

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The three-legged pot and the lasting impact of the Gukurahundi: Shona Ndebele inter-tribal families in England

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**Received:** July 25, 2022;

**Accepted:** September 10, 2022;

**Published:** September 14, 2022.

**Citation:** Maendesa C and Hakak Y. The three-legged pot and the lasting impact of the Gukurahundi: Shona Ndebele inter-tribal families in England. *Soc Work Soc Welf*, 4(2): 242-251.

<https://doi.org/10.25082/SWSW.2022.02.004>

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**Abstract:** This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of Shona/Ndebele inter-tribal families in England, the challenges they face, and their responses to these. The findings show that the atrocities of the Gukurahundi continue to cast their shadow on some of these families. Disapproval of the marriage from one or both sides of the couple's parents leads to the couple's parents' subsequent lack of interest in the children born in these families. This is then extended to the wider family. Gender imbalances, culture shock and communication difficulties were other challenges faced by such couples. Couples learned to compromise and bring their cultures together, for example through cooking. The three-legged pot' metaphor was used by older women to teach younger, mainly Ndebele, women to accept male infidelity. This study will inform practitioners working with such couples as well as other mixed couples, especially those originating from areas of conflict.

**Keywords:** Zimbabwe, inter-tribal families, migration, England

## 1 Introduction

The United Kingdom is characterized by its growing ethnic and cultural heterogeneity [1]. According to the Office of National Statistics (2019) [2], there are 128,000 Zimbabwean-born living in Britain. This population is geographically dispersed across Britain but is mainly concentrated in England, especially in London. Zimbabweans can also be found in Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Luton, Slough, Leicester, Sheffield, Doncaster, Bournemouth, Oxford, Bristol as well as Coventry and Edinburgh [1]. The majority of Zimbabweans in England are educated professionals, belonging to the middle and upper class in their homeland [1, 3, 4].

Zimbabweans who migrated to England and are married in inter-tribal marriages need to bridge the cultural differences with both their spouse and English culture [1, 5]. Kim and Park (2009) [6] argue that individuals experience the challenges of "unlearning" who they originally were when they relocate to a different cultural environment and adjust to it. In some cases, not being able to 'unlearn' and adjust to the new culture is part of the reason some Zimbabweans lose their children to social services [5, 7]. Most first-generation Zimbabwean immigrants exposed to Western civilization face the challenges of adjusting to English culture [5, 8].

But bridging such cultural differences should not be the sole responsibility of migrants. Professionals interacting with them should also help to create such bridges. Studies have shown that children from minority groups, including those from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, are significantly over-represented in the care system [9]. Studies focusing on specific local authorities in England have also noted vastly disproportional rates of children in the care system for this group [10]. Owen and Statham (2009) [9] show that while children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds in England are most likely to be adopted, along with children from white backgrounds, they also tend to stay in care longer than those from other ethnic groups. Their research also highlighted that a high percentage of children from Black, minority ethnic and mixed backgrounds entered the care system as babies or under 1 year old. Similarly, this population is also thought to be overrepresented in Child in Need procedures and receiving support services [9]. Possible factors that may contribute to over-representation include high rates of poverty, large families, single-parent households, and disability. Other factors also considered differential treatment or cultural differences including families' attitudes towards welfare professionals and the practices of professionals towards this group. Okpokiri (2021) suggests that negative experiences of institutions are affecting black African parents' trust and engagement with child welfare services where they feel they are treated with suspicion and dealt with heavy-handedly. The limited familiarity with the Zimbabwean culture of most UK practitioners is likely to increase misunderstanding. We hope that this article will help

in increasing practitioners' familiarity and understanding of these mixed couples and the Zimbabwean culture they originate from.

Our research is focused on the experiences of Zimbabwean mixed couples and their children living in England where one spouse is Shona, the other, is Ndebele. Zimbabwe comprises different ethnic tribes as a nation where endogamy (Endogamy, also called in-marriage, custom enjoining one to marry within one's own group [11]. has been practiced and inter-ethnic marriage, especially between Shona and Ndebele, has been unacceptable [1, 12]. In the 1980s, those who married across ethnic and political lines were some of the first victims of violent oppression under the rule of the government [13].

