

Zezuru Society

1. Description

- 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Zezuru society, Shona language, Bantu language family
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): SNA
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Latitude: -17.80 longitude: 31.10
- 1.4 Brief history: "The Shona are a cluster of peoples who have lived for about 2,000 years in a region of the southern Africa Plateau. Shona speaking migrants of the late 1800s also live in Zambia, in the Zambezi valley, in Chieftainess Chiawa's area. The Shona are the builders of Great Zimbabwe. Which is the largest stone Structure of pre-colonial Africa south of the equator." (4p2).
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Christianity has been integrated into the Shona religion due to missionaries (9p1) Schools incorporate English literacy as well.
- 1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Landlocked, "climate: tropical; moderated by altitude; rainy season (November to March), terrain: mostly high plateau with higher central plateau" (2p1)
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 3,200,000 Zezuru (1) Zezuru live among other groups that fall into Shona as well so it is difficult to measure how much of a particular village is Zezuru

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): "A coarse flour made from maize. Also known as *mielie-meal* is a staple food in southern and sub-Saharan Africa" (10p1).
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: "Another name for the grain sorghum. Because it is highly drought-resistant, and has enough protein to sustain a population in times of famine, it is an important crop in many tropical and sub-tropical regions" (10p3).
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Carved woods; "knobkerries are large, club-like sticks are common in Southern and Eastern Africa; they have a knob at the end and are variously used to hunt animals (by throwing it at them), against an enemy, or as a walking stick" (10p4).
- 2.4 Food storage: Unable to find information on this.
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Division stereotypical, men hunt while women care for the family.
- 2.6 Land tenure: land use "arable land: 8.24%; permanent crops: 0.33%" (CIA)
- 2.7 Ceramics: Clay pottery
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Anything you have you are expected to share. Mwali gives things to the people so that they may share.
- 2.9 Food taboos: As stated just before, you are expected to share your belongings among the community, including food. Additionally, food is offered to Mwali.
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Zimbabwe is landlocked, these modes of transportation are not needed.

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): Average male height in Zimbabwe is 68 inches; the average Zimbabwean female height is approximately 58 inches (2p1)
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): I was not able to find the average weight.

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): I did not find an exact age for this but I did learn that this is a celebrated ceremony that is considered when a girl becomes a woman. (13p1)
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Zezuru women are eligible for marriage at age 18, after which they are encouraged to start their family (7p2).
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): Because a son may "inherit" his father's wives upon his death, typically size of family varies and varies during a person's life dramatically. For example, a son could marry his father's five widows in addition to his current wives.
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): I did not find this information
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): "An average Zezuru girl is shown her future husband when she is just 12. "Our old say a child must be shown a husband aged 12 so she can know the husband and when she is around 18 she gets married" (7p2)
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: While divorce is possible within the court systems, it is strongly discouraged.
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: "They are a communal people, who raise large families because the men take many wives. "There is no law that limits the number of wives a man may have. You are free to marry any number of women, so long as you take care of them" (8p1)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: "Also known as the *roora*, a form of dowry paid to the bride's family. Livestock was almost always the payment: cattle if the family could afford it, and sheep or goats if they couldn't. Often the brideprice for a daughter would pay for the marriage of a son, and thus enforce close bonds between those siblings, whose matrimonial fates were closely linked. Because of the brideprice if a girl found herself in a terrible marriage, it was hard for her to leave; her family would be forced to repay the brideprice, which often they had already spent." (10p2)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Many children often inherit their parents' occupation. For example, children of musicians are typically taught to play at an early age and are around it more often, ending in the same occupation as their parents. The same is true for healers.
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Upon the death of their father, sons are encouraged to marry any of his late father's wives except his natural mother.

- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: "...Customary law deny the existence of homosexuality through their almost studious silence. Yet when pressed, experts on custom will concede that homosexual relations were frowned upon and hushed up but did sometimes occur." (3p200)
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): People are encouraged to stay within their society but because so many different Shona groups live together in one community the cultures integrate.
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? The elder men are involved in raising the boys and the elder women raise the girls, they teach their role in their community and families and teach them obedience (8p2).
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") Mothers hold the primary role in childbearing however men do participate, especially if the child is male.
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? I did not find information specifically discussing this.
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: I did not find information on this, however women are expected to be obedient to men, especially their husbands, so one could assume a certain amount of coercion.
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): "Often the brideprice for a daughter would pay for the marriage of a son, and thus enforce close bonds between those siblings, whose matrimonial fates were closely linked. Because of the brideprice if a girl found herself in a terrible marriage, it was hard for her to leave; her family would be forced to repay the brideprice, which often they had already spent." (10p2)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Women are taught discipline at a young age, "women do not challenge the authority of men" (8p2)
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: There is very little information on extramarital relationships. I believe this is due to the fact that polygamous marriages are socially acceptable so there is very little reason to engage in extramarital or extramarital relationships ultimately become an additional marriage.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? The husband's other wives help raise the children.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: Unable to find exact ratio, heavily female dominant as marriage is commonly between one male husband and multiple female wives.
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades? I found no mention of couvades practice within the Zezuru community.
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) Brides and grooms are encouraged to start their families soon after their wedding (10p2).
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Avoidance of marriages of incest.
- 4.24 Joking relationships? "bhudi: an informal term used colloquially like 'buddy' or 'man' implying familiarity" (10p4).
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules? If a father dies, the oldest son may marry any of his late father's wives except his natural mother. (12)
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes, the bride's dowry pays for a formal ceremony. (10p2)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? "In Shona, women are addressed by their relationship to a male family member. Mai is the term for 'mother of'" (10p1).
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) People are encouraged to stay within their society but because so many different Shona groups live together in one community the cultures integrate.
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Both the woman's parents and her husband-to-be's parents mutually arrange a marriage, the elder also have influence over the arrangement.
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: As previously stated, families often develop close relationships due to the bride's dowry and marry one pair of siblings off to another pair of siblings.

