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‘A Crisis of Expectation?’ Narratives on the Impact of Migration on Gender and Family in Zimbabwe, 2000-2011¹

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Abstract

The article employs the narratives of those left behind to explore the impact of migration on the Zimbabwean family institution and its gender terrain in the post-2000 period. It uses narratives collected from various categories of people including spouses, grandparents, siblings, in-laws, teachers, civil servants and lawyers in order to explore the nature and extent of the crisis created by migration. The article argues that on the whole, migration has produced a crisis of expectation amongst those left behind in the Zimbabwean society and, to a certain extent, to the migrants themselves by failing to satisfactorily address their plight. This crisis includes family breakdowns, family feuds, neglect of those left behind, betrayal as well as delinquency among children, particularly those of school going age.

Introduction

The story of the Zimbabwean crisis at the turn of the millennium has been told a number of times. The crisis manifested itself at various levels, and one such level is the mass exodus of Zimbabweans to other countries. As McGregor (2010: 7) notes, this crisis is closely connected to the emergence of Diasporic identities and claims since 2000. Scholars have documented this phenomenon from various standpoints. Some have looked at the forces that contributed to the unprecedented trends in migration, while others have been interested in the impact of this development as well as the experiences of those in the Diaspora. This study is situated within the context of those that seek to explore the endogeneity of migration.

A few points need to be made about migration, gender and family in the 21st Century Zimbabwean context. Migration is not a new development in this country, and some of the effects of the post-2000 migration mirror pre-2000 migration trends. The impacts, however, differ in terms of intensity and nature because of the peculiarities inherent in the recent trends in migration. These peculiarities include the fact that unlike previous trends in

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migration where Zimbabwe used to be both a sender and recipient of migrant labour, it has largely been a sender (Mlambo, 2010). Further, the crisis has also been characterised by unprecedented volumes of emigrants. What is also worth noting is the 'feminisation of migration' in the post-2000 era. Crush and Tevera (2010: 18) note that this "feminisation of migration relates more to growing numbers and new roles rather than any sudden post-2000 surge in the importance of female versus male migration".

In terms of the gender terrain, Zimbabwe is largely a patriarchal society. Notwithstanding the increasing 'feminisation' of migrant labour, women have remained generally exposed to gender stereotypes. For some women, the migration of spouses has opened avenues previously closed to them as women. Even more interesting are the changes of gender roles for some men whose spouses have joined the Diasporan community. As for family, the Zimbabwean society, like most African societies, has an extended family concept where family ties go beyond the 'immediate' or nuclear family.

From the analysis of the narratives, the following points arise as key to shaping the nature of the experiences of those left behind. The first is the period of absence of the migrant, especially where couples are involved. The second point is the nature and extent of continued communication between the Diasporans and their families or partners back home. Thirdly, there is the issue of the extent to which those abroad continue to support their family members or partners, especially in terms of material benefits and, lastly, there is the question of the socio-economic environment obtaining in both the sending and receiving countries.

Literature Review

A number of scholars have contributed to the Diasporan discourse, paying attention to the endogeneity of migration. Borraz, Pozoy and Rossi (2008: 1) use the case of Cuenca, one of Ecuador's largest cities, to "examine the impact of migration on the happiness of the family left behind". Using quantitative analysis and social scientific experiments, the authors come to the conclusion that "migration reduces the happiness of those left behind" (*Ibid*). Bracking's (2003: 633) study on the impact of remittances on those in Zimbabwe posits that "while money sent from the 'other side' has a beneficial effect on close kin, remittances can also undermine the purchasing power of those households without migrating members". She, too, paints a less optimistic picture of the impact of remittances on those left behind.

