Gender Issues in Some Traditional Shona Marriage Customs.

15 Mutswairo S. 1994. *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*. Harare: Haper Collins Publishers.

epics were selected as the most prominent surviving epics that speak to traditional culture. Taboos were also selected for the same reason of pursuing peace. They also form part of the Shona traditional belief systems; hence, it is indisputable that traditional practices and African Traditional Religion were inseparable. Tabona Shoko, an indigenous African religion scholar, adds that, "Religion and culture are so intertwined that it is impossible to speak of one without the other. Marriage is thus one of the key religio-cultural institutions in Africa and manifests the unity of African religio-cultures in its various expressions among African ethnic communities."¹⁶

THEORY AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

Arranged marriages have been viewed negatively and openly castigated in modern society, but they have also had limited scrutiny in terms of their merit. In line with this, the term "forced marriage" has been used interchangeably with arranged marriages. Critics of African marriage customs often highlight deplorable aspects of the given customs based on touristic and cursory glances outside of their contexts, but not from insiders' perspectives. They argue that these arranged marriages are human rights abuses that occur across numerous ethnic groups in Africa. To counter this view, this chapter explores how such marriages were used among the Shona and other ethnic groups as forms of peacebuilding.

In this chapter, we argue that indigenous Shona marriage practices have been used as forms of conflict management. There are significant instances in which African marriage customs, in this case those of the Shona, afforded the community an opportunity for cordial relations, especially in conflict-ridden or potentially conflictual relations. It further postulates that if Shona marriage customs are analysed in their proper historical and socio-cultural context, one easily sees the positive aspects of such marriage customs, which include peacebuilding. This use of marriage can also be seen in other conflict management strategies drawn from other forms of traditional practices and folklore, indicating considerable cultural support. The specific research objectives of this study are thus: (1) to explore selected folklore to get a deeper understanding of how marriage and intermarriage are used in peace building, (2) to identify conciliatory and reconciliatory measures brought about through marriage as presented in folklore and (3) to assess the effectiveness of such measures.

This study is informed by the *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is premised on "humanity through recognising the humanity of others"¹⁷ and creating a communal atmosphere that emphasises "kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa".¹⁸ *Ubuntu* recognises strong cultural expectations that extend to family and other

16 Shoko T. 2007. *Karanga Traditional Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Wellbeing*. Oxfordshire: Routledge.

17 Samkange SJWT and Samkange S. 1980. *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indigenous Political Philosophy*. Harare: Graham Publishing, 15.

18 Ramose MB. 1999. *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Harare: Mond Books, 271.

community members who care for one another in the spirit of oneness.¹⁹ Thus, within the *Ubuntu* cultural practice, families and communities embrace each other and share the bond of reciprocal love, including through marriage and intermarriage.²⁰ *Ubuntu* is pertinent to this study, which hopes to bring to the fore the unrecognised role of peacebuilding brought about by arranged marriage and intermarriage among the Shona, as well as to proffer a way forward in managing conflict in present-day Zimbabwe. In this study, we argue that despite possessing areas of challenge that need adjustments, good practices drawn from *Ubuntu*²¹ can still be useful in understanding the role of arranged marriage and intermarriage in peacebuilding. We contend that if *Ubuntu* is fully embraced, the Zimbabwean community can continue to excel in managing conflict even with severely limited judicial facilities.

To examine this, we adopted a qualitative methodology design, which made it possible to investigate how the Shona used marriage and intermarriage, embedded in *Ubuntu* philosophy, as form of conflict resolution. The purposive sampling method was used in identifying conveniently selected elders in Harare Metropolitan Province who would help the researchers to understand how marriage and intermarriage were used in peacebuilding among the Shona, with special reference to Chaminuka and Nehoreka epics. This type of sampling method enabled the researchers to select sources that were regarded as data-rich sources.²² The study draws heavily from the Critical Narrative Analysis.²³ The research design aims to show how the Chaminuka and Nehoreka epics exhibit the Shona justice system of marriage and intermarriage. Through the methodology of Critical Narrative Analysis, the study endeavours to document Shona cosmology through the two selected epics, thus demonstrating how marriage and intermarriage resolves conflict among the Shona. Other myths and taboos were conveniently used as a way of augmenting the cultural perspective of the study, and these were largely drawn from community elders and the literary texts under study.

