

# AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON DIVORCE: A CASE OF THE NDEBELE IN THE VUKUZENZELE WARD AT ESIKHOVENI, ESIGODINI

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## ABSTRACT

Cases of divorce are reportedly on the increase in Zimbabwe, which is a situation that poses a threat to the very institution of marriage. Modern-day marriages appear to be particularly vulnerable, despite the United Nations (UN) Freedoms and local legislation governing marriages, while traditional marriages appear to be more stable. The study, conducted in Vukuzenzele Ward at Esikhoveni, sought to investigate traditional African views on divorce and ways of preserving marriages. A case study was used as a research design, with open-ended interviews being used as data-gathering tools. Nine respondents were identified through snowball sampling, and all were successfully interviewed. The study revealed that traditional marriages remained very stable, with a number of methods being used to preserve such marriages. These include *lobola* payment and other Ndebele rites. The study further revealed that the UN Freedoms, especially those that relate to equality between men and women in marriages, were unfamiliar to the traditionally married couples, who were of the view that such freedoms were not conducive to successful marriages. However, the study revealed that in the traditional context, divorce was permissible where the wife was guilty of adultery or witchcraft. The study concluded that traditional rites and beliefs remained valid in the preservation of marriages.

**Keywords:** African; traditional; marriage; divorce; Vukuzenzele; Esikhoveni; Ndebele

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The emancipation of women must undoubtedly rank among the greatest achievements of our time, and has seen greater acknowledgement of the equality between men and



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women. In the African context, as revealed by the study reported on, the emancipation of women has been linked to an increase in instances of divorce, to the extent that as a social institution, marriage is now under threat. In Ndebele and other similar cultures, marriage was viewed as permanent and crucial to society as a whole, yet it is now in jeopardy. This has been attributed to the way marriages are now conducted and the freedoms women now have, which enable them to terminate a marriage if they feel threatened in the marriage situation. This article aims to explore the concept of marriage in traditional Ndebele society and draw lessons from the means by which some traditional marriages have lasted so long: the informants interviewed had been married for at least 20 years, some even for 52 years.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Marriage, which was and is still considered one of the important institutions in communities, especially African communities, appears to be under threat in Zimbabwe. The country has recorded alarming divorce statistics in the years following the protection of women's rights as enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Freedoms. Divorce appears to be particularly prevalent among the modern generation married in the civil court as opposed to traditionally married couples, with some attributing this to the emancipation of women promoted by the UN. This has placed the institution of marriage in jeopardy, gradually devaluing it, and eroding the pride and delight that African communities take or once took in the institution of marriage. This raises the question: Were traditional marriages perhaps stronger than modern ones? Did the older generation with closer ties to tradition have a way of preserving marriages that the present generation lacks? Do modern rights and the empowerment of women, as advanced by the UN, have a bearing on divorce?

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the disparity between the divorce rates among traditionally married couples and couples married in the civil courts, the study sought to understand African traditional views on divorce, and specifically the views on divorce held by the traditionally married couples interviewed.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following main research questions:

1. How were marriage and divorce viewed from a traditional point of view?
2. What traditional methods were used to preserve marriages in the past?

3. Under what circumstances was divorce seen as inevitable and acceptable in the past?
4. Should there be a divorce, how was it conducted/handled?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section reviews literature dealing with the way in which marriage was viewed in the past, types of marriages in Ndebele society, some Ndebele marriage rites, some modern views regarding modern marriages as well as a brief history of women's emancipation in Zimbabwe. Reviewing such literature helped place the study in context.

## HOW MARRIAGE WAS VIEWED IN THE PAST

The literature reviewed shows that marriage was very important and strongly encouraged in Ndebele society, to the extent that it was rare to find an unmarried woman (Mpofu 2014). The marriage system likewise was sound and solid among the Ndebele: marriage was an irreversible contract that could be nullified only on the grounds of witchcraft, adultery or insanity. The bride's family, after receiving *lobola*, did not want to lose it, and so reversing the marriage contract was not an option (Nyathi 2005). Marriage was promoted for two main reasons, namely the continuation of society and the promotion of social integrity.

