Women on the Move: Migration and Transformation of Gender Relations

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Introduction

A complex set of economic, political and socio-cultural factors associated with globalization are contributing to the growing displacements and scattering of families across space. McGregor (1977) and Todaro (1994) both argue that migration is often attributed to a search for work. Labour usually moves from an area where there is an excess of labour and a shortage of capital to an area where there is a labour shortage and sufficient capital. Migration is therefore primarily motivated by opportunities that exist in the receiving countries. In the current era of globalization, the internationalization of capital and the reorganization of production have promoted uneven economic development contributing to increasing levels of international migration. The uneven economic development between Africa and Europe in the last few decades has not only initiated new migration movements and patterns but also led to the feminization of migration (Castles and Miller 1993), which has resulted in the transformation of gender relations.

Over the past four decades total numbers of international migrants have more than doubled. There are now 175 million international migrants worldwide or approximately 3.5 per cent of the global population – about half of whom are women, despite the common misconception that men are the migrants (Jolly and Reeves, 2005). The common perception is that migrants are predominantly male. In fact, global estimates by sex confirm that since 1960 numbers of female cross-border migrants reached almost the same numbers as male migrants. By 1960, female migrants accounted for nearly 47 out of every 100 migrants living outside their countries of birth. Since then, the female proportion of international migration has risen slightly, to reach 48 per cent in 1990 and nearly 49 per cent in 2000 (International Labour Organization 2003: 9A prevailing misconception has been that men migrate and women do not. Women migrants have often been “invisible” – assumed to be economic dependants of spouses – despite the fact that consistently over the past 40 years, nearly as many women as men have migrated. However, women migrants are becoming more visible as they take up income-generating opportunities and this is important in an analysis of migration and transformations and renegotiations of gender relations.

International migration theories over the past 25 years have failed to address the gender causes and gender-specific experiences of migration. It was feminist researchers and activists in the 1970s and 1980s who questioned the near invisibility of women as migrants, their presumed passivity in the migration process and their assumed place in the home (Boyd and Grieco 2003). The 1980s and 1990s brought more of a focus on gender equality and gender relations, albeit still on the margins of international migration theory (Piper 2005). Indeed migration is only just now emerging as a development policy issue, with limited attention to gender and remains sidelined on the global policy agenda (Jolly and Reeves, 2005).
In Zimbabwe, international migration and cross border trade have historically been male activities. Colonial migration has been dominated by men to towns and to countries in the region, mainly to South Africa and Botswana. Post-colonial Zimbabwe witnessed the cross border migration of women who have explored the cross border trade option in large numbers. These have been predominantly single, widowed, divorced as well as elderly women in difficult family circumstances (Gaidzanwa, 1993). Post 2000, characterized by economic, political and social crisis in Zimbabwe has seen an increase in female migration, including the migration of married women. Such phenomena as the feminization of labour, women’s rights and globalisation have partly contributed to the feminization of migration. Female access to global mobility shows that these movements mean a challenge to the existing gender order and that they initiate transformations of gender relations. Such transformations as will be analysed by this thesis relate to actor transformation which automatically leads to structural transformations, that is transformation of society.

**Background to the study**

In the history of kin-based communities such as Zimbabwe, mobility from home was male dominated since women were more involved in agriculture (Gaidzanwa, 1993). Men dominated the cross-border wage labour markets as legal and illegal immigrants into South Africa and Botswana. They tended to be migrants for long periods. In the 1980s, women, mainly single, widowed and divorced, started migrating within the region to South Africa and Botswana for shorter periods. This was partly because it was deemed too far and risky for women to travel to such countries on their own. Among the Shona the word *pfambi* (prostitute) is derived from *kufamba* (mobility). Mobility was therefore associated with prostitution and the fear of being labelled as prostitutes for a long time hindered women from being mobile. It was less acceptable for women to move about and travel on their own so women may found it more difficult to migrate, or they tended to migrate shorter distances than men, internally, or within the region.