Past family research explored a range of mixed marriages, but little is known about inter-tribal couples [14]. Especially scarce is the information about mixed couples from the Shona and Ndebele tribes. Such marriages were especially frowned upon due to the bloody history between these two tribes [15]. This study aims to explore the experiences of these couples in England and understand the challenges they face and how they respond to them. Research has shown deficit-based initiatives to be ineffective in creating sustainable change in families compared to strengths-based community-driven initiatives [16]. Therefore, exploring the strengths of these families and how they overcome challenges, manage their differences, and raise their children, would be of key interest. The study is also meant to enhance the knowledge of practitioners who might interact with such couples.

## 1.1 The Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean population is estimated at 14.65 million people. 98% are Black Africans and 1% White. Asians and peoples of mixed ancestry make up the remaining population. Out of the Black Africans, the Shona are approximately 82%, the Ndebele are 14% [17] and the rest are other Black Africans. Although the Shona and Ndebele speak different languages and are dispersed in separate geographical areas of the country, the two belong to the major Bantu family [18]. The Shona tribe's language is also called Shona (Bantu) and the Ndebele's language is IsiNdebele. The Ndebele are the descendants of King Lobengula, who fled from the Zulu warrior Shaka in the 19th Century to Transvaal, and they are incorporated into the Gauteng and Northern Provinces of today's South Africa. Mixed Shona and Ndebele marriages began when King Lobengula's father, King Mzilikazi, arrived in today's Zimbabwe in 1835. Thata (2020) [19], a social commentator, argues that 'these two ethnic people hate each other from the bone going out... *The hatred between Shona and Ndebele still exists and it is naked, raw, and uncouth. This is a cause to be concerned about because we live in the afternoon of our lives and to think that we are leaving behind children who have inherited ethnic divides that hold on to deep-seated tribal hatred and tribal intolerance is disturbing...*' [19].

The animosity between these two tribes was worsened by the politically motivated 'Gukurahundi', a series of massacres of approximately 20,000 Ndebele people in the Matabeleland region, the southeast of the country (see fig 1). This was perpetuated by the Zimbabwean National Army between the years 1983 and 1987. The word 'Gukurahundi' which derives from the Shona language means, "the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains", metaphorically referring to 'something seen as worthless' [20]. During the social unrest, the Ndebele suspected of supporting the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in Matabeleland and the Midlands province in Zimbabwe were detained by the 5th Brigade (mainly ZANU and a Shona tribe) and executed [20]. As Shona-Ndebele marriages were forbidden by the government at that time, they were among the first to be targeted [20].

This social divide is still strongly felt in contemporary Zimbabwe [21, 22] with both groups residing in distinct areas. As the Shona are a much larger group, they hold key positions in the government and are disproportionately better represented in all other institutions. While the number of Shona Ndebele couples, and the tolerance towards them in contemporary Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, is increasing (Xinhua General News Service, 11 March 2007), according to the Refugee Documentation Centre (2017) [15], they still face many challenges. There is currently almost no data on such couples in contemporary Zimbabwe or outside of it.

## 1.2 Shona and Ndebele's customary marriage

Similarities in marriage rites exist between the Shona and Ndebele cultures, where the bridegroom pays the bride's price to the bride's family, which is known as 'roora' in Shona and 'amalobolo' in Ndebele [23]. The purpose of this payment is 'to legalize the marriage' and any marriage that does not comply with this ritual is regarded as nothing more than casual sex or prostitution [23, 24]. Agreeing and paying the bride price remains a common practice among contemporary Shona and Ndebele and only once this has been paid a couple is considered married [24].