Perhaps an even more elaborate study on remittances and household survival in Zimbabwe is one by Tevera, Crush and Chikanda (2010). This study quantifies the economic value of migration by Zimbabweans to the Diaspora and evaluates the importance of remittances to economic survival given the economic crisis bedeviling the nation. In this way, the study

attempts to provide “information on the relationship between remittances and poverty alleviation at the household level” (Tevera, Crush & Chikanda, 2010: 307). The authors conclude that “without remittance flows, the situation of many Zimbabwean households would even be more dire than it is already” (*Ibid*). Bracking and Sachikonye (2010: 338) make a similar observation in their study of trends in remittances to Zimbabwe in 2006 and 2007. While these observations are correct, this article contends that at the bottom of it all, the Diasporan connection, including (if not specifically) the remittances, produced crises of expectation at various levels in the Zimbabwean society, especially where issues of family and gender mattered, as the remittances, to a greater extent, were responsible for instigating family feuds, divorces and the re-orientation of gender roles.

Mwatwara’s (2012) study on the impact of migration on women begins from the stand point that migration in Zimbabwe has been a masculine undertaking. The study notes that there were various social, economic and even biological factors that restrained many women from migrating. For Mwatwara, hegemonic patriarchies, for the most part, worked very much against women, causing them to suffer more than they benefitted from the migration of their husbands. While he acknowledges that some women did benefit from the migration of their spouses, Mwatwara maintains that, by and large, women left behind were actually negatively affected by the departure of their loved ones. This observation confirms the argument that migration has reproduced a crisis of expectation in Zimbabwe. Parreñas’ (2005: 319) study on long-distance intimacy and transnational families in the Philippines looks at communication systems and how they are used to fulfil what she calls “transnational intimacy”. In this study, she also examines gender trends that arise as a result of mothers being away from their families and as such engaging in “transnational mothering” (Parreñas, 2005: 319).

Pasura (2010) makes an examination of how the gender terrain and family institution of Zimbabweans in the UK are re-formulated. His study demonstrates some of the challenges posed by migration. It posits that migration resulted in the re-orientation of gender and the family institution of Zimbabwean migrants in Britain. He also looks at efforts in public spaces to resist re-configuration of gender in the private spaces. A number of his observations are also mirrored amongst those left behind to an extent that the same migration trends reproduced similar impacts on both the sending and receiving ends.

Methodology

Data for this study was collected over a period of nine months between April, 2011 and January, 2012. The study purposively sampled towns and locations, and then randomly sampled the narratives from those left behind

as well as certain officials to illuminate the impact of migration. It is qualitative and based, largely, on urban experiences, particularly the high-medium densities. Some 26 interviews were carried out. The narratives are themselves of a subjective nature and may not be representative of all urban migration experiences. However, these narratives are reflective, to a certain degree, of sets of experiences and perceptions that men, women and families have had as a result of the post-2000 migration trends in Zimbabwe.

The narratives give empirical evidence on some of the effects, positive or otherwise, of migration on the population that has remained in the country while close family members like spouses, children, siblings, cousins and parents moved to foreign territories usually in search of greener pastures. Narratives also make it possible to move away from “models that investigate the role of remittances on the economy as a whole, or within a national developmental frame using a combination of indicators” (Bracking, 2003: 634). Such models, as Bracking (*Ibid*) observes, “largely miss the central point that remittances [in this case migration as a whole] are not uniform in their effects”. Thus, with narratives, one is able to have an appreciation of the concrete and varied experiences of those left behind without having to gloss over or universalise realities with statistical (mis)representations. In the words of Eastmond (2007: 249), “from personal accounts we may also glean the diversity behind over-generalized notions”.

The research used, largely, the life-history approach where the individuals would narrate their life experiences within the context of the impact of the emigration of their relatives, spouses, friends, clients or even just acquaintances.² From these, sieving was done in relation to what the narratives were saying, or not saying about migration in relation to its impact on gender and family. Hearsay was also employed as source of information given the sensitive nature of some of the aspects of this research. Individuals are, for instance, more ready to talk about the nasty experiences (for instance, the infidelity of husbands and wives) from next door rather than expose skeletons in their closets. While hearsay may have its own limitations with regards to truthfulness, it is a legitimate tool of gathering information in as far as it can also help one to observe and analyse the perceptions and ideas that dominate in a given society.