Despite these discourses, women have crossed borders, a fact which reveals women’s agency in migration, their desire to change their situations as well as societal structures and perceptions. Due to the trend described above, the role of gender in migration decision-making as well as shifting gender relations emanating from migration processes has not in the past received the attention it deserves. The transformation of gender relations is an intrinsic part of the global and regional migration movements and it is still neglected by much of the mainstream literature on migration as well as by policy makers worldwide (Dannecker, 2005). Migration may challenge traditional gender roles – absence of one spouse may leave the other spouse with both greater decision-making power and a greater burden of responsibility and labour (Jolly and Reeves, 2005). Children may be left behind by mothers migrating internally or internationally. Sometimes fathers take on new gender roles and look after their children. The migration of women, especially married women, from Zimbabwe to far away place such as the United Kingdom the years starting 2000 therefore deserves special attention as it implies a break from the “norm,” a transformation and a redefinition of gender relations, both at the destination and in the country of origin.

**Defining Migration**
The English word migration derives from the Latin verb *migrare*, meaning “to move from one place to another.” Migration may mean either a temporary or a permanent change of residence by one person or by a group of people (migration of people 2010). Two other words associated with migration are “emigrant” and “immigrant.” An emigrant is someone who leaves one place for another. An immigrant is a person comes from another place.

There are two basic kinds of migration—internal and external. Internal migration occurs when someone moves from one section of country to another, usually for economic reasons. The most notable example of internal migration has been the movement from rural regions to cities. This kind of migration has occurred since the earliest recorded periods of civilization. International migration occurs when people move across national borders (Martin & Widgren 2002). Migration is as old as humans wandering in search of food, but international migration is relatively recent phenomenon. It was only in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century that the system of nation-states, passports and visas developed to regulate the flow of people across national borders.

**Why people migrate**

The reasons for migration can be divided into two main aspects, the so-called "push" and "pull" factors. Push factors are those in their old place which force people to move. For example, there may be civil wars or wars in general in the country, but political or religious oppression, climate changes, lack of jobs or simply poverty are all important push factors. Pull factors are factors in the target country which encourage people to move; these include peace and safety, a chance of a better job, better education, social security, a better standard of living in general as well as political and religious freedom (www.ghs-mh.de/migration/projects/define/define.htm)

If people are satisfied where they are, they will not migrate. For migration to take place, there must be some factor that pushes people out or that pulls them to a new environment. Throughout history, people have left their native lands for a variety of reasons: religious or racial persecution, lack of political freedom, economic deprivation (migration of people 2010). Becoming an emigrant is no easy matter. For an individual it means leaving home, family, friends, and a familiar social environment to take one's chances in a new place. For groups of people the situation is much the same; they must uproot themselves from one society to move into another. They probably will not know the language, the customs, or the laws of the destination country.

International migration is usually a major individual or family decision that is carefully considered since crossing national borders to settle or work in another country is not an easy decision. Migration may be viewed as a natural and predictable response to differences in the countries of origin and destination. These may be differences in resources and jobs, in demographic growth, and in security and human rights. In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, Africa is likely to be a major source of migrants, as young people move from overcrowded cities in Africa to industrial societies with slow-growing or declining population sand a high proportion of older residents (Martin and Widgren, 2000). Large numbers of migrants are already migrating to Europe in search of jobs.

**Emigration in Zimbabwe**
The chaotic situation in Zimbabwe takes place against a backdrop of massive flows of people, skilled and unskilled, within the region and across the Atlantic and Europe. These migration flows need to be understood as part of the increasing global flow generated by globalizing forces. Depending on what one chooses to emphasize, migration is positive and negative all at once. On the one hand, migration flows are placing stress on the family, but it is also reinforcing family ties, as people tend to ride on these connections to facilitate their mobility (Muzvidziwa, 2005).

The fourth largest group of African migrants in the UK is from Zimbabwe. There are approximately 103650 Zimbabwean migrants in the UK, which is about 0.18% of the total UK population according to the ILO (2006) This number only includes those who were not born in the UK and not 2nd, 3rd and subsequent generation immigrants. Of this number:

- 47% were male
- 53% were female
- 14% were aged 0-15 years
- 12% were aged 16-24 years
- 53% were aged 25-44 years
- 12% were aged 45-64 years
- 2% were aged 65+ years

Most of the Zimbabweans who migrate to the UK are work permit holders, people with rights to settle in the UK on the basis of ancestry and refugees and asylum seekers. 84% were employed, 4% were unemployment and 11% were inactive. 64% of Zimbabweans in the UK either own property outright or have bought a home with a mortgage.