On top of the bride-price, bride-wealth, known as *ikhazi* in Ndebele or *rusambo* in Shona,

is also required from the groom [24]. It normally consists of cattle but may be paid instead in cash. Marital negotiations between the two families are an extended process involving the intermediary known as '*munyai*' in Shona and '*Usodombo/umkhongi*' in Ndebele [24].

Mangena and Ndlovu (2013) [23] highlight a growing trend to "commercialize" lobola and turn it from a cultural practice into a source of wealth for the bride's parents. To determine the bride price, her upbringing and her educational and professional status are considered. In most cases, when parents are aware that their son-in-law is rich, they charge a higher bride price [23, 25]. During the wedding ceremony, families dance, clap hands and ululate in appreciation of the newly married couple's and families' unions [24]. The Shona and Ndebele cultural rituals also involve sending a woman to her home area during her first pregnancy for a *kusungira* ritual where the wife would get guidance and counselling on how to handle the newly born baby from her parents and relatives. One of the questions we ask is how do Shona/Ndebele inter-married couples in England manage their differing marriage customs?

The term 'marriage' receives multiple meanings and interpretations amongst the Shona - Ndebele inter-tribal marriages in England. The 'move-in' version where a man and a woman cohabitate without going through the traditional Shona or Ndebele marriage customs is popular [1]. This is due to several reasons including fear of rejection, or real rejection or disapproval of the marriage by their extended families [1]. For some, simply 'moving in' is the only way their relationship may be possible in a social context that still largely forbids it [1].

### 1.3 Coping mechanisms

Several studies explored the Ndebele and Shona social networks, but very little has been written on marriages between individuals from these tribes, the families they form and their siblings [1, 26]. Coping mechanisms identified among intercultural couples more broadly include striving for mutual understanding and reconciliation of cultural differences, developing cross-cultural communication, and building intimacy and a third culture [16]. Reconciling cultural differences strengthened couples' bonds and helped cope with negative social perceptions. Mixed marriages serve to weaken social boundaries between groups and the negative perceptions toward members of the other group [26].

Research indicates that strong links exist between religion and marriage outcomes [27]. Higher levels of religiosity have been associated with better marriage quality, marriage satisfaction and an increased likelihood of remaining married [27]. Religious discourse and seeing marriage as sacred have also been linked to positive marriage outcomes [27]. In this regard, the Christian faith has resulted in changing the perceptions Shona and Ndebele people have of each other. Christianity is the main religion in contemporary Zimbabwe practised by over 70% of the population and churches play an integral role in reconciliation and creating mutual understanding and respect across this tribal divide [26].

Power-sharing is evident between inter-marriage couples where they integrated their cultures to maintain equilibrium in their marriage [28]. The couples in a qualitative study undertaken by Renalds (2011) [29] explained how they communicate and merge their cultural values, behaviours, and norms into a 'third culture' referencing the existing cultures [30, 31]. Because marriage involves the wider family of both partners, winning parental consent is important [32, 33]. Although intercultural marriages can have specific challenges to overcome, they can also have benefits which intra-cultural marriages cannot attain [28].

### 1.4 Parental consent and communication

Using a strength-based solution-focused approach to explore the process and effectiveness of winning parental consent, Chukwuebuka et al. (2018) [34] applied the Two-Way Symmetrical Model Public Relations approach to 40 Nigerian Igbo couples who are in an inter-tribal marriage. Applying the two-way symmetrical communication of public relations to these mixed couples ensured that decisions made by the couples were mutually beneficial between themselves and their extended families thus fostering mutual understanding [34]. To be successful, parental consent was sought. The fundamental aim is to foster harmony and mutual understanding based on collecting information on issues which may hinder the success of the marriage. Any such issues were explained and clarified through an intermediary, and this helped the couples to adapt, accommodate and adjust their opinions and those of their parents [34]. Intermediaries (usually uncles and aunts) respectfully persuade the parents through dialogue, striving to reach a consensus. As a result, the individual whose consent is sought feels respected and given a sense of belonging, thus they are more likely to accept the proposed inter-marriage [34].

