

Review of: "Square peg in a round hole: Migration and romantic relationship troubles in the UK Zimbabwean diaspora"

Marija Brujic¹

¹ University of Belgrade

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The manuscript **"Square peg in a round hole: Migration and romantic relationship troubles in the UK Zimbabwean diaspora"** by **Mvikeli Ncube** and **Nicola Bentham** offers insight into the specific problems that Zimbabwean spouses encounter when living in the UK. Enculturation (or resistance to enculturation) brought about general problems, such as taking care of a spouse without a legal status, and gender-related problems, such as domestic violence, adultery and so on. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been chosen as the interpretation tool. In this respect, this manuscript presents an interesting perspective by showing the effects of (irregular) migration, such as a change in the relationship between spouses.

However, I see a lot of room for improvement. The manuscript leaves us with the conclusion that migration disrupts marriages and that Zimbabweans beat, exploit and abuse their wives. To avoid generalisation, I believe that the manuscript would benefit from: a) a more detailed application of CDA; b) gender analysis; c) a clear separation of regular from irregular migration; and d) the contextualisation of Zimbabwean relationships (if available, some statistics on domestic violence among migrants and specifically among Zimbabweans in the UK and information on whether these women were beaten before coming to the UK).

I hope the following comments and suggestions will be useful for the authors to revise their manuscript.

Specific comments:

Title: "romantic relationship troubles" – this part of the title sidetracked me. I think the word "romantic" doesn't apply to these interview samples since they are all divorcees – perhaps "marriage troubles"?

Introduction section

In the introduction, the authors use appropriate literature on the Zimbabwean diaspora. The manuscript gives readers a fine understanding of the migration situation among people coming from less developed countries and forced migrants to affluent countries, but this should be clearly stated. Regular and/or well off migrants generally do not have these marriage problems (stemming from their irregular status) once they are settled in a new country. The introduction leaves us with clearly stated study aims – I strongly advise that a research question(s) is also stated in the introduction.

Finally, one of the main concepts – “enculturation” – is neither defined nor explained throughout the text. I recommend for instance, Zimmermann, Laura, Klaus F. Zimmermann and Amelie Constant. 2007. “Ethnic Self-Identification of First-Generation Immigrants”. *International Migration Review* 41 (4): 769–781.

Method section

The method (semi-structured interview) was rightly chosen to study migrants' life histories (and collect data). The authors took into consideration the ethnic origin of the migrants and their own position (to avoid possible obstacles during interviews, such as language and cultural barriers).

Ethics section

The manuscript followed an ethical procedure to avoid the possible recognition of participants. I would only suggest that the authors give some general details, such as number of men and women participating in the study, level of education/previous job, etc. to be able to grasp the wider context.

Results section

Critical discourse analysis has been chosen as a method for the interpretation of data because it focuses on discourse as a source of the reproduction of power and control. I suggest the authors consult more literature on CDA – it would give them a clearer idea of how to better apply CDA when analysing their data.

Jäger, S. (2001) “Discourse and Knowledge: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of a Critical Discourse and Dispositive Analysis”, pp. 33–62. In: R. Wodak, M. Meyer: *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications.

van Dijk, T.A. (2015) “Critical Discourse Analysis”, pp. 466–485. In: D. Tannen et al.: *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2nd ed.). Malden: Wiley Blackwell.

Gender: I think that the clarity of the manuscript would be greater if the gender and residence status (for instance irregular, temporary, permanent) of each respondent was revealed (it wouldn't jeopardise the anonymity of the respondents).

Culture: I suggest literature on gender migration and on traditional Zimbabwean culture – written like this, the conclusions became self-assuming.

e.g. Kofman, E., Phizacklea A., Raghuram P., and Sales, R. (2000) *Gender and International Migration in Europe*. London and New York: Routledge.

Theme 3: some interview extracts are not clear (to the reader) because we do not know the full context (e.g. respondents #5, 6)

Conclusion section

p.6. “From this analysis, we can deduce that immigration into the UK has a negative association with the marital

relationships of migrant couples”. This statement is a generalisation because not all migrants are the same. They differ in class, education, wealth, reasons for coming to the UK, economic and political status of their country of origin, their residence status and so on. This should be clarified.

Moreover, the conclusion leaves us with more questions than answers – I find this way of finalising a manuscript confusing. Furthermore, two sentences have too many repetitions/synonyms causing the meaning to be unclear.

p. 7 “With reference to the aims of this research study, we have presented an empirically robust and empirical investigation into the separation and divorce experience of Zimbabwean couples living in the UK. Within this exploration, we have examined the interrelationships between different socio-cultural factors, including whether and how the Zimbabwean diaspora represented in this study navigate their assimilation and acculturation processes within their new host society, specifically with reference to the immigration processes that function as their entry into and stability within their new host society”.

Implications section

It should be clearly stated for whom these recommendations are meant (it is only stated in the abstract).

Strengths and limitations section:

p.7 “Furthermore, this study highlights the need for future studies to acknowledge the potential impact of the pandemic in adversely exacerbating domestic relationships, power relations and relationship dynamics, whilst simultaneously providing couples with an unique opportunity to self-reflect and express their feelings and frustrations (perhaps previously known or unknown to themselves) within the confidential setting of an interview.” – I do not feel like the manuscript highlighted this point clearly enough, if at all.

Other comments:

There are occasional typos; sentences are often too long; when possible, it is always better to quote the original work (e.g. van Dijk, 2001:96 as cited by Amoussou and Allagbe, 2018).

I hope that the authors will find my comments useful as I believe their manuscript has a lot of potential. I am thankful to the editorial team for providing me with the opportunity to review this manuscript.