The Decision to Migrate

It is important to have a brief appreciation of why people migrated as represented by the narratives as this not only helps in setting up the platform to analyse the impact of migration, but also facilitates the contextualisation

² Except for the two lawyers cited in this article, all names used for the interviews are pseudonyms.

of the nature of the impact of migration. The narratives emphasise economic forces in explaining migration. The hyper-inflationary economy that characterised the post-2000 era saw many individuals migrating to perceived greener pastures (see Jones, 2010). Yet, as Crush and Tevera (2010: 1) correctly note, the deepening “political oppression” also had a contribution. There are also cases of people who just left for foreign lands to visit and, while there, opportunities to stay emerged. At times, migration began simply as a visit to a sibling or children abroad, and then an opportunity to stay would arise. In other instances, individuals and families migrated in pursuit of academic opportunities, or as a result of work-related transfers.

On the social front, Georgina noted that, in some instances, people resorted to migration as an escape route from marital problems.³ She had this to say on the subject:

[T]here are those who go forever; they see leaving as an opportunity to escape from a failing marriage. They would be looking for a way out due to complications in the marriage and other hardships, and going away is for them the easy way out. They say they are going to look for a job but are never to be heard from again.⁴

This is quite understandable in the Zimbabwean society where marriage is encouraged and divorce generally frowned upon, especially if the divorce is initiated by the woman. Society usually encourages women to soldier on and endure the painful experiences of their marriages, usually ‘for the sake of the children’, and to preserve whatever honour they may still have in society. Instead of official divorce proceedings, migration can thus be used as an escape route from a failing marriage as well as social censure, among other problems. Thus, “being away serves as a much-needed break”.⁵

In some instances, even when relations had not been as bad as to warrant divorce, disagreements over the wisdom of migrating could cause relations between spouses to sour, leading to divorce. Chitanda outlined how his wife, Jane, left him against his will to join her sisters in the UK, leaving under his care two children, a girl aged eight years and a boy aged three years. He had told her that “going to the UK would destroy our marriage”⁶, but she was adamant. This case speaks on gender contestation in which the husband sought to impose his will as the head of the family. The issue of Jane’s migrating had been a bone of contention in their marriage for a relatively long time, and Chitanda had made his final decision that his wife

³ Georgina (female nurse), interview with the author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Chitanda, interview with the author, Darwendale, 28 September 2011.

was not leaving the country. The wife, with the help of her sisters in the UK who bought her the flight ticket, purchased her freedom in exchange for the breakdown of the marriage. In the few days before departure, Jane went to stay with a friend, and subsequently left for Britain without bidding her husband farewell. Even the proximate kinship ties which are usually useful in sustaining marriages in the Zimbabwean set-up were of little assistance as she refused to entertain any family arbitration processes. Undoubtedly, such circumstances would have a negative bearing on the nature of the relationship that she would then have with her husband and children left behind.

Diaspora Euphoria: 'A Crisis of Expectation?'

When individuals and families migrated, the expectations were that their lives would greatly improve. In the words of Lucas (2003: 7), "unforced migrants presumably envision some gain for themselves or for those about whom they care. However, the impacts of such migration decisions on those left behind and on those in the receiving community are far more ambiguous". Despite this atmosphere of expectancy, the narratives collected demonstrate that migration did not always bring the expected results. While one aspect of their lives such as financial standing could be considerably improved, another could be destroyed with the same stroke. An interview with a Zimbabwean woman in Britain cited by Chinouya (2010: 172) captures one form these expectations could take. The Zimbabwean woman said:

You tell them (the family members back home) you have no money, and they do not believe you. They ask you what about other people whose children are in the UK who have kombis (taxis), houses and are sending money. Why don't you have those things too? We are suffering here and you are there.

The narratives highlight a number of negative developments directly related to the Diasporan phenomenon. These include compromising a healthy social development of children, family breakdowns, increased gender inequalities, emergence or intensification of family feuds and impoverishment for some left behind. It is this failure to satisfactorily address the plight and expectations of the migrants, their relatives as well as partners back home that produced a crisis of expectation.