### 1.5 Children and identity

Discrepancies in communication styles and values related to childrearing are common in cross-cultural marriages [35]. Conflict may arise when the husband feels that his language

should be the major language the child should learn. Mangena and Ndlovu (2013) [36] found that fathers desired their children to be identified with their side and culture but were often away. Such tensions are common and contribute to some parents feeling uncomfortable about giving consent to inter-tribal marriage, hoping to prevent their grandchildren from having identity problems rather than seeing exposure to both cultures as an advantage. Identity formation was described as a continual process that starts in childhood, is particularly important in adolescence, and continues into adulthood leading to the formation of achieved identity [37]. Some children from intercultural marriages may face 'identity confusion' [37].

## 2 Methods

Ethnic tensions between the Shona and Ndebele tribes continue to be felt in contemporary England, making data collection for this study more challenging [36, 38, 39]. Despite this challenge, data for this study were collected from five couples in Shona/Ndebele inter-cultural marriages and five adult children born from such marriages. An additional Ndebele wife was included but her Shona husband refused to participate. All our participants were 18 and above, resided in England, were either Shona or Ndebele Zimbabwean and were in a heterosexual marriage with a member of the other tribe, or were born out of such a marriage. Some of them were divorced. Snowballing and purposeful sampling were used to recruit participants from churches, social clubs and through mutual acquaintances [28, 40]. Facebook and Twitter were also used to further support recruitment. Potential participants were provided with an Information Sheet enabling them to prepare questions. Those agreeing to participate signed a consent form. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time. This study was granted ethical approval by Brunel University's ethics committee.

Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and this was followed by a thematic analysis [40]. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews were conducted via Skype [41]. Skype-enabled participants to take the interviewer on a virtual tour around their house [41]. Our interviews were either conjoint or individually conducted. Previous studies successfully used conjoint interviews in intercultural relationships [30, 42]. Conjoint interviews pointed at how partners perceive and perform their roles as parents and as partners [28]. The first author of this article was a social work student while carrying out this study. She is also a black Zimbabwean female born and bred to a Shona mother and Malawian father which influenced her relationship with the participants. The first author's position as a social work student was often regarded with suspicion by some Zimbabweans who blame 'outsiders' including social workers for a range of problems. Social workers were often presented as 'child snatchers' [5]. To address such fears, the researcher emphasized her being a Zimbabwean, an 'insider'.

## 3 Results

Differences and tensions experienced by participants in this study were primarily a result of their genders, political affiliation, parental consent, and children's rejection by the couple's wider family. Some of our female participants had to abandon their own culture in favour of their husband's culture to make their marriage work. (see in Table 1)

**Table 1** Participants' profiles

	Zimbabwean Ethnicity	Age	Marital Status	No of children	Occupation
Participant 1	Ndebele P1	52	Wife	4	Nurse Manager
Couple 1	Ndebele P2	55	Wife	2	Teacher Lecturer
	Shona P3	59	Husband		
Couple 2	Shona P4	42	Husband	2	Nurse Nurse
	Ndebele P5	40	Wife		
Couple 3	Ndebele P6	50	Husband	3	Pastor Nurse
	Shona P7	45	Wife		
Couple 4	Ndebele P8	40	Wife	2	Nurse IT Engineer
	Shona P9	45	Husband		
Couple 5	Ndebele P10	56	Husband	3	Social Worker Nurse Manager
	Shona P11	50	Wife		
Adult-Child Participant 1 Female	Father -Shona Mother-Ndebele	35	Married		Therapist
Adult-Child Participant 2 Female	Father-Ndebele Mother-Shona	40	Married	1	Nurse
Adult-Child Participant Male 3	Father-Shona Mother Ndebele	38	Married	2	Writer
Adult-Child Participant 4 Female	Father-Ndebele Mother-Shona	45	Single		Social worker
Adult-Child Participant 5 Son	Father - Ndebele Mother- Shona	32	Single	0	Editor

### 3.1 How it all starts

In our sample, five couples met at church, three during their university studies, one at high school, one at work and one through a relative. At least according to our small sample, attending church plays a significant role in bringing couples together to build a Christian home that minimizes their cultural differences. It is therefore evident that in this case, Christianity is a powerful antidote that heals tensions and unites members of the Shona and Ndebele tribes as one [26, 27]. Interacting in academic institutions was also common in our sample.