**Emigration as a family survival strategy in Zimbabwe**

Families in Zimbabwe have increasingly relied on the concept of selective migration of family members in order to sustain the livelihoods of those family members who remain behind. This means that families chose one of their members who has the greatest potential of generating income outside the country. This family member becomes the main breadwinner and sustains the livelihoods of those who remain behind. Decisions about who should migrate, where, and for how long are sanctioned, if not controlled by the family so as to promote inter-generational flows of resources (Adepoju, 2005a). For many Zimbabweans the money sent by migrants has become the major source of income. This money is used to buy food, pay rent, pay for education, medical bills and many other expenses. Other families send their children to the UK to acquire education. upon completing their education they get formal employment there and use their income to support their families back home.

**The Zimbabwean Diaspora Community**

According to the UN Migrant Stock database the Zimbabwean-born diaspora was already becoming global in its distribution in 2001. Nearly 20 percent of the global migrant stock was located in Western Europe, 5 percent in North America, 4 percent in Australasia and 3 percent in
the rest of Africa. Of the 222 jurisdictions (countries and other territories) reported in the database, 192 (or 86 percent) have at least one Zimbabwean-born person. However, certain countries have clearly been major destinations. They include the United Kingdom (14 percent of the global stock), the United States (3.5 percent), Australia (3.3 percent), Germany (2.8 percent) and Canada (1.2 percent).

**Table 1: Zimbabwean Migrant Stock by Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>% Global Stock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>240,494</td>
<td>66.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East &amp; Central Africa</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>9,012</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa &amp; The Horn</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>66,910</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>4,068</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australasia &amp; Pacific</td>
<td>14,664</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>16,598</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>2,872</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>4,733</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>361,743</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN

**The Zimbabwean community in the UK**

Families in Zimbabwe have used selective migration for their members as a strategy to ensure the survival of family members or to pursue economic mobility to supplement dwindling household resources. In doing so households generally select invest in a member who is viewed to have the greatest potential to for generating migrant earnings and sending remittances. Propelled by the economic crisis migration has become the central coping mechanism to ensure family survival. Decisions about who should migrate, where, and for how long are sanctioned, if not controlled by the family so as to promote inter-generational flows of resources (Adepoju, According to The International Organization for Migration Zimbabwean migration to the UK was comprised of three waves. The first wave of significant Zimbabwean migration consisted of white Zimbabweans who migrated after the country's independence from Britain. This group was driven out by the uncertainty posed by the new political dispensation. They feared backlash from the new black government. The second major wave lasted from 1990 until 1997, caused by the economic hardship that resulted from Zimbabwe's application of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programme. The third wave began in 1998 and has resulted from political and social unrest in Zimbabwe (IOM 2006). The UK government
introduced visas for Zimbabweans intending to travel to the UK. As Ranger (2005, 411) explains: “At the beginning of November 2002 a visa requirement was imposed on all Zimbabweans travelling to Britain. It was no longer good enough to turn up at the airport, as nearly all the asylumseekers had done, with a passport and a plane ticket.” Because of these changes, a new and sophisticated wave of immigration emerged and this has continued to the present. This shift from a permissive immigration policy to a control-oriented policy led Zimbabweans to acquire South African, Malawian, and Zambian passports in order to travel to the UK. Table 4.3 shows the Zimbabwean entrants to the United Kingdom from 2002 to 2007.

Table 2: Zimbabwean Entrants to United Kingdom, 2002-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Returnees</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Work Permits</th>
<th>Dependents/Family</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>27,500</td>
<td>2,790</td>
<td>1,780</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>9,225</td>
<td>56,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>19,100</td>
<td>14,900</td>
<td>1,850</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>1,550</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4,890</td>
<td>43,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>24,300</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>1,730</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>51,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>14,500</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>5,455</td>
<td>45,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>20,700</td>
<td>12,700</td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5,025</td>
<td>41,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>20,800</td>
<td>11,600</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3,915</td>
<td>39,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UK Control of Immigration Statistics, 2002-7

Spread and Distribution

The Zimbabwean population is widely dispersed across the UK. The largest communities can be found in the UK’s larger cities and towns. The table below shows the geographic spread of Zimbabwean people in the UK in 2006, based on estimates by community leaders.