The narratives collected demonstrate that, in some instances, the financial welfare of families or partners back home considerably improved as a result of their link to individuals in the Diaspora. However, as observed by Borraz, Pozoy and Rossi (2008: 18), "the monetary inflows that often accompany migration cannot compensate for the absence of household members through migration". The general belief has been that once one migrated to the

Diaspora, finances would begin to flow like 'milk and honey'. In the words of one of the interviewees, "People seem to think that getting on a plane to go to some place guarantees riches, but that is very wrong".⁷ The same was also captured by another interviewee who pointed out that, "People have this concept that once someone leaves the country to go to the Diaspora then he/she is definitely making and sending some money".⁸ It is such high expectations that at times resulted in crises of expectations when reality sunk. These perceptions, however, were not wholly unfounded, especially before the dollarisation period.⁹ Indeed, before this era, having access to foreign currency (especially the US dollar, South African Rand and Botswana Pula) became a ticket to riches for some as they were able to exploit, to their maximum advantage, the high demand for foreign reserves in the country (Jones, 2010). Many families with Diasporan links had most of their financial situations ameliorated. As a result, they went through difficult experiences such as deaths, health emergencies and shortages of basic commodities with relative ease because of the financial muscle from their Diasporan links. The narratives clearly illustrate the significance of remittances to the Zimbabwean families.

One interviewee narrated how her elder sister in the UK took responsibility of their father's medical expenses when he fell seriously sick. When the father passed away in 2008, the sister "covered all the funeral costs".¹⁰ Molly had a similar case in which her ex-husband in Canada, together with his siblings, paid health costs for their ailing father. She recalled:

I remember that when my ex-husband's father was sick, he was able to receive treatment in private hospitals because he had six children in the Diaspora. Two are in Canada, two in the UK, one in Australia and the other in South Africa. Each one would contribute some cash. In total, the money was a substantial amount which covered scans and many other expenses. That is how they pulled through.¹¹

However, for some, the Diasporan connection yielded frustration and disappointment. The following statements from Molly, who is also a local nurse, are quite revealing:

⁷ Mr and Mrs Chinda, (husband and wife), interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

⁸ Jestina, interview with author, Harare, 2 May 2011.

⁹ With dollarisation, it became difficult to create fictitious values and make easy profits from converting currencies.

¹⁰ Mercy, interview with author, Harare, 23 May 2011.

¹¹ Molly, interview with author, Harare, 17 May 2011

When I see some of the patients at our practice you can tell things are not well. A mother will be telling herself that her child will make sure she gets the best healthcare services, and in most cases the child promises to send money, but most parents' conditions worsen while waiting, and some even die. In order for the doctor to make a proper diagnosis, certain tests have to be carried out because not everything can be seen with the naked eye. Most people, however, never get round to having these tests done due to unavailability of cash at the time. Yet they could have had the same tests done for free in government hospitals.¹²

Having a child or close relation in the Diaspora thus also became a status issue. Having a Diasporan link was then seen as placing one's family at a higher social standing, deserving the best health attention in private hospitals as opposed to cheap government hospitals, normally frequented by those with financial challenges.

In other instances, the frustration in terms of remittances emanated from failure, on the part of the migrants, to settle down as quickly as anticipated, or from mere neglect. As McGregor (2007: 809) notes in her study of migrants in Britain: "Some Zimbabweans were able to get their first job a matter of days after stepping off the plane...*But others tried for months to find work before finally being successful*, and became increasingly desperate as the goodwill and budgets of friends soon ran out" (emphasis added). In the latter set of circumstances, the plight of those left behind could be precarious. Mike narrated their predicament as a family in the early days of his uncle's departure to South Africa:

When he (the uncle) left it was not easy for the family. For instance, he could not send money through the banks because their rate of exchange was lower than that on the black market...It was not easy finding someone to bring the money to us as he did not know a lot of Zimbabweans in South Africa who frequently came back home. He could not come back personally as he was still getting the business off the ground. When he finally sent the money it was not enough. We had to come up with ideas to subsidise. At some point we baked pies for sale.¹³

Over time, however, the uncle settled down, and the interviewee could claim that, "Financially these days all is well, he is sending money consistently. In my view at least everything looks perfect right now".¹⁴ However, while remittances seem to have been on a sound track, socially there seems to have been tension in both the immediate and extended family as the aunt was reported to be mentally unstable and rumour in the

