

Chuchuchu Nchunga Nchunga, *Marriage is a Risk: Navigating the Legal and Emotional Gambles of Matrimony*. Gaborone: Letswiti Publishers, 2024, ISBN: 978-99968-999-2-8, 157 pages.

Although the word ‘risk’ and its synonyms like possibility, chance, probability, likelihood, danger, peril, threat, and prospect all send a chill of fear up the spine, Attorney Chuchuchu Nchunga Nchunga goes on to placate these fears by using expressions like ‘marriage is sweet risk; sweeteners of marriages, twenty advantages of marriage, etc’. Marriage is a risk just as driving, breathing, flying, and pregnancy are. These expressions mitigate the negative implications of RISK, being danger, exposure, hazard, liability, opportunity, peril, possibility, prospect, and uncertainty. The gerundive verbal form ‘navigating’ in the book title is both evocative and inchoative of a marriage ship that has to be steered and navigated through choppy waters; and this is just what the book achieves. This review is in line with the book’s endorsement which states that ‘In this day and age, marriage is under siege and requires urgent rescue’.

Since the book focuses on marriage as a risk, I start by mentioning one well-acknowledged societal or Botswana core risk: a non-reading culture. Despite high literacy rates, many people do not read and thus includes both seasoned married couples and those intending to tie the knot. Another point to make about the book is that it is written in a simple, accessible, readable, and user-friendly style. Its simplicity belies the fact that it comes from many years of legal practice and a marriage spanning over 30 years by the author. For these reasons, the book carries a rich professional and experiential authority on the subject matter, which is conveyed in a didactic, legible format. The book is very intentional, calculated, conscious, done on purpose, intended, planned, considered, wilful, purposeful, purposive, thought out in advance, pre-arranged, pre-conceived, pre-determined, and sprinkled with aforethought richness. In its engaging style, most of the chapters end with very poignant, visceral, frank, and brutally challenging questions for reflection by the reader, thereby raising the reader’s engagement to a crescendo on the subject matter. The book is itself a counselling manual of marriage, typical of a driver’s manual.

One of my favourite chapters is the one that invokes the contrasting metaphor between ‘size one’ versus ‘size ten’ -chapter 16, entitled ‘Satisfying a Size Ten Sexually in Marriage’. Reference to size has nothing to do with physical biological adornment but refers to emotional appetite, degrees of yearning for accentuated brain release, of a brain chemical compound known as dopamine, a neurotransmitter that functions as a reward centre. Inevitably, there is diversity of sexual fulfillment and intercourse in marriage. ‘If your partner has a high sexual appetite (size 10), and you have a more moderate one (size 1), how can you navigate this disparity to avoid sexual complications in marriage?... The key is for both partners to understand and cater to each other’s sexual needs, ensuring a harmonious and fulfilling marital life... Be content with your spouse sexually and strive to give them the very best, even when tired’. The book goes on further to state that denying your lawfully wedded spouse sexual gratification could almost be considered criminal. ‘When sexual denial is employed as a weapon in marital conflicts, it not only humiliates but also emotionally crushes and cripples the deprived party’. The significance of this chapter, and indeed other chapters, is that it raises issues that are hardly ever discussed openly in the various stages of modern-day preparations for marriage.

This book adds to a growing body of literature on the *Lenyalo* (marriage) institution, which is very good for stability and the retention of relevant practices. Our mental store of institutional memory, based on generational word-of-mouth rather than the written word, has its own perils. Verbal folklore tends to be volatile and ephemeral, thereby being easily buffeted by winds of change and inconsistencies. But if the marriage institution is to be stable, practices

and processes have to be codified. A 2022 book entitled *Lenyalo: Marriage Culture and Processes in Botswana -Past and Present* makes observations on post-independence socio-economic changes that have had adverse effects on traditional marriage practices (page 69). The significance of *Marriage is a Risk* is that it offers remedies covering chapters on the foundations of marriage, marital vows, sweeteners of marriage, ten tips for newlyweds, 20 advantages of marriage, 10 advantages of celebrating your wedding anniversary, and many other interesting topics.

Some of the highlights of the *Lenyalo* book findings include the fact that *bogadi* (bride gift) evolved out of voluntary gifting by the male, reaching heights of competition among males, rising to a crescendo of outright demands by the brides' relatives, at times in a manner of extortion to the detriment of the marriage union; the quick adoption of *bogadi* by communities that had no culture of *bogadi* -'a risk, as Nchunga puts it' -where even the law gives conflicting determinations on compensation in instances of infidelity. All of this takes place to the detriment of polygamy, despite the stark statistical disparities of eligible males to eligible females. The institution of marriage needs serious intervention from different angles and Nchunga's book closes some of the major gaps bedevilling the marriage institution.

The book is compliant with modern-day approaches to risk. Towards the end of this review, I urge the author and the reader, to adopt this risk spreadsheet (or any other) approach to *lenyalo*, *peeletso* (*betrotal*), *go laiwa* (counselling), *patlo* (seeking a hand in marriage), *bogadi* (bride price), *lenyalo*, critical role players, uncles, aunts, councilors, magistrates, etc. Many of the traditional rites of passage, pre-puberty events (*go laiwa* at the onset of monthly menstrual periods, *bogwera* and *bojale* (male and female initiation rites) have become obsolete, a derisive thanks to adverse Western influences. For example, *go laiwa* has been whittled down to a one-day event (or one-morning stand, not much different from a one-night stand) and needs concerted, sustained, and conscientious revival. The roles of uncles and aunts in family cohesion have been relegated to pariah status due to socio-economic changes, relative changes in power/wealth/influence relations, and the nucleation of family units versus extended families. With an increase in single-parent-led households, all parents ought to be counselled (*go laiwa*), including the dynamics of being a parent-in-law and being a parent.

I highly recommend that the author registers, among other services, a marriage counselling unit that provides both face-to-face and virtual services. A YouTube podcast channel would do very well for this book. One wishes that the school social studies curriculum would include family-building lessons, not the pursuit of money and wealth. The book is a must-read for all players involved in the marriage institution, including uncles, aunts, in-laws, magistrates, lawyers and aspirants, marriage counsellors, priests, *Dikgosi* (chiefs/traditional leaders), human resource officers, etc. Another hope is for the upcoming Botswana Television (BTV) family-feud programme to give attention to real Botswana family issues because marriage is a risk; yet it is the crucible for nation building -its mortar and its pestle, literally as well as figuratively.

**Reviewed by Joseph Tsonope**

[tsonope.j@gmail.com](mailto:tsonope.j@gmail.com)

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