Table 3 Location of Zimbabwean migrants in the UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Zimbabwean population</th>
<th>Location(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 each</td>
<td>Leeds, Luton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 each</td>
<td>Birmingham, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Sheffield, Slough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 each</td>
<td>Coventry, Glasgow, Leicester, Wolverhampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,000 each</td>
<td>Edinburgh, Liverpool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 each</td>
<td>Cardiff, Oxford</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Employment structures for migrants in the United Kingdom

The results of this study shows that most Zimbabwean migrants get employment as care workers. As Bloch (2005) points out, the UK “care industry” has become the single major employer of Zimbabwean migrants during the last decade. In her survey, nearly 20 percent of migrants were working as carers or care assistants. The fact that most migrants are employed in the menial jobs does not mean that the do not have the qualifications or that they have low qualifications. On the contrary many of them are highly qualified professionals. This creates a lot of frustration and dissatisfaction among the migrant workers. To add insult to injury a lot of derogatory names are used to describe these care workers. In Zimbabwe, migrants in the sector are disparagingly referred to as “bum technicians” or as “working for the BBC” (British Bottom Cleaners) (McGregor 2007). Most of the migrants who engage in care work have little or no experience in the field but they do not have any alternatives. The care industry is the one which offers employment opportunities because of a variety of reasons. These include the fact that the sector is shunned by local as well as the fact there is a growing population of old people in the United Kingdom. The “care gap” between demand and supply in Britain has been created by an aging population, geographical mobility (which has split up families) and the fact that British women have been less able or willing to perform “traditional” caring roles (Bloch 2004). Most of the migrants go to the UK with very high hopes of finding work that is relevant to their qualifications and experiences. However most of them end up being stressed because they end up experiencing deskilling and loss of status. For men engaging in care work is even more humiliating to them because they consider it to be women’s work. However for these men there are limited choices because care work pays more than any other menial jobs they can lay their hands on. As a result those men who decline to do care work will have to content with a lower income. This does no good to their manhood and ego as having lower income will put them on a lower position than their female counterparts who engage in such work.

Care work has become increasingly unattractive to indigenous British locals. This is due to the fact that it has been largely privatized and contracted to local authorities and private home care units. As McGregor notes: “These changes have been important in spreading temporary work and creating unstable and insecure employment conditions at the bottom end of the job market, contributing to the shortages of carers and the growing importance of migrants.” The care gap is increasingly filled by insecure (often irregular) international migrants, although “their service has often been “invisible,” and their contribution is little appreciated.”

Female Migration in colonial Zimbabwe

According to Schmidt (1992) women were an unusual minority in the early colonial urban settings. This was due to the partriarchial settler state that sought to dominate and Africans and in particular African women from the benefits of urbanization. Migration of African women to urban centres dates back to the beginning the of the twentieth century. For instance the first women to move freely into mining centres were those of independent means, mostly prostitutes and informal sector operators, due to women’s exclusion from the waged sector of the economy.
Beer brewing by African women was a very common and lucrative business in the mining centers. Entry into the wage labour market by African women increased in the 1920s. However women were confined to doing menial jobs shunned by their male counterparts. To supplement their meager wages women migrants resorted to earn an income through the informal sector trade. The colonial state viewed female migration as a threat to female dominated peasant farming that helped to keep urban male wages down (Muzvidziwa 2005). As a result the colonial state instituted policies to control women’s movement and economic activities such as beer sales in the compounds, by banning most informal activities.

According to Schmidt (1992) the 1930s witnessed a specific form of female migration. Women moved to towns, mine, mission stations and European farming areas in an attempt to break away from the bonds of rural patriarchal authority. Women saw prospects in earning an independent income, whether as a prostitute, domestic worker or informal sector operator. However discriminatory laws such as the Vagrancy Act, the Urban Areas Accommodation and Registration Act (1946), and the Land Apportionment Act (1930), worked to restrict the movement of African women into urban areas. These regulations permitted women to enter into urban areas according to their marital status. Women were allowed entry into urban areas as dependents of their husbands not as independent women. The colonial state linked its stability to the control of African women’s sexuality, which dominated colonial migration policies (Muzvidziwa, 2005). European men and women, as well as African men, all worked to restrict the migration of women from the rural to urban centers.