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Mike, interview with author, Harare, 13 May 2011.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

family was that the husband was responsible for her condition. Two allegations were being made. First, that he bewitched her or got her bewitched for his business to prosper in South Africa. The second is that the wife lost her sanity when she visited her husband and found out that he was in love with another woman.¹⁵

It is not in every case that the migrant would eventually 'settle down' and be able to send remittances home. The experience of Mercy with her Diasporan husband is quite revealing:

In terms of finances, I am not coping because he does not send me anything. He used to call almost every day when he first got there but now he says because of the job situation he has no money and that times are hard to an extent that he cannot afford to make calls. I try to be an understanding wife and I call him whenever I have money, which is not often. He left me at my mother's house with nothing, and she is the one taking care of me and my son. All of our burdens are on her.¹⁶

Such cases heightened the crisis of expectation and, as will be demonstrated, had potential to wear thin spousal bonds and, in some cases, culminated in divorce. In some instances, tensions would develop when the husband's relatives assumed that the wife was receiving money and keeping it to herself.¹⁷

It seems that in some instances, receiving money from a relation or partner abroad came with some strings attached, implicitly or otherwise, depending on the nature of the relationship. Having extra-marital relations by either partner, whether back home or abroad, could have negative ramifications on the sending or receiving of remittances. Honesty and transparency, or lack thereof, even where it did not involve intimate relationships, could cause one to either continue or stop receiving remittances. In an interview with a man and his wife, the latter remarked, "If it is the man in the Diaspora and he is involved with another woman, chances are that he will stop sending money"¹⁸, adding that even husbands left behind also have extra-marital affairs. However, these husbands "are very careful and the mistress is never brought home for fear that if the news reaches the wife in the UK, she could stop sending money"¹⁹. To a certain extent, the Diasporans have used their financial muscle as some kind of remote control of their partners' sexuality and other 'liberties'. Of course, this is not always as effective as intended.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Mercy, interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

¹⁷ These sentiments were echoed by Jestina, Molly and Mai Ruth.

¹⁸ Mr and Mrs Chinda, interview with author, 25 April 2011.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Judith presented a case of dishonesty which resulted in the sending of remittances being stopped and diverted to someone else. She narrated:

I remember this friend of mine...She used to send money to her daughter... The daughter was supposed to use that money to develop their family home. She instead used it to finance her own *lobola* (bridewealth). She then telephoned her parents and asked them to come home because her boyfriend wanted to pay bridewealth for her. She and the fiancé went as far as acquiring a piece of land to build a house on. The mother later discovered everything and she abandoned her and swore never to send her money again. The mother then sent the money to develop her house through someone else.²⁰

In this instance, the crisis of expectation was heavy on the mother in the UK who was being cheated by her own daughter.

Where remittances failed to meet the basic survival needs or the socio-economic expectations of individuals or families, coping mechanisms were developed. Mercy, whose elder sister is in the UK, for instance, said she would look for piece jobs during school vacation to augment the pocket money from her sister since the elder sister did not send as much money during the vacation as she did during school terms. The young sister devised deceitful techniques where, for instance, she would extend the school term days and shorten the vacation so that the sister would send more money. She explained, "Sometimes I take advantage of my elder sister. I can lie to her and say I need money for school or lie about transport allowance just to get extra money".²¹ She added:

When I need money I lie about prices because she sends the exact amount that I mention. I lie about my fees, right now she thinks I pay USD405, so that's what I get. She has no idea that I only pay USD67 because of the cadetship. I use the extra money to buy myself clothes and whatever I want.²²

For some women, the way out of inadequate remittances is 'commercial sex' or extra marital affairs. Bertina explains, "I have friends whose husbands are in the Diaspora...if the husbands are like mine, who does not send anything, most young married women end up with a sugar daddy to provide for them, as is the case at a university where I am enrolled as a student".²³

If this happens, it could have huge negative implications on the marriage institution and family.

²⁰ Judith, interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Mercy, interview with author, Harare, 23 May 2011.