Religion also played an important role in marriage approval and the acceptance of the lobola by the in-laws. Five couples initially met at church and seven participants out of these couples had no problems with getting consent from their families. One participant said:

*There were no issues as both families were Christian and what bind us together were the same values and beliefs. . . We followed the customary marriage process as it is the same in both cultures. The only problem was that Shona people expect you to pay more for the bridal price compared to the Ndebele. I paid five herds of cattle and bought her mother and father clothes and blankets. Among these, cattle were paid 'mombe ye humai' (was paid to the mother of the bride in appreciation of her not having children from other men) and a shawl that a man buys to show that she (the bride) was a virgin.*

Just like the participant above, other couples told us that sharing the Christian faith helped them overcome differences and build resilience. It was evident from our findings that, much like discussed in the literature [26, 27], churches have become agencies committed to reconciliation, mutual understanding, and respect across this tribal divide.

### 3.2 Marriage disapproval and the Gukurahundi

Many of our participants also experienced one or another forms of marriage disapproval. The historical tensions between the Shona and Ndebele seem to be still very much felt in contemporary Zimbabwe and England. A Ndebele wife participating said:

*Most Ndebele are bitter because of Gukurahundi, and Shona are saying they were the first to come to Zimbabwe and Mzilikazi oppressed them. The grudges go on and on and they shape our relationships most of the time when we decide to marry. My father would keep telling us the story since we were children. . . now I have Shona (husband), and he is nice and kind. I was not there when this happened. He would say that he didn't want his children to pollute his lineage. Well, my father got mad. . . threatened to kill my boyfriend and, in a rage, said he disowned me for bringing a Shona into the family and it was a disgrace to the family. . .*

The quote above and many others like it confirmed that the tensions between the Shona and Ndebele are still very strongly felt. This might not be very surprising considering the large number of casualties during the Gukurahundi, and the fact that many of the survivors who were children at the time, now have their own families. Once families reject the marriage and don't participate in the Lobola process, many couples separate. Other couples have to overcome attempts to prevent their marriage often by arranging their marriage or forcing them into a marriage to someone from their ingroup. Some couples are confident enough to maintain their relationship despite such pressures.

### 3.3 Deeply embedded stereotypes: 'callous men' and 'devious women'

The hostility between the Shona and Ndebele is often manifested in the image each group has regarding the other group. From the interviews, it seems that Shona men are often perceived by the Ndebele as only intending to take advantage of Ndebele women, who are known for their beauty, and leave them shortly after. One of our Ndebele women participating quoted her aunt who said, 'Your children will be abantwana bamaphepa when he leaves you for his Shona wife later in life', meaning your children will bear their father's name on birth certificates only and he will not be physically and emotionally present in their lives as compared to the children of other Shona wives. This, however, did not put the woman off and she stayed in the relationship. For her and her husband and some of our other participants, marriage approval was more easily received, often thanks to a history of Shona-Ndebele marriages within their families. Two of our participants, both Ndebele wives, came from such a mixed background. One of them said:

*I am lucky that my grandmother and aunts are married to Shona. When we visit my grandmother, if it's a Ndebele son in law she will say this one is all right; but when it's a Shona-in-law, she will say 'Kwauya mukwasha' (son in law is here!! we are going to eat.*