PEACEBUILDING AND ORAL FOLKLORE AS RESOURCES: THE CHAMINUKA AND MAKATE/NEHOREKA EPICS

This section focuses mainly on two epics popularly known as the Chaminuka and Makate/Nehoreka epics. It highlights how women's roles in epic and traditional folklore are often relegated to the periphery, yet they play pivotal roles in matters of

19 Kalomo EN and Bestorm FH. 2018. "Caregiving in Sub-Saharan Africa and Older Female Caregivers in the Era of HIV/AIDS: A Namibian Perspective", *Grand Families: The Contemporary Journal of Research, Practice and Policy* 5(1):33-48.

20 Kalomo and Bestorm, "Caregiving in Sub-Saharan Africa and Older, Female Caregivers".

21 Manyonganise M. 2023. "Caught in-between two worlds: *Ubuntu* identity and the African diaspora", *Zimbabwe International Journal of Culture and Heritage Studies* 1(1):15-30.

22 Creswell JW. 2014. *Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Fourth Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

23 Barone TE. 1992. "Theory and method: A case of critical storytelling", *Theory into Practice: Qualitative Issues in Educational Research* 3(2):144-146.

governance. Arranged marriages that required previously conflicting ethnic groups to bury the hatchet, depended on the willingness of such women to take risks and make sacrifices on behalf of their communities. Both the Chaminuka and Makate/Nehoreka epics have a lot in common and ride on this concept of the use of marriage as conciliation and reconciliation. Chieftains Chaminuka and Makate at one point were at war with indigenous chiefs, Lobengula and Nehoreka, respectively. Under Chaminuka, the Shona were persistently under attack from the warring Ndebele ethnic group. In line with tradition regarding peace, neither chief Chaminuka and nor chief Nehoreka denies the gift women sent to them – Baveya from the Ndebele and waMakate from a fellow indigenous Shona group, the Makate. The women were taken as olive branches extended towards peace. In both cases, the emissaries who were sent to present Baveya and waMakate constituted the mediating team that negotiated the marriages with Chaminuka and Nehoreka. It should be noted that Chaminuka and Nehoreka received their “gift” wives in sincerity, as it was a known practice. Political scientist Obadiah Dodo confirms how marriage has been used, since traditional times, as a conciliatory gesture in resolving conflict.²⁴ The irony of this gesture, in the case of Lobengula and Makate, was how it was abused by both chiefs in a bid to wrench power from their erstwhile adversaries. These gift women had considerable agency and were not just passive. Indeed, they acted as spies for their natal groups, exporting vital information concerning the power of their husbands. It happened that waMakate was successful in gathering enough intelligence on the charms that kept Nehoreka powerful, which she then gave to her brother Makate, leading to the dissolution of the Nehoreka empire, with Nehoreka fleeing with his family and disappearing into a rock.²⁵ This section thus largely draws lessons from the Chaminuka epic, whose gift wife served as a momentary example of the effects of marriage alliances.

The marriage alliance between Chaminuka and Baveya can be seen as a model for resolving cross-cultural and ethnic conflict in several ways. Both Chaminuka, a Shona, and Baveya, a Ndebele, set aside their cultural differences and past conflicts and formed a bond based on mutual respect. They formed a connection based on their shared human spirit that transcended cultural identities. Chaminuka and Baveya thus represent and demonstrate that meaningful cross-cultural bonds can be formed between their respective ethnic groups based on commitment to burying past conflicts. Ultimately, the seeming conciliatory measures by the Ndebele through Lobengula appeared to represent true reconciliation. Baveya falls in love with Chaminuka and admits that the people of Chaminuka’s stronghold Chitungwiza “treat me like a daughter”,²⁶ and she grows to love the peace-loving people as opposed to her Ndebele kith and kin who were warring.

24 Dodo O. 2015. *Traditional Taboos Defined: Conflict Prevention Myth as and Realities*. Bindura: Bindura University Press.

25 Musiyiwa M. 2020. “The Significance of Myths and Legends in Children’s Literature in Contemporary Zimbabwe”. IBBY 2020 Virtual Conference, ibby.org.