²³ Bertina, interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

The narratives in fact demonstrate that migration, in some instances, contributed to the breakdown of the family unit in general and the marriage institution in particular. The mere physical separation of spouses, siblings or children from parents could be seen as symbolic of this breakdown. However, in some instances, migration has actually increased the bond of families, whisking them away from 'Egypt to Canaan'. Georgina, elaborated this point saying:

I have seen married men and women who left for the Diaspora, and because they had a good relationship with their spouses and children, they came back for their families as soon as they had settled down...I have many friends in the Diaspora, some who left their husbands and those who called their husbands to join them as soon as they had settled down...When my friend first went to South Africa, she went alone then later asked her husband and children to join her.²⁴

While there have been such 'success' stories of family re-unions in the Diaspora and strengthening of ties even with those back home, people tend to cast doubt over the success of long-distant relationships. One young woman whose husband (now ex-husband) went to South Africa remarked: "I do not encourage long distance relationships because they cause havoc in homes".²⁵ Jestina echoed the same sentiments stating that, "Distance, I believe, kills affection and romance".²⁶

The scepticism that people have over the success of long-distant relationships is not wholly unfounded. The narratives obtained speak of high levels of infidelity between separated spouses as well as marriage break-downs associated with the separation of spouses. One such case was given by Jestina:

When men go out there, they forget they are married and overdo things. For instance, when I was pregnant my husband went to Kenya. He stayed in hotels and would spend time with women. One day he wrote a romantic message to one of his lady friends and instead of sending it to her, he made the mistake of sending it to me. When I read it, I realised it was not meant for me so I replied him and asked him about it. He called and said he and some friends were just experimenting to see my reaction, but of course he was lying.²⁷

²⁴ Georgia, interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

²⁵ Bertina, interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

²⁶ Jestina, interview with author, Harare, 2 May 2011.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

She even confessed to having some “colleagues with husbands in the Diaspora having some extra-marital affairs”.²⁸ In another case, Bertina explained her experience of mistrust between her and her husband in South Africa:

Our relationship is quite unstable because there is mistrust...We sometimes quarrel over the phone due to misunderstandings caused by the distance between us. My phone can be unavailable for a whole day because of a flat battery...However, it is hard for my husband to believe that. When he finally gets through he accuses me of doing all sorts of things, and who knows what he is up to down there.²⁹

This mistrust may not have been built upon any concrete suspicious or incriminating developments, but it certainly was not helped by the distance between the couple. This case also demonstrates the frustration that husbands have over their inability to control, effectively, their wives’ sexuality back home and at times having to resort to accusations emanating from fictitious imaginations. These accusations are also intended to retain some degree of continuous monitoring of their spouses’ sexuality. A few months after this interview, the couple “mutually agreed to part ways”.³⁰

Women who have migrated have also been accused of infidelity, sometimes taking the form of polyandry where she would have two or possibly more husbands. Mai Mapfumo reported:

One of my daughter-in-law’s sisters left for South Africa at the height of the economic crisis. Her husband helped her to get a visa. And now her behaviour down there is shameful...She has been seen and caught in the act...What married woman goes away for six months and then when she eventually comes home only spends two days with her husband and children?³¹

Fidelis Banda, an informant cited by Pasura (2010: 216), made the same observation noting that, “Zimbabweans are living double lives. Some women have the economic means; one has a family here and another husband in Zimbabwe, though both husbands are not aware of this”. What is certainly clear from the narratives is that long-distance relationships are wrought with mistrust which sometimes ends in divorce. The rumours about as well as the actual existence of these ‘double lives’ only serve to worsen the situation in Diasporan marriages.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Bertina, interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

³⁰ A follow up telephone interview with Bertina, Harare, 20 August 2011.

³¹ Mai Mapfumo, interview with author, Chitungwiza, 27 May 2011.