**Migration and gender relations**

Transnational spaces are gendered and migration is changing power and gender relations (Dannecker, 2005). New female spaces have been created by global processes and the fact that women have explored new possibilities means a challenge to existing gender and power relations. Unlike traditional patterns of cross-border migration that attracted mostly men today’s official migration statistics in Zimbabwe reveal a situation where females are now the majority in terms of migration flow (Mpofu, Nyatanga and Tekere 2002). Cohen (1997) noted two important trends characterizing migration patterns in post-apartheid South Africa. These are immigration for shopping purpose and an increase in the number of independent women migrants mostly on a short term basis.

Not only is female migration independent of men, but also according to Dodson (2000), it is certainly part of household survival strategies. Gender relations do not only facilitate or constrain both men and women’s movements but also structure the whole migration process, including practices, identities and relations between the different actors involved. Men and women therefore experience transnationalism differently and have different relationships out of these. Gender roles, relations and inequalities affect who migrates and why, how the decision is made, the impacts on migrants themselves, on sending areas and on receiving areas. In the SADC region there is a general distrust of women who travel unaccompanied as seen in the visa requirements for South Africa, where married women have to obtain permission from their husbands to travel (Muzvidziwa 2005). This shows the intersection of private and public patriarchy in attempting to keep women down.
Experience shows that migration can provide new opportunities to improve women’s lives and change oppressive gender relations – even displacement as a result of conflict can lead to shifts in gendered roles and responsibilities to women’s benefit (Jolly and Reeves, 2005).

While working in Hong Kong I experienced many things – the way people treat a dependent or independent woman. I have gained much experience and my confidence has grown. Now, I have a say in decision-making at home. My husband does not shout at me. I have bought a piece of land and four rickshaws and I am creating a means of livelihood for four other families…’

SushilaRai, Nepalese migrant domestic worker (UNIFEM 2004, section 2, p1)

SushilaRai’s experience above shows how migration can provide new opportunities to improve lives and change oppressive social relations. Migration can provide a vital source of income for migrant women and their families, and earn them greater autonomy, self-confidence and social status. However, migration can also entrench traditional roles and inequalities and expose women to new vulnerabilities as the result of precarious legal status, exclusion and isolation (Jolly and Reeves 2005). It is therefore the purpose of this study to establish how migration by Zimbabwean men and women has led to changed gender relations.

Activities and social practices of migrants are influenced by and influence gender relations in the home country as well as gender relations in the migrant community abroad. Dannecker (2005) observed among Bangladesh male migrants that their perception of female migration is that they have occupied spaces that have not been created for them. Female migration in Bangladesh has led to new perspectives on existing gender relations with a new belief in the equality of men and women resulting in a negotiation of gender relations and an introduction of new practices when they return home. Some of these women have dressed in a different way, at least at home, they have criticized their husbands and families by referring to the Malaysian context (where they had migrated to) and their own experiences. Migration has helped change gender roles and gender expectations among Latino families. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) has documented how a slightly more egalitarian, less orthodox division of labor emerged among Mexican immigrant families, particularly in families where husbands and wives had been separated by migration for a number of years. Several factors made these families more egalitarian in terms of the division of labor.

Based on interviews of Chinese migrants to Australia, WeiWeida (2003) found out that gender role performances are strategic and flexible. The impact of migration on gender relations is multifaceted, individualized and cultural. Women’s expectations of men involved elements of tradition, modernity and some degree of ambivalence (Ibid). The findings suggest the importance of considering the social context, culture and social class of migrants in the home country when discussing the gender relations of migrants in the process of settlement in the host country. Migration also tends to have negative effects on families. Rabe (2001) found that many commuter couples had strained relationships. Violence, unfaithfulness and stress were likely to be high for commuter couples as compared to couples living together. Because female migrants are active agents, gender relations are bound to be transformed by the migration of Zimbabwean women to the United Kingdom.

Migrant Women Employment
The structure of migrant women’s employment in United Kingdom is conditioned both by transformations in the global economy and by particular factors in European societies, such as the demand for services of care for the young and elderly. This demand for services has increased significantly due to the withdrawal of state care services, or a basic inadequacy in these services which has not been addressed. Even though some women have managed to break into professional skilled labour’ it remains true that for many migrant women the types of jobs into which they are recruited are largely unskilled, low-paid and insecure in terms of having little social or legal protection. The fact that many of these women are working illegally because they do not have the requisite work permits makes their conditions of work even more insecure and makes it harder for them to mobilise because they may be afraid to make themselves visible in the public space. In addition, the type of work in which migrant women are involved may mean that they remain isolated and cannot access any support either from other migrant women or help from outside sources such as the Trade Unions, for example. Although these women have very good educational qualifications, often with professional experience prior to migration, and although they have mastered the English language, only a small minority have been able to obtain employment that is commensurate with their skills, and that has long-term prospects. A third of skilled immigrant women are not integrated in the labour market and a further half of the women have a precarious labour status, either because they work in positions below their skill level or because their employment is unstable and without long-term prospects.