Despite the negative social perception of Shona men among Ndebele, this participant's relatives welcomed the marriage. The above statements suggest respect given to the Shona in-law's prosocial behaviour for bringing groceries to his in-laws, which is instilled in Shona men in their early years [43] and is now an image associated with them. In Shona culture,

visiting in-laws with no groceries is often believed to bring bad luck to the marriage as parents are believed to be 'kunyunyuta' (doubting) the credibility of their son in law for caring for their daughter [44]. This approach to facilitating parental support was termed by Chukwuebuka et al (2018) [34], the 'public relations approach' and included a range of persuasive techniques. When asked whether Ndebele husbands do the same, this participant said:

*No, they are selfish, Shona men dress smart, do shopping, load the shopping in the car boot and give to their in-laws. . .*

The generosity associated with Shona men might mitigate against less desirable aspects of their public image discussed earlier. We can assume that the higher socio-economic status of the Shona plays a role in their ability to express such generosity.

While Shona men are perceived as callous and generous, Ndebele women are perceived as both uniquely beautiful as well as devious, making their way into the hearts of Shona men using love potions. Here is what one of our Ndebele wives said about it:

*They say we give our husbands love potions but in fact, it's some of these powders we keep in the kitchen cupboards which is used to treat when a woman has too much 'wind'. All Ndebele men know the powder and sometimes they will say 'I think you need a bit of toning. . . get some of that powder' when you are passing too much wind. Sometimes you can put it in porridge or tea, and it is also good for men. So, when Shona sees this, they say, 'ehh, our men are finished. . .'. To resolve this, I leave this in the kitchen.*

Ndebele women taking part in our study were required to protect their marriages and themselves from such accusations. Our participants often realized there is little they can do to change the views of their or their partner's family, and the only option is either to learn and live with these perceptions or to remove themselves from the family's environment.

Naming animals is a practice used amongst both groups to vent undesirable feelings. One of our Ndebele wives participating said:

*My mother-in-law got to the extent of naming her dog 'Tarasika' meaning "we are lost" and the other one 'tsigai' meaning "calm down". I think she named them after me because the family think their son is lost because he married an 'unstable' (Mhepo) Ndebele woman. . . I don't care, they are not part of my marriage contract.*

In response, the daughter-in-law named her son 'Khulumani' which in Shona means 'you can talk but this will not bother me'. This naming practice has been found to provide therapeutic solutions and a way of expressing negative feelings between feuding parties [18].

### 3.4 Moving in together

Some of the couples in our study were unable to win their families' approval and the lobola process did not commence. One of the Ndebele wives participating explained how she and her partner dealt with their families' rejection of their marriage:

*They all didn't want to get involved and the lobola process did not proceed. We then decided to do a court wedding as we were both over 21 years and could marry without our parent's consent, we started living together and immediately decided to relocate to the UK with our two children.*

This couple like some of the other couples had to pay the price of losing the support of their families of origin to be able to maintain their relationship. Moving to the UK enabled them to avoid some of the societal pressures still current in Zimbabwe. Such a drastic stage was likely enabled by having an academic and/or professional qualification that ensured solid income in the UK. This option is not likely to be available for everyone.

### 3.5 Power imbalance: Ndebele wives & Shona husbands

Some of our Ndebele wives reported clear power imbalances. While most of our Ndebele participants could speak Shona or at least understand it, most of the Shona cannot speak or understand Ndebele. Six Ndebele wife participants mentioned Shona becoming the family's main language. One of our adult-child participants said:

*My mother was given the condition by her husband's family to give up her Ndebele culture and not to speak Ndebele if she was to be my father's wife. . . because she loved my father, she adhered . . . she missed her culture.*

This unfortunately did not stop the father's family from rejecting the children. Here is what another Ndebele wife said about the matter:

*. . . A woman is expected to know her husband's culture and learn how to be a Shona woman, sometimes I miss my own culture. . . I would like my husband to recognize my culture and love me as a Ndebele woman he met. . .*

According to our participants, women are expected to adjust to their husband's culture, and children born in that union automatically belong to the father. Following that logic, female participants told us about their husbands' expectations that the children will speak their language.