It would be incorrect to suggest that every marriage that has had one partner migrating has failed. Many transnational families have, indeed, withstood the test of distance. Ganda, who is in his late 40s, explains how the migration of his wife to South Africa actually saw the family progressing and strengthening. He noted that lack of trust was common with young families, but claimed that he and his wife had matured to an extent that they could withstand any pressures that may arise from the migration of his wife.³² As a way of strengthening the marriage, Ganda would also visit his wife at least once a month in South Africa while his wife also came to Zimbabwe during the school vacation as she was a teacher at some technical college. The wife thus indulged in circular migration, a “process of migration followed by return to the original home area (possibly the same place, but at least the original region)” (Lucas, 2003: 14). However, it was sometimes difficult for family members to visit each other, especially where the migrant did not have immigration papers in order. Referring to the case of her father, Susan explained, “My father went to South Africa sometime last year, I cannot remember when exactly. He did not have any travel documents so he crossed the border illegally, which meant he could not come back to visit the family”.³³

The divorce process for transnational marriages varied from relationship to relationship, depending, in part, on the type of marriage. If it was a traditional marriage, the two parties could, as in the case of Bertina above, simply mutually agree to divorce and then advise other family members of the developments.³⁴ Where the divorce involved partners with a court or church wedding, the process could be cumbersome and onerous. Dzvetere, a law practitioner who has dealt with some of these divorce cases explained:

In divorce proceedings, whether it is one or both parties away, the first requirement in court is summons which should be sent and delivered to the person who is to be divorced. The other party in the Diaspora will have problems trying to initiate the divorce. The summons can only be issued by the deputy sheriff, and you need a court order to do anything different. That further complicates things and it is more expensive.³⁵

Apart from the legalistic challenges, Mrs Dzvetere, who partners Dzvetere in their law firm, also noted that the cases of divorce for Diasporans are complicated by the very fact that one or both parties may not be in the

³² Ganda, interview with author, Harare, 14 January 2012.

³³ Susan, interview with author, Harare, 2 May 2011.

³⁴ A follow up telephone interview with interview no. 139.

³⁵ Mr and Mrs Dzvetere, interview with author, Harare, 11 May 2011.

country and “relatives do not want to get involved. They want to watch from a distance and let you solve your own problems”.³⁶

Where one would be fortunate to have cooperating relatives, especially of the partner being divorced, proceedings could be relatively smooth. Molly recalled her experience:

I thought the divorce proceedings would be complicated but they were not. The summons had to be sent to the last address of residence of the person being summoned, and in this case it was to his (husband) sister’s house in Sunningdale. She had to reply to the courts and say that the husband being divorced now lived in Canada. Actually, I went to Sunningdale and told the sister of my ex-husband that I needed the reply the very next day for court proceedings. I told them what to write...So once the court had evidence that he truly was in Canada they mailed him using DHL. In four days he had received the divorce papers...His lawyer communicated with mine and they took it from there...A month later we were given papers to sign. Since I had stated my terms in the summons, I just signed. He also signed his papers and sent them back with the marriage certificate. Together with some of my relatives we went to court and it was over. We had been married for two years.³⁷

The relative speed with which these proceedings were completed was, to some extent, a result of the willingness of the husband’s sister to participate as well as the high determination of the wife to get the divorce done with.

The diasporic phenomenon has also contributed to tensions between and amongst families — sibling against siblings, parents against children and even tension within the context of ‘extended’ families. This crisis emanates, in part, from mutual mistrust and dishonesty. Some of the most serious property scams, for instance, have been perpetrated on relatives abroad. This is because close relatives, as opposed to strangers, are the ones usually familiar with details pertaining to these properties, for instance, who owns what, where, and how closely the owners are able to monitor their properties. Mrs Dzvetere narrated one case she had handled at her law firm:

I remember we had this case...Reuben (pseudonym) sold his brother-in-law’s (who is in the Diaspora with wife) house which was registered under the latter’s company name. The brother-in-law and his wife had children who were shareholders in the company but they were also in the Diaspora. The family made Reuben director and left the company in his hands, but he sold the house. It was worth more than USD500 000, yet he sold it for USD60 000.³⁸

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Molly, interview with author, Harare, 17 May 2011.

³⁸ Mr and Mrs Dzvetere, interview with author, Harare, 11 May 2011.