Changes in Gender and power relations in migrant families

Life in the United Kingdom has forced many Zimbabweans to rethink their gendered positions in society. Though Zimbabwean families are characterized by a more rigid gender division of labor, where women are culturally expected to fulfill the homemaker role and men the provider role, much is changing among Zimbabwean families, both in the United Kingdom and in their countries of origin. Migration has helped change gender roles and gender expectations among Zimbabwean families. A slightly more egalitarian, less orthodox division of labor emerged among migrant families, particularly in families where husbands and wives had been separated by migration for a number of years. Several factors made these families more egalitarian in terms of the division of labor. First, husbands lived for several years in small, migrant communities, where there were few women to do their domestic work. Consequently, they had to learn how to cook and wash their own clothes, among other chores. Women, on the other hand, grew more independent and assertive during the period of separation, leading them to make new demands on their husbands to participate in household chores. The transformations were modest, however, as men tended to avoid the dirty and invisible household work, such as cleaning the bathroom. Instead they took on types of work where there was immediate recognition, such as cooking.

Another important factor was that women entered the United Kingdom legally. Legal status minimized the anxieties of finding work, spatial mobility, and integration. For women who arrived without documentation the situation was different. Their fear of being apprehended by the immigration authorities instilled by their husbands, led to isolation as many dared not go beyond the confines of their homes. In these families a more orthodox division of labor remained.
For immigrants social class has shaped gender relations and the gender division of labor within families. Zimbabwean working-class migrants in the United Kingdom try hard to maintain a traditional gender division of labor, but the reality of life forced many mothers to join the labor force. Working-class men resisted women's entry into the world of work by taking a double shift so that wives could stay home, take care of the children, and do housework. Some women resisted those traditional roles and sought to change them. For some families, the income provided by employed mothers was too critical to the family's survival. Men accommodated to the wife's employment, but the traditional expectations for the woman did not change.

Working mothers are still responsible for the care of the children and housework and they have developed a range of strategies to deal with the “second shift.” For example, daughters are introduced to household responsibilities very early and are left to care for younger brothers and sisters. Others, given the ease of migration, brought over relatives with them to help care for the children. In contrast, middle-class Zimbabwean migrant women felt differently about work and family obligations. Middle-class and educated professional women in the United Kingdom rejected traditional ideologies about women's roles and saw no conflict in doing both. Some husbands supported them, but when husbands resisted, they negotiated the work and family responsibilities. Their class position afforded them options, including staying home until they were ready to return to work, hiring help, postponing having children, and organizing their schedule around their children's school schedules.

**Financial independence and decision making**

The intersection of migration and employment is a powerful force that erodes patriarchal family arrangements. Results of the study show that most of the Zimbabwean women pooled their incomes with those of their partners. All felt that such contributions earned them a right to voice opinions and decisions about how the money would be spent and other household issues. They found earning and spending their money as they pleased empowering. Apart from their new roles as primary breadwinner and the financial independence brought about by it the women have also come to question traditional gender roles and identities.

Those who were married had formulated arrangements that suggest the influence of the more flexible gender role patterns found in the United Kingdom. In these families, household chores such as cleaning and cooking were shared between both partners.