However, in most cases, many of the husbands were much more often away from home for work, and their children were much more likely to learn their mother's language in addition to English. These patriarchal expectations and practices shape and promote gender inequality, stripping women of any control over many aspects of their lives [45].

### 3.6 'Small house'

Another manifestation of the power imbalances identified by the research were couples in which the husbands are Shona and their wives, Ndebele. Shona husbands were involved in extra marital affairs with women from their tribe. This was also meant to please their own families. One of the Ndebele wives participating in our study said:

*He seems to be going out with a Shona girlfriend or most probably (having) a 'small house' and I don't send the money... he has to come back and work to finance his 'projects' back home.*

'Small House' is a marital practice which allows the extension of monogamous marriage into a quasi-polygamous system which used to be common in the past [46]. The small house phenomenon amongst the Shona people in contemporary Zimbabwe forms part of the relationship and household arrangements amongst certain heterosexual couples. In cases where partners engage in small house relationships, it has specific implications for existing marriage and family dynamics. In most cases, the man may not be employed full time which will facilitate time for the other partner. Several of our Ndebele wives described such challenges. Such power imbalances were especially strong among Ndebele wives and Shona husbands in which the marginality of both the female gender and the Ndebele tribe intersects. Such power imbalances were not identified in couples where the wives were Shona. We can assume that the husbands' Ndebele tribe marginality was offset by the wives' gender marginality, so no side had the upper hand.

### 3.7 The three-legged pot

Referring to the small house practice, one of our Ndebele wives remembers what her grandmother - who was married to a Shona man - taught her while rhetorically asking:

*When a three legged-pot breaks one leg, would you stop cooking? No, you must see what you can do to make it work... don't fight with him when he meets other women, develop yourself... he will come back when he is tired. For example, doing other extra activities, meeting others, taking children swimming, going to church, getting a driving license, going to work and empowering yourself. Don't make yourself a house - girl (maid)... meet other women and before you know it... he will come back.*

From a Western feminist perspective, the grandmother is complicit with the patriarchal order, and Kambarami (2006) [45] argues that older Zimbabwean women teach younger women to accept male infidelity. Saba Mahmood (2005) [47] offered a different perspective on similar issues when she highlighted the liberal individualist assumptions that underlie the feminist project. Mahmood argues that in Western consciousness, social, religious, and other norms and commitments are perceived as binding, and only when the individual opposes them is he/she able to achieve genuine freedom and express his/her "true self". However, in many traditional societies, social demands are perceived as a kind of scaffolding, which is the only thing that enables the true self to appear. Not only that but in this case, while the women are encouraged to endure the infidelity, they are also encouraged to use it for their advantage and develop themselves in ways that might have been impossible otherwise. Such a coping mechanism also enables the couple to stay together.

### 3.8 Lack of interest in the children

A lack of interest in children born to parents in intercultural marriages was evident in our data. One of the Ndebele wives said:

*I took my child to my in-laws (his family) and they did not show any interest. I entered their house but (they) did not offer me any drink (as per African custom) and they just said congratulations, but (I) could not feel the warmth, until I left. They spoke in their Shona language, God... I did not understand a word, I just stayed there hoping to just get up and get my things and go. I left with my baby... I became depressed and cried all the way (and) till this day I haven't seen them (again).*

Hostility and suspicion towards this Ndebele wife and her son were expressed in this case by not responding to her entrance acceptably and offering her a drink or showing warmth towards her. Language barriers made things more difficult. Some of our couples who initially were rejected by their families following their intermarriage managed to shift their families' response to their children. Here is what another Ndebele wife told us about her cousin's sister who was married to a Shona man:

*The man's parents could not accept the children in the family... it took them 16 years to accept them... The guy stood his ground and said, 'you did not like XXX - she has gone, but I loved her, now you must accept my children, they are my blood. . . .', and later, they accepted them.*

While this is an example of parents changing their view, we can assume that by the age of 16, the relationship these grandchildren might develop with their grandparents will be marred by resentment and the pain of rejection up to that age.