26 Mutswairo S. 1994. *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*. Harare: Haper Collins Publishers, 125.

Baveya's commitment to Chaminuka does not falter, even when Chaminuka is captured and tortured. She shares in Chaminuka's suffering and her anguish highlights the intimate bond between them despite initial differences in their relationship. She even pleads to her people on behalf of Chaminuka when he is about to be killed so that he is spared. Their relationship thus symbolises oneness that transcends ethnic differences as well as different faiths: Chaminuka was a traditionalist, spiritual medium and high priest, while Baveya was a Christian. As individuals from historically divided communities, their coming together represents a spiritual unification fostered by a marriage that was meant to bring two ethnic groups together.

Lessons from the Baveya and waMakate's tenure with new ethnic ties are evident in the relative peace that was enjoyed by both groups, as they were perceived to be gathering intelligence about their husbands for their natal ethnic groups. In *Chaminuka*, author Solomon Mutswairo reveals, "Months went by [more than a year]. Only rumours of the endless raids of the Ndebele continued to reach Chitungwiza."²⁷ This means that the Ndebele continued with war but spared Chitungwiza because of the marriage bond through Baveya.

The Chaminuka epic, however, offers more in terms of details of the epic, as documented by Mutswairo. Apart from the marriage alliance, the story unravels its use as a form of reconciliation. The fictionalised epic documents some of the different ways in which conflicts were resolved among the Zezuru in Chitungwiza. One man asks what is to be done in the event that someone kill his wife, to which Chaminuka responds, "Our ancestors enacted a law, that if a man kills another, he will be brought before a judge and a council of elders, who shall order the loss be recompensed by giving a young woman to the bereaved man to bear him children and to restore the loss of blood."²⁸

This story within a story is more evidence of the ways that young adolescent girls were involved in the restorative justice without which the Shona believed would escalate into *ngozi* (an avenging spirit), another form of conflict representing an aggrieved deceased. Obadiah Dodo highlights how it was taboo to kill and how the sanctity of life was revered among the Shona. Specifically, Dodo writes:

Ukauraya, unoripa nemwanasikana wako (If you kill, you compensate by surrendering your virgin daughter to the victim's family). Killing another person is unacceptable in every culture. However, some people are not deterred from committing such heinous offences. To deal with such people, traditional societies came up with a system of compensation whereby the murderer is required to surrender his/her virgin daughter to the family of the victim. The daughter is then given to any male member of the victim's family as a wife regardless of whether there is love or not. The new couple

27 Mutswairo, *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, 147.

28 Mutswairo, *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, 123.

is expected to bear children and the first boy child is then named after the deceased (that is if the deceased was a male).²⁹

Therefore, two families or communities who are conflicted through killing are reconciled and the marriage bond is permanent. Chamunogwa Nyoni underlines the effects of taboos among communities to maintain peace and states that the “earliest social systems that regulated society and were supposed to whip into line any individuals who transgressed against such taboos.”³⁰ Hence, through marriage alliances, warring ethnic groups would desist from the conflict, since they would regard each other as bound by blood as new blood relations, particularly if there were children born out of the union.

In the interviews we conducted about taboos through marriage and intermarriage to broker peace, one elderly man brought out an interesting dimension, namely, that *zviera* (taboos) present themselves once two previously unrelated ethnic groups consider themselves kith and kin.³¹ The two groups’ status immediately changes through marriage. For example, a woman is considered sacred; hence, the respect for the mother figure becomes entrenched into a newly forged relationship through marriage. In his novel *Things Fall Apart*, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe stipulates that “Mother is Supreme”,³² thereby highlighting the status of a woman once she becomes part of a community and has offspring. Through marriage, erstwhile enemies do not retain their old traditions but adopt new ones attained in the new relationship. That way, peace is extended, and harmony maintained. The several elders whom we interviewed on the *zviera* (taboos) or avoidance rules agreed that no one wanted to bear the repercussions of flouting any of the laid-down avoidance rules, especially when dealing with one’s mother, no matter her ethnic background. Regarding the role of the mother in society one elder said:

PaChiShona mai vakakosha. Kutakura mwedzi mupfumbamwe handi nyore. Chero vasisipo, hanzvadzi dzavo dzinoramba dziri mai vako. Ukavatadzira unotiza botso kana mukatadza kuvariya rudzi rwese runopera. (Amongst the Shona, the mother is very important. Carrying nine months [of pregnancy] is no mean feat. Even when she is no longer there, her brothers remain your mother. If you wrong your mother, you have to go through a painful ritual and failure to compensate her for the grievance may result in a whole clan perishing.)³³

The elder brought in a new dimension of gender parity whereby maternal male relatives could adopt the female title to underline the importance of the mother in society for the harmonious existence of society. Among the Shona people, male relatives from the maternal side are regarded as mothers, while female relatives

29 Dodo O. 2015. *Traditional Taboos Defined: Conflict Prevention Myths and Realities*. Bindura: Bindura University Press, 31.