**The costs of migration on relationships**

An important outcome of financial independence is that women are less likely to tolerate abusive relationships. Societal sanctions in the United Kingdom against domestic violence also compel men to refrain from such abuse. The potential for conflicts between men and women is also higher in the United Kingdom. The conflicts manifest at many levels but they are more visible in the social arena. When women are quick to initiate changes in gender roles in keeping with the
more flexible expectations found in the United Kingdom, the reaction of men is negative. This kind of strain on immigrant families frequently leads to divorce. Zimbabwean immigrant women reported that upon migration they enjoyed more rights in their marriages. Marriage in Zimbabwe is a contract between two families and extended families and kinship ties are central to the production and reproduction of gendered ideologies. In most households the changing of gender roles has put families under a lot of pressure leading to intense domestic conflict and breakup of marriages. The fact that women have become bread winners means that they now demand more say in family affairs. In addition they no longer want to undertake their culturally assigned domestic chores. This has not gone down well with their husbands who resent this loss of status. In addition men have also lost their self-image as bread winners for their families. Women’s access to their own independent income threatens men’s hegemonic masculinity which centres on being the main providers and decision makers in the family. The Zimbabwean man back in his home country is a typical African man. He is the one who is supposed to do everything for his family. He is supposed to bring money for the family whereas the woman is there to cook. There is no equality between men and women. When they are in the United Kingdom there is a complete transformation in the way they relate. Usually both work many shifts per day. When the woman comes back home she is tired and wants to relax. This means that domestic chores have to be shared. However in Zimbabwe even when both of them work, when they go back home the wife is expected to do the cooking while the man usually will take a newspaper and read. However it is common for working women to rely on maids to do household chores.

Gender roles norms and expectations have been challenged and reconfigured in Zimbabwe as a result of migration. For women the impact of migration on their lives is never a “zero-sum game.” They enjoy greater freedom and independence in the United Kingdom than they had in their countries of origin, but at a great cost. They have had to work very hard, often in jobs below their level of education and skill, and have had to juggle full-time work with family responsibilities. They also have to face discriminatory concepts that are embedded in migration policies and in the minds of many employers in the United Kingdom. Particularly important among these are the undervaluation of the personal and educational qualifications of non-EU immigrants, and patriarchal attitudes regarding the child-rearing role of immigrant women in society. These concepts combine to produce unequal opportunities for women to access the skilled labour market. Skilled immigrant women are not only faced with barriers to applying their educational resources in British society, but they are also confronted with the associated de-skilling, loss of confidence, and loss of autonomy. Thus, for many skilled immigrant women, migration does result in an improvement but rather a loss of class status. This situation seems a paradox: whereas countries outside the European Union lose valuable resources through the migration of skilled personnel, the United Kingdom fails to provide an adequate framework for the development of women’s social and cultural capital.

CONCLUSION

Migration has led to many changes in gender relations and roles between men and women. Men are now being forced through circumstance beyond their control to do household chores and take care of children. This is something they would never have accepted or considered doing before their migration experiences. For women, migration has also changed their roles and the way they relate to their male counterparts. It has reduced their domestic responsibilities as they now have
to share these duties with men. Besides this migration has opened up opportunities for them in the public sphere where they can prove their competences as well as earn an independent income for themselves. However the opening up of new opportunities means that women now also have to work for long hours to get this income. Before that the men would do all the work for them while they took care of the children. Women nowadays have greater financial autonomy and have more say in financial decisions. The fact that women now possess and control a significant amount of income has inevitably led to transformations of gender relations as most of them are a function of financial and material well being. The power and control over their own income has become a means for the transformation of gender relations within the household. Another factor that strengthens these changes in gender relations is the absence of the extended family in the diaspora set up. A situation where there are no close relatives of the migrants provides a space for the articulation and shedding of “traditional” gender roles. For most men still in the United Kingdom the changes are a passing phase, and they believe that they will eventually return home and recover their hegemonic masculinity.

The factors that cause the transformation and renegotiation of gender roles and relations in the migrant community are not only related to the participation of women in the job market, neither are they influenced by financial autonomy. They are also influenced by the status of the gender relations in the destination country. The UK is a country with its own norms and values which are not as oppressive to women as that of Zimbabwe. Migrants tend to pick some of the norms and values that tend to enhance their freedom and empowerment. This is usually the case when women are the primary migrants and their husbands have a “dependant label”. The overall result of these changes is that patriarchal gender roles and relations are challenged. This renegotiation of gender roles has led to a situation where the traditional marriage contract has been re-evaluated and altered. The consequences have not been always positive as this has often led to the dissolution of marriages as well as and increase in single parent households.

Despite all the gains that women have made in challenging the constraints placed on them by the traditional patriarchal system their emancipation has not been total. They still experience patriarchal exclusion and control. Men continue to resist these challenges and seek to assert authority in the households by appealing to pre-migration norms and values.

References


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