### 3.9 Resilience through cooking

Negotiating differences and reaching compromises was the main mechanism we came across allowing our participants to overcome any differences encountered and build resilience as couples. In most cases, these were the women who were making these compromises. One of our Ndebele wives faced challenges concerning her husband's expectation that she will prepare Sadza, a dish usually prepared for dinner. Her husband, however, preferred eating it in the mornings. She found preparing this meal in the morning difficult, but decided to comply:

*I just do what he wants to keep him happy... I have to please the man... That is the culture.*

The above quote implies accepting clear inequalities in marital roles to maintain resilience and adds to the evidence in this direction, especially among couples with Shona husbands. Another participant described how she was taught to cook according to her husband's tribe's customs:

*He taught me how to cook the Shona way and sometimes we cook together since we came to the UK, but there isn't much difference between Shona and Ndebele food. . . . the difference is the way Shona make their sadza is different from the Ndebele's. Shona use water to mix the mealie meal with cold water before mixing it with hot water to cook. Whereas Ndebele use a musika (whisker) to mix mealie meal with hot water to cook and simmer very well before cooking it, then moulding it into neat smaller portions. He likes the Ndebele way. Ndebele like a lot of peanuts and milk so their women spend most of their time roasting the peanuts.*

Understanding their differences allowed this Ndebele woman to adjust her cooking to meet her husband's preferences. Such adjustments had many other manifestations.

### 3.10 The best of all worlds

Several participants described how no one culture has the upper hand, but a much more nuanced process by which members of the family choose different aspects from each of the cultures involved. Here is how it was described by one of the Ndebele husbands:

*We are guided by the fear of God and our Christian values. We compromise and agree. We do not look at whose culture is supreme, but all cultures including our religion are important... Shona, Ndebele, English, and our religion are instilled in our children making 'four cultures'... Since our children were born here in the UK, we sort of joined our cultures together based on Christianity, differentiating what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in these cultures.*

When asked about issues they experience concerning their parenting, the couple mentioned teaching their children how to greet elders. In Shona culture, when children are greeting elders, they are expected to clap their hands kneeling. Ndebele are much more casual in such meetings and shake hands with in-laws, which is taboo in the Shona culture. Ndebele also say "iwe" (you) when addressing elders, whilst this is regarded as disrespectful in Shona culture. In this case, the couple adopted the casual approach of western culture which is closer to the Ndebele's approach.

## 4 Discussion and conclusions

The mass massacres that took place during the Gukurahundi still cast a heavy shadow in contemporary Zimbabwe and impact couples from the two rival tribes, the Shona, and the Ndebele. While in contemporary Zimbabwe's urban centres such couples becoming more common, wider society is still largely unwelcoming towards them. For that reason, some Shona-Ndebele couples choose to migrate to England. For these couples, life in England means facing fewer objections from their surroundings, but at the same time, they are also less able to benefit from the support of their wider families. As we showed, despite living outside of Zimbabwe, some of our participants still experienced many objections and other obstacles, but they have also developed a range of appropriate responses and solutions. The power relations between the Shona majority and the Ndebele minority in Zimbabwe also shape their socio-economic differences. Such power relations seem to be transported to England. The intersection between the male gender and the Shona tribe seems to create a greater power difference in these couples. When the man was from the Ndebele tribe, our impression was that power differences were smaller, and the relationship was more equal. One aspect of these inequalities is the 'small

house' some men create. While Western feminism would require women to revolt against such cultural norms to be able to express their 'true self', the participants in our study, like the women studied by Mahmood (2005) [47], responded differently. They kept their marriage despite these acts of infidelity and utilized them to develop and empower themselves. This was a small-scale qualitative study. Larger scale studies can provide an opportunity to quantify some of these issues. Practitioners working with Shona-Ndebele couples should be aware of these issues, so they are better aware of the challenges as well as the strengths and solutions developed by them.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our research participants for sharing their experiences so generously and for the anonymous reviewers of Social Work and Social Welfare for their helpful comments.

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