30 Nyoni C. 2015. “Foreword”, Dodo O, *Traditional Taboos Defined: Conflict Prevention Myths and Realities*. Bindura: Bindura University Press, ix.

31 Interview with Participant A by E Gudhlanga. Harare, Zimbabwe, 17 February 2023.

32 Achebe C. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.

33 Interview with Participant B by A Madongonda. Harare, Zimbabwe, 23 March 2023.

from the father's side are regarded as fathers. Nigerian poet and anthropologist, Ifi Amadiume, in her seminal work *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, concurs with the elderly lady whose interview we note above when she argues that the gender system among the Igbo of Nigeria challenges the Western concept of binary gender roles and highlights the importance of understanding and respecting diverse cultural practices.³⁴ Similarly, gender roles also operate in the same way among the Shona. Men can adopt a female identity and take on female roles and responsibilities. Not only is this shift in roles conciliatory, but it also resolves some challenges in the absence of a mother figure. The maternal relations continue to play an important part even in the absence of the literal mother, hence ensuring peace.

Mutswairo's novel, *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, also demonstrates the power the eponymous protagonist wields in preventing conflict. Chaminuka's prophetic powers and his adopted ideology of pursuing peace ensured that his people would not randomly get involved in conflict. To underline this, Zimuto, a member of his council of chiefs, under serious threat from the Ndebele, beseeched Chaminuka to mobilise an army to defend against an imminent attack from the Ndebele, but Chaminuka reassured him that Lobengula's days were numbered and that "Every oppressor has his time."³⁵ The pursuit of peace was a strength for the people of Chitungwiza, since they avoided war. This underscores the various strategies that traditional society utilised in avoiding, preventing and resolving conflict.

The two epics are a demonstration that antagonistic sides can forge a relationship and settle disputes – although the marriage alliances between antagonistic parties did not materialise because of sinister and dishonest ulterior motives, the epics demonstrate, through verifiable and documented evidence, that such unions were possible. Despite it being a difficult choice, women submitted to marrying foreign ethnic groups to save their communities, as demonstrated by Baveya and waMakate. Notwithstanding the marriages being arranged, the married couple can develop a mutual understanding, respectful and loving relationship. Peace prevails during the subsistence of the marriage, implying that the antagonistic groups would not go to war when one of their own was still in the camp of a presumed enemy. For the months that Baveya was with the Shona, there was no war between the people of Chitungwiza and the Ndebele. At the same time Makate only attacked Nehoreka when waMakate was out of the way.

OTHER FORMS OF MARRIAGE THAT FOSTERED CONCILIATION AND RECONCILIATION

There are different types of marriage among the Shona, and arranged marriages are among them. These were done in a bid to fulfill certain obligations, including pursuit of peace through conciliation and reconciliation purposes. Two conflicting sides could break their differences when one side would initiate or propose a

34 Amadiume I. 2007. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*.

35 Mutswairo, *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, 127.

marriage alliance in a bid to bury the hatchet and start a new chapter. One example is that of cases involving murder. One of our interviewees explained that even though it appeared inhuman to present an undefiled girl child as a replacement for the murdered person, the reverse was true. The girl child was presented not for replacement purposes per se but to extend the lineage as it would have been the case when the deceased was alive. If it was a man, then the girl was supposed to bear a son for this purpose. As noted in the analysis of the Chaminuka epic above, this was the practice of *kuripa ngozi-mukadzi wengozi* (compensating an avenging spirit through a girl child) in which usually a girl child was chosen to represent the peace deal.³⁶

Additional interview participants revealed that another type of marriage that helped to keep marriage ties strong and peaceful was the matrilineal residence, where a man lived with his wife's family (*kutema ugariri*).³⁷ This usually happened when a poor, honest man presented himself to provide his *lobola* payment in kind. Rather than use the unpopular option of *kutizisa* (eloping), which might be cause for potential conflict with the family of the girl for non-payment of *lobola*, a man could opt for this not-so-easy option. Eloping was likely to escalate into a potential conflict, so to avoid this, the man offered himself and provided labour for a stipulated period before he was awarded his wife. This helped reinforce these interethnic relationships that fostered peace. Residing with an in-law group exposed men to different cultural practices and built familiarity between groups. They were a means of forging ties where no previous bond existed. Their transfers represented an important symbolic gesture that fostered peace.