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: Death due to violence has gone down tremendously due to both the court systems and the various cultures coexisting peacefully.
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Outgroup cause of death is due to each culture feeling the need to protect its culture and fear integration as turning their back on their own especially with the new presence of government, missionaries, and other organizations.
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: The most common causes of violence appear to be indigenous cultures blaming one another for issues inside the community and the government.
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Zezuru live in very diverse societies. Their communities, court systems and land areas are shared with other Shona groups.
- 4.18 Cannibalism? I found limited texts that acknowledged the issue of cannibalism but did not state whether Zezuru participate in it or not.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: As one article states, Shona often live in large groups comprised of Zezuru, Kalanga, Ndebele, Sotho and Shangana therefore it is difficult to establish an exact number of Zezuru in a particular residential area.
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Mobility depends on both drought and flood seasons (2p1).
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Most Shona communities have a court with a chief acting as judge. Members of the society may appeal to the court. These courts also consist of Zezuru, Kalanga, Ndebele, Sotho, etc.
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Live together as a family

- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Zimbabwe is considered an extremely politically active location where there is conflict between both indigenous tribes and the government and indigenous tribes among each other
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): In Zezuru culture, women may meet their husbands at age 12 but they are not able to marry until 18 and remain predominately within a circle of women until their marriage (7p2).
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: “bhudi: an informal term used colloquially like ‘buddy’ or ‘man’ implying familiarity” (10p4).
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Girls spend time with elderly women and rarely interact with the opposite sex during childhood. At age 18 they may marry and join their husband to create a family.
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): People live together as families rather than separated by sex. (7p4)
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Unclear, however sleep is extremely important. Dreams are analyzed and believed to be signs from the spirits (7p2)
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: religious leaders and healers are part of an inner organization, as well as judges for the court systems, those of high social status or lineages and elder in age are looked to for guiding the rest of the community.
- 5.12 Trade: Food used as trade within the community
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? See social organizations

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: Extremely religious, devote their seventh day entirely to the spirits (8p3)
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): “Healers generally maintain that they derive their powers from their association with a shave spirit” (7p3)
- 6.2 Stimulants: “Tobacco as a crop was introduced to Zimbabwe in the early 17th century and quickly became incorporated into African society. Snuff is a form of tobacco that has been finely ground and is meant for inhaling” (10p1).
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):
- 6.4 Other rituals: “Zezuru believe that dreams mediate between the spirits and the living and make connections between the present and the past. The spirits are believed to use the dreams of the healers to achieve their purposes. Through dreams they can call, inform, guide, permit, correct, and shape healers, as well as reach the community and direct the actions of its members. The spirits of witches or lost souls can use dreams for nefarious ends: they can cause harm, demand retribution, or scare the dreamer.” (7p1)
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): Mwali is God as is in most Shona groups
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Mbira music the traditional Zimbabwean instrument of the Zezuru tribes (National Museum Wales)
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: During offerings to Mwali, a large group of women perform the dance as well as bring the offerings into the hills. They are led by an individual male figure.
- 6.8 Missionary effect: Presence of Christianity due to missionaries
- 6.9 RCR revival: Zezuru religion has been revived into a combination of both typical Mwali worship and Christian beliefs.
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: “In Zezuru society, it is believed that at death a man's personality becomes a spirit that plays a fundamental part in the social affairs of living men. The *makombwe*, or heroes, who are believed to have lived on earth north of the Zambezi River before the founding of Zezuru society, have special powers of healing, prophecy, and rain-making, whereas the *vadzimu*, or ancestor spirits, are more directly concerned with the day-to-day affairs of their descendants. The heroes and the ancestors represent the bastions of morality, whereas the *shave* spirits, which are believed to originate from outside Zezuru society, are responsible for individual talents and for individual differences between people.” (7p3)
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No, the dead are believed to live on among the community
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy? “In Shona, women are addressed by their relationship to a male family member. Mai is the term for ‘mother of’” (10p1).
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Worship of the ancestors by praying to their spirits

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: Scarification is a common practice
- 7.2 Piercings: Piercings as well as scarification is common ways to express oneself.
- 7.3 Haircut: “Long bears and clear-shaven heads for identity” (8p2)
- 7.4 Scarification: Scarification is conducted in many African tribes that also perform ceremonies for Mwali. It appears that scarification along a young woman’s abdomen is most prominent because it emphasizes her role as a child bearer. (13p3)
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Jewelry such as necklaces and bracelets are popular for women. Additionally, stretching of the labia is performed while the girl is still young. (13p1)
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: There are two different ceremonies for when a boy becomes a man and a girl becomes a woman after menstruation. During this time, scarification, body paint and other adornment are performed. (13p1)
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Women emphasize their child bearing through adorning their abdomen and other feminine features. (13p2)
- 7.8 Missionary effect: Missionary has had a strong effect, Christianity is a popular religion and it has also been integrated in the already present religious practices for Mwali

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system: Male siblings typically rank higher than female, marriage status and social status also decide sibling classifications.

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Levirate is not practiced in Shona cultures. Upon death, a widow would marry her late husband's son as long as it is not her natural son.

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them): The Zezuru have many similarities to that of my previously researched, Kalanga group, as they both are Shona and often times live together.

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