## TYPES OF MARRIAGE IN NDEBELE SOCIETY

According to Mpofu (2014), there were three forms of marriage: marriage of own choice, marriage deriving from social pressure, and marriage resulting from a combination of both as explained below

In the marriage of own choice, a young man saw a girl he loved and proposed to her. If she accepted him, they nursed their love until such time as they informed their families in the traditional way. Family negotiations would then follow, leading to the marriage of the two. In Ndebele society, sisters, aunts, uncles and so on encouraged and promoted the relationship. The involvement of the whole family and community meant that the entire community acted as a source of unconditional social support, thus ensuring the success of the couple's marriage. In the case of a conflict between the two, the relatives would be more than willing to assist, which would guarantee that any conflict was dealt with peacefully without resorting to divorce. This differs considerably from the modern-day approach, in which marriage is viewed as a contract exclusively between the two people concerned, and if they decide to end the marriage nobody questions them, as nobody else would have been involved in the first place. If both family and the community had had a part to play in the relationship the two

would have found it impossible to divorce, since they would not have had the support of society (Mpofu 2014).

Marriage among the Ndebele also arose from social pressure, leading to one being given a wife or a husband. *Ukupha indoda* or *ukuphiwa umfazi* (to be married off to a man or for a man to be given a woman to marry by her or his parents, respectively) was binding on both man and woman (Mpofu 2014). The Ndebele accepted this as a way of ensuring that no woman was left without a husband. It was against the social norm for a man who was given a wife to refuse. Likewise, if a girl found herself without suitors, and decided with or without consultation to pick up her scarce resources and go to a man of her own choice without giving him notice, the man was not supposed to ask her any questions; the marriage was contracted and this would last. Ideally a girl was not supposed to propose to a man she loved, since this was taboo, but she could induce the boy indirectly and with the support of relatives, the boy could approach her and they could get married (Mpofu 2014). These were ways to make sure that everybody got married, and the resulting marriages were built on solid ground.

The last type of marriage in Ndebele society was a result of the combination of marriage of own choice and social pressure. This usually arose from the uncontrolled behaviour of an unmarried couple, leading to pregnancy. As a result of this pregnancy the relatives were left with no choice but to compel the two to marry. They may not have been ready, but their actions would have accelerated the action (Mpofu 2014). Even in this case, the family members provided unconditional support, leading to the success of the marriage.

## NDEBELE MARRIAGE RITES

Marriage was so important and so complex that in Ndebele society it was solemnified by rites (Nyathi 2005). In this section, a few of the rites are reviewed and their meaning and importance discussed in the words of Nyathi (2005).

### Ukucola

This was a very important concept among the Ndebele. The word *cola* means “cleanse” (*hlambulula, geza, hlambulula inhliziyo*) in Ndebele, and the rite was conducted to express happiness and to wish someone success in their marriage (Nyathi 2005). *Ukucola* was performed on different occasions, including the birth of a child believed to belong to the ancestors, the investiture of a new king, and as part of marriage rites. A day before the marriage party departed for the groom’s home, the father of the bride-to-be would slaughter a goat, an ox or a cow to *cola* his daughter. The father personally anointed his daughter with bile from the slaughtered animal, *inyongo*, in a process known as *ukuthela inyongo*. The bile was applied to different parts of the body, including the top of the head, neck, limbs, joints and toes (Nyathi 2005).

## Ukuphehlela isthundu

During this rite, the father of the bride-to-be used *uphehlo*, a stirring device, to vigorously stir the contents of a gourd until a white foam was produced (Nyathi 2005). The white foam would then be poured onto his daughter's, head, neck and body (Nyathi 2005). The father would at the same time appeal to the ancestors to look after his daughter. Prior to the marriage, the girl would then say goodbye to her relatives (Nyathi 2005).

## Ukumekeza ceremony

In this ceremony the bride wore a crown, *amatiya*, and the bridal dance would then follow. Since the main function of the marriage was for the bride to bring children into the world, after cattle had been paid, she was often told "*ufike uveze abantu*": should she fail to produce children, one of her young sisters would take her place (Nyathi 2005).

Marriage was very important not only to the living, but also to the dead, and so it was sacred and treated with extreme respect. These ceremonies involved everyone. All these ceremonies thus helped stabilise marriages and make sure that divorce was not tolerated. The issue of rights did not feature in traditional society, and indeed men were in charge of most of the activities leading to marriage, but these marriages lasted nonetheless.