A few interview participants raised other forms of marriage alliances that ensured peace amongst the Shona. Another form of marriage raised by most of them was that of *kugara nhaka*, where a brother would inherit his deceased brother's wife. In a similar fashion, through the *chimutsamapfihwa* ritual, a niece could take over from her deceased aunt by marrying her uncle. These were conciliatory measures that were meant to prevent the conflicts that often accompanied the distribution of the deceased's estate and a marriage into a totally different family or ethnic groups different from that of the deceased. It meant inherited property would remain within the family as well as avoiding potential conflicts that came with stepfamilies. However, as we have discussed in other writing, these types of marriages have lost their popularity during times of sexually transmitted pandemics, such as HIV and AIDS.³⁸

Marriage was thus one of the political strategies that aimed at pursuing harmony amongst a people. In many ways, marriage and the ties it represented were crucial tools for managing conflicts, reconciling differences and constructing cordial relationships in pre-colonial Zimbabwean societies. Marital alliances helped turn

³⁶ Dodo, *Traditional Taboos Defined*.

³⁷ Interview with Participant A by E Gudhlanga. Harare, Zimbabwe: 17 February 2023; Interview with Participant C by A Madongonda. Harare, 30 March 2023.

³⁸ Gudhlanga and Makaudze, "Gender Issues in Some Traditional Shona Marriage Customs.

erstwhile enemies into kin and built a foundation of durable peace. This exploration of unique traditions on peacebuilding helps to emphasise the importance of community, relationships and restorative justice. It provides a framework for promoting peace and harmony that is grounded in the values of interconnectedness and mutual respect even in contemporary society. However, sometimes in these forms of arranged marriages, particularly when girls were made to be part of a reparation process, the girl in question was made to stay in a hut built for her outside of the homestead because she was regarded as the wife of the dead person. In cases like these, while peace was observed in the two larger families in conflict, the girl concerned was a victim and sometimes nursed latent conflict against her people for sacrificing her.

CONCLUSION

In keeping with Shona traditional belief systems, marriage rituals among the Shona, apart from being socially and culturally binding, were also deeply entrenched into Shona ways of worship. Traditional African religion plays a significant role in peacekeeping and peacebuilding in many African societies. It is a complex system of beliefs, practices and values that are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of African people. Traditional African religion recognises the interconnectedness of all aspects of life, including the spiritual, social and environmental dimensions, with marriage and blood ties being the centre of all critical relationships.³⁹ This chapter has demonstrated that marriage bonds can help foster peace in conflict-ridden communities or potentially conflicting ethnic groups.

While contemporary society frowns upon arranged marriages, which are presumed to be forced, we argue that modern African society should take a leaf from the positive aspects of traditional marriage customs as possible strategies in peacebuilding and could benefit from relying on homegrown strategies in peacebuilding. This means they can still be used in contemporary society, despite likely clashes with Christian marriage norms that now prevail in many sub-Saharan African societies.

Scholars agree that there is a need for indigenous methods of conflict resolution in Africa.⁴⁰ This augurs well with *Ubuntu* philosophy, whose roots are deeply entrenched in the idea of peace and harmony, both within oneself and among others. It recognises the importance of relationships and the need for individuals to live in a way that promotes social cohesion and mutual respect. In the context of peacebuilding, the *Ubuntu* philosophy has been used to promote conflict resolution and reconciliation of aggrieved parties. It is thus important to draw from the wisdom of traditional times to maintain peace in today's world and to harmonise such traditions from the pre-colonial era and contemporary society, so that the former is viewed in a positive light instead of demonising them.

39 Shoko, *Karanga Traditional Religion in Zimbabwe*.

40 Paul GD. 2015. "Predicting participation in a victim-offender conference", *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 8(2):100-118.