In the above case, Reuben had “borrowed money and put down the house as collateral, and when he could not pay, he agreed to have the house sold to settle the debt”.³⁹

In many ways the Diasporan link, especially the issue of remittances, has been a source of family feuds both in the immediate and extended families. Diana explained how, in a family of eight siblings, her elder sister preferred to send money only to her, the youngest sister: “I am only twenty...since my sister left she has never sent money to anyone but me. Not even to my older siblings. If they want money she tells them to come and see me. If she wants to send to mum she will send it through me”.⁴⁰

The above arrangement did not go down well with one of the brothers whom the interviewee was staying with then. This became worse when the younger sister stopped giving him cash and instead, bought the household necessities adding that, “If I give him (the brother) money, he will use all of it to fill up his car with fuel while his kids go hungry”.⁴¹ The situation was so tense between these two siblings that the younger sister did not even join the family for meals, preferring to show up only during night time. Eventually, she moved out and found her own place, whose monthly rental was being taken care of by the elder sister in the UK. Friction was unavoidable as the brother felt that his authority was being subverted. Parreñas (2005: 325) makes similar observations in the case of Filipino mothers in the Diaspora. Some family members felt that their authority was being compromised when they were not chosen to receive remittances, and this resulted in conflict.

Mercy acknowledged the negative effects of the Diasporan link on the family, adding, “It was not all good though. It caused family divisions”.⁴² She gave the following example:

My older brother told my parents that they did not love him anymore because the money he was giving them was not as much as that which my sister (in the UK) was sending. He complained that my sister was now the family favourite. My sister was really taking care of us, especially my parents. She sent them so much money that when someone gave them a small amount they would not appreciate it and would literally throw it back. So now everyone was against my sister, and it caused divisions in the family. She sends me money as well, and my brothers and other sisters do not like it. They say she is spoiling me.⁴³

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Diana, interview with author, Harare, 02 May 2011.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Mercy, interview with author, Harare, 23 May 2011.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

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In the face of a melting economy where access to foreign currency was central to one's survival, the UK link became so important that most parents took it to be their salvation.

When the extended family suspected that remittances due to them were being 'abused' by their daughter-in-law or son-in-law, this could cause tensions with in-laws. Mai Ruth captures the tensions that arose from this high expectation amongst the extended family:

Our mother, who is now late, was a hard-working woman who always provided for everyone in the 'extended' family. When the boys went away, relatives believed they would do the same. The relatives think our brothers send stuff which we keep to ourselves. Whenever we go to our rural home and are nicely dressed, they think the boys bought the clothes for us, and we are reprimanded for not sending money and not sharing some of the things we receive from our brothers. They do not believe that our brothers are not sending us anything.⁴⁴

Similar observations were made by Jestina whose husband had been posted outside the country at the height of the economic crisis. She said:

To try and explain to relatives that you have no money, especially to the elderly, is impossible. They do not believe you, and that can cause misunderstandings and bad relations. If, at any point, they used to receive groceries and cash at the end of every month, they expect things to be even better and to come in larger quantities now that their relative is in the Diaspora. Some even go as far as going to my side of the family to see if I am not using the money I am supposedly receiving to develop my home area, yet what we get from my husband is really nothing to write home about.⁴⁵

In some instances, relationships with in-laws would "already be sour and money problems only made everything worse".⁴⁶ It is clear that the 'extended' family in some cases had exaggerated expectations of material assistance from their kin in the Diaspora, which expectations could result in severe tension if they were not fulfilled.

The tensions that arose between the spouses left behind and their in-laws were not only as a result of different expectations of material gain versus the reality of little, if any, assistance. In some instances, the in-laws would actually be receiving remittances directly from their son or daughter abroad, yet tensions still existed. This actually had a potential to cause another dimension of conflict where, for instance, the in-laws would not care about

⁴⁴ Mai Ruth, interview with author, Chitungwiza, 27 May 2011.

⁴⁵ Jestina, interview with author, Harare, 11 May 2011.

⁴⁶ Molly, interview with author, Harare, 17 May 2011.

or respect their daughter in-law because they got 'all' they wanted directly from their child abroad. Molly, whose husband