## Modern-day views on marriage

Owing to changes in human interactions, especially with the acknowledgement of women's rights, there has been a major shift from traditional views on marriage to the way marriage is viewed nowadays. The issue of women's rights has had a negative effect on the marriage structure, in particular the subject of *lobola*. *Lobola* is a token of appreciation which is paid or given by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. It is usually paid as a token to the family of the bride for bearing children for the family of the groom. *Lobola* has often been interpreted as buying a woman, as a result of which she foregoes her rights. Some scholars are beginning to argue that *amalobolo/lobola* are one of the hindrances to the empowerment of women, as bride price in many ways encourages the violation of women's rights (Mangena and Ndlovu 2015). Since this view has been cited as a significant cause of divorce nowadays, a brief history of the emancipation of women is useful.

## A brief history of the emancipation of women

Throughout history, women have struggled against oppression, in particular oppression by men, and unfortunately, until recently, violence against women was not given priority, even at the UN. Although the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed the equality of everyone before the law as well as the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, it said nothing about violence against women. In the 1970s the

UN Commission on the Status of Women called for an internationally binding treaty to develop a Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was presented in 1980, and was signed by 64 countries. It was a significant step forward, but domestic violence, including marriage-related violence, continued to be treated as a private issue worldwide. The Third World Conference on Women met in Kenya in 1985 to discuss violence as a systemic issue. The 1993 UN Conference on Human Rights in Vienna discussed violence against women as a violation of human rights which ought to be treated as a crime. In 1995 the Beijing Women's Conference gave women a platform to air their views. The documents mentioned above have since been used as guidelines to deal with violence against women (Rivington 2014).

## The struggle for the emancipation of women in Zimbabwe

Marriage is one of the components considered in the struggle for the emancipation of women, as there appear to be many elements in marriage which violate women's rights. The Government in Zimbabwe has contributed to the emancipation of women by enacting laws and ratifying treaties, and non-governmental organisations have supported this cause mainly through awareness programmes.

## The Domestic Violence Act

Signed into law in 2007, this is perhaps the most celebrated piece of legislation in Zimbabwe aimed at curbing domestic violence, which is directed mainly against women. It defines domestic violence as "any unlawful act, omission or behaviour which results in death or the direct infliction of physical, sexual or mental injury to any complainant by a respondent" (Zimbabwe 2007), and goes on to list as examples actions such as physical abuse, stalking, and forced marriage. The Act even gives the police power in instances of domestic violence to arrest without a warrant, as stated in section 6. It also authorises the relevant Ministry to create an Anti-Domestic Violence Council, consisting of civil society leaders, religious leaders and traditional leaders to monitor the implementation of the Act.

Despite all these efforts, statistics show that divorce is on the increase, and some scholars are citing the emancipation of women as a major cause. In Bulawayo alone, the number of divorce summonses increased as follows between 2011 and 2014:

**Table 1:** Number of divorce summonses issued in Bulawayo (2011–2014)

| Year | Divorce summonses |
|------|-------------------|
| 2011 | 406               |
| 2012 | 425               |
| 2013 | 473               |
| 2014 | 475               |

(Mpofu 2014)

Although these statistics refer to registered marriages only, they are nevertheless an indicator that divorce is on the increase.

## EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN, AND THE TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE: THE WAY FORWARD

The literature reveals that the institution of marriage was intact and well preserved in Ndebele society. However, marriage as an institution is now under threat, as witnessed by the growing number of divorce cases. Among the reasons cited for this is the desire to emancipate women, which has brought attention to bear on issues of rights and equality, which undermine the traditional system. This has given rise to a number of questions. If divorce was virtually absent in traditional Ndebele society, why is it on the increase now? If development in the form of the emancipation of women leads to more divorces, which leads to the breakdown of the basic unit of society, then the question to ask is whether we are in fact developing at all in the African context. Can society strike a balance between the emancipation of women and development? Is there indeed a middle path?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in the study was qualitative, as the researchers sought to understand how divorce was being viewed and dealt with in the traditional way, as well as traditional ways of preserving the institution of marriage. According to ATLAS.ti (2015), qualitative research “is not desk research, we go out into whatever we consider the real world, observe and talk to people, interact with them aiming to understand what is important to them and how they perceive the world”. The researchers therefore travelled to the village selected as the research site in the Vukuzenzele Ward at Esikhoveni, in Esigodini, to talk to elderly people who were familiar with traditional marriage customs.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

A case study design was used. This particular design was suitable because of its qualitative nature.

## POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Because the researchers intended to gather data on African traditional views on divorce, a rural setting was chosen, and elderly people knowledgeable about the institution of marriage from a traditional point of view were selected to participate in the study. Vukuzenzela Ward in Esikhoveni, Esigodini was used as the case study site. A number of elderly people who were or had been married were selected to be interviewed. The researchers selected those married for twenty years and more, as they were considered

to have wisdom concerning traditional views on marriage and divorce. Furthermore, couples who had been married according to traditional custom were selected. Snowball sampling was employed for the study. This sampling method allowed the researchers to identify a number of elderly people, who would then recommend others considered to possess the wisdom that the researchers were looking for. As one of the researchers had grown up in the village, he was able to identify the first two participants, who then referred the researchers to the others. In all, nine respondents were interviewed using a standard interview guide which, however, contained open-ended questions. There was full cooperation from all the respondents who were identified, translating into a 100% response rate. However, it must be acknowledged that the researchers had some difficulty in locating the respondents who met the sampling criteria in terms of their age, the length of their marriage and marriage by traditional custom. In some instances, the researchers were referred to cases that did not meet all three requirements, and it was then not possible to include them in the sample.

## DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS

Data was gathered through interviews. In this case, open-ended questions were asked and these allowed the interviewees to express themselves at length, given the qualitative nature of the study. The study was also cross-sectional in nature, as the researchers went to the field and collected data immediately.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations that were observed in the study included seeking permission from the District Administrator (DA) in charge of the village in which the study was conducted. After receiving permission from the DA, the researchers proceeded to the village, where interviews were conducted. Before conducting the interviews, the researchers explained the purpose of the study, using Ndebele, the language of the interviewees, and interviews took place only after the interviewees had given their consent. As reported earlier, all agreed to be interviewed. This cooperation was enhanced by the fact that in addition to the researchers' use of the language of the respondents (Ndebele), one of the researchers had grown up in the village and all of the respondents were still acquainted with him. The interview guide was drafted in English. However, the interviews were conducted in Ndebele. The researchers had to translate the data gathered into English. This was made easy by the fact that one of the researchers was fluent in Ndebele.

## DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this section, data is presented, analysed and interpreted.



## Description of the population

|   | Couple or single | Reason for being single | Number of years in marriage | Marriage and Wedding status              |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | Couple           | N/A                     | 52                          | Traditionally married. No civil wedding. |
| 2 | Couple           | N/A                     | 34                          | Traditionally married. No civil wedding. |
| 3 | Couple           | N/A                     | 26                          | Traditionally married. No civil wedding. |
| 4 | Couple           | N/A                     | 27                          | Traditionally married. No civil wedding. |
| 5 | Couple           | N/A                     | 35                          | Traditionally married. No civil wedding. |
| 6 | Single           | Death of spouse         | 27                          | Traditionally married. No civil wedding. |
| 7 | Single           | Death of spouse         | 30                          | Traditionally married. No civil wedding. |
| 8 | Single           | Death of spouse         | 46                          | Traditionally married. No wedding.       |
| 9 | Single           | Death of spouse         | 39                          | Traditionally married. No wedding.       |

## RESPONDENTS' FAMILIARITY WITH THE UN WOMEN'S FREEDOMS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS ENTRENCHED IN THE CONSTITUTION OF ZIMBABWE

When asked about women's freedoms as provided for by the UN and women's rights as enshrined in the constitution of Zimbabwe, all the respondents expressed unfamiliarity with these and most expressed scepticism about such issues, considering them unhealthy for marriages. One of the female respondents indicated that a woman is expected to submit to her husband in order for a marriage to survive. She went on to state: "*Ubaba yinhloko yomuzi njalo kuqakathekile ukuthi umama azithobe phambili kuka baba atshengisele inhlonipho ukuze kube lokuthula egumeni. Angeke umama alinganiswe lobaba walapha ekhaya...akulanto engalunga nxa lokho kungenzeka. Yebo imithetho yenu yanamuhla esingayaziyo ingabe ilinganisa ubaba lomama kodwa akulunganga emendweni. Umama kufuze azehlise phambili kuka baba.*" Translated into English, this means:

The husband is the head of the house and it is important for his wife to show respect for him so that there is peace in the house. The wife cannot be equated to her husband in the house, for that is not healthy for a marriage. Of course, there are laws of today which some of us are not even familiar with, which put wives and their husbands on par in a marriage setup, but they are not healthy for a marriage. The wife should humble herself before her husband.

The researchers interpreted this as a way of preserving marriages, as such respect strengthened the institution of marriage.

## TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Data revealed that in the past marriage was viewed as a very important union between two families and a means of strengthening relations and respect in a society. All the respondents indicated that in the past everyone was encouraged and expected to marry and start a family, as marriage helped married people and their families to earn the respect of society. Men who were not married were referred to as *ophekeyakhe*, meaning men who are old enough to be married but are not and cook for themselves, and women who were not married were referred to as *omazakhela*, meaning “women who would have come of age for marriage but are not and stay without husbands”; such people did not share the same social respect as married people. *Ophekeyakhe* and *omazakhela* were sometimes excluded from certain societal activities, and their views on certain issues were given very limited consideration by society. Thus marriage was regarded as key, and as a way of commanding respect and recognition in society.

Respondents indicated that married couples were not expected to divorce, and that society did not easily allow divorce to occur. In fact, in the past divorce was considered shameful. All the respondents emphasised that divorce was not common, and was shameful and avoided as far as possible. This does not mean that marriages in the past were perfect, and all the respondents indicated that marriage is an institution requiring maturity and patience. However, despite all the difficulties associated with marriage, there were methods that indirectly protected marriages. These are discussed below.

## TRADITIONAL WAYS OF PRESERVING MARRIAGE

The study revealed a number of ways in which marriage was indirectly preserved in the past.

### *Lobola* payment

It emerged during the interviews that *lobola* payment was key in a marriage, and that it preserved marriage by discouraging divorce. One of the respondents stated, “*Amalobolo apha isisindo emtshadweni*” (paying *lobola* gives marriage some weight and respect). It came out strongly during the interviews that the payment of *lobola* to the wife’s family strengthened relations between the two families, and that it was a sign of commitment and appreciation on the part of the husband. This *lobola* was paid in the form of cattle. Respondents emphasised that the payment of *lobola* in the form of cash or anything other than cattle was unheard of, which reflects a significant difference between current and past practices. Because cattle were so highly valued in the Ndebele community, the payment of *lobola* earned the husband the respect of the wife’s family, and that cultivated stability in the marriage. In such cases the wife was expected to be patient and would always be mindful of the fact that *lobola* had been paid to her family as a token

of appreciation for her bearing children. The payment of *lobola* gave rise to the saying *uzidle uzibeka amathambo* (eat them and keep their bones). This would be uttered by the husband's family as a reminder to the wife's family that cattle had been paid and the wife was therefore expected to behave so as to avoid a divorce that would result in the cattle being repossessed.

### *Ukulaywa* (giving advice on the do's and don'ts of marriage)

The data indicated that the practice of *ukulaya* meaning to give advice to a woman who is just about to get married, was also key to the preservation of marriage. This entailed giving advice to a woman who was about to get married on how to conduct herself in the marriage. The wife-to-be would receive such advice from elderly women in the community who had wisdom relating to marriage. The practice of *ukulaya* groomed the wife-to-be and instilled a sense of discipline in her, helping her to conduct herself in an acceptable manner in the eyes of her husband and his family. This way, the chances of complaints from the husband would be reduced, and this facilitated stability in a marriage. A woman who conducted herself in a contrary manner would be considered as not having been given such advice, and it would be said that *kalaywanga* or *kalayekanga*, meaning that she did not receive advice of this kind. However, this does not mean that there were no squabbles between marriage partners. If the wife displayed what the husband considered undesirable behaviour, she would be sent back to her parents to receive some more advice in terms of how to conduct herself in the marriage. However, sending the wife back did not mean chasing her away for good. The wife was sent away for a certain period of time, after which the husband would make efforts to get her back, indicating that the practice of *ukulaywa* was critical to the survival and preservation of marriage.

However, the wife would not be sent back for *ukulaywa*, meaning to be given advice on the first occasion she misbehaved in a marriage. One of the interviewees explained that in the case of the wife misbehaving, she would be given a word of advice by her husband's family, and efforts would be made to keep the matter within the family and avoid it reaching the wife's family so as to prevent instability in the marriage. It was only in very rare and extreme circumstances that the wife would be sent back to her home for *ukulaywa* again. This would happen only if the husband's family had tried their best to advise and even admonish the wife, but without success. In cases of disputes other than those relating to adultery and witchcraft on the part of the wife, the husband was expected to be patient with and tolerant of his wife, as in the context of marriage women are generally regarded as *abesintwana* (children). This is because men equated the behaviour of women with that of children, especially with regard to issues of short temper. For example, one of the respondents stated, "*Ukuba lomama yisibindi... kudinga isibindi lokubekezela*", meaning that staying with a wife in a marriage requires bravery and patience.

In some cases, the husband might have been the one in the wrong, and again it was his family who dealt with the matter by admonishing him and reminding him to respect and take good care of his wife. Thus, the system was fair to both the wife and the husband, and this helped preserve marriages.

### *Ukuphehla*

This rite was conducted as a send-off for the wife-to-be as she left for her new home. This ritual signified that the woman who was getting married was leaving her parents, and her parents were sending her to her new home with happy hearts and with clean hands. This also instilled a sense of responsibility in the prospective wife that encouraged her to conduct herself appropriately in the marriage. As the rite was being conducted, a song with a particular message would be sung, the words of which are as follows:

*Londolozela, londoloz'e lumama* (“keep her, keep this woman”)

*Nxa ekwehlula umlethe* (“if she doesn't listen to you, send her back”)

*Ungabots Shay' ubulale* (“don't beat her to death”)

The song contains a special request to the prospective husband and his family to take good care of the wife. The song further states that should the wife misbehave in the marriage, her husband should not beat her to the extent of killing her, but that she should rather be sent back to her parents for further advice on how to conduct herself in the marriage. This was seen as another way of preserving a marriage, and helped minimise cases of divorce.

## CHILDREN

Children were also considered to be a binding factor in a marriage. Traditionally, a wife would not easily divorce if she and her husband had children. One of the respondents explained that if a husband initiated a divorce, for the sake of her children the wife would not automatically agree to it. For example, one of the respondents stated, “*Ngiyabe ngihlalele abantwabami, angeke ngiphume lapha ekhaya ngiyshiye abantwabami basale bezokondliwa ngomunye umfazi*” (“I will stay for the sake of my children. I cannot leave my homestead and my children, only for them to be taken care of by another woman”). Interestingly, children were identified as a binding factor by female respondents. Thus, children were a binding factor in a marriage because women would remain in a marriage to avoid their children being raised by another woman should their husbands remarry.

## MARRYING A WOMAN OF YOUR TRIBE AND CULTURE

The study revealed that traditionally a man would not marry a woman of a different tribe and culture, but was required to marry a woman of his own tribe and culture. Neither was it advisable for a woman to be married to a man of a different tribe and culture from her own. This was believed to be a way of making sure that there was cultural compatibility between the husband and wife and their families. One of the respondents cited the proverb *Olungaziyo aluthezwa bantwabami*, meaning that you do not fetch or make firewood of just any tree. This proverb, cited in Ndebele communities, is an encouragement to members of that society to marry people with similar cultural values so as to avoid disputes arising from differences in cultural practices. It was believed by the society that once there were cultural differences in a marriage, the resulting problems would threaten the marriage and in some instances this would result in the failure of the marriage. Thus, marriage between people of the same culture was seen as a way of preserving marriages. The intention was not to be discriminatory or tribal, but to make choices to the advantage of the institution of marriage.

## CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH DIVORCE WAS UNAVOIDABLE

Respondents indicated that there were very obvious cases in which a divorce was unavoidable. These were cases where the wife was guilty of witchcraft or adultery. Interestingly, it is only when these offences were committed by the wife that a divorce would be instituted. Thus, to preserve their marriages, women were always careful not to commit any of the above crimes.

## CONCLUSION

The research revealed that although the UN Freedoms have been embraced, the ordinary villagers, both men and women, were not aware of them. This could have been as a result of their not having been being taught about them, and also because the African village approach achieves the intended purpose, namely to preserve marriage as a permanent bond between a man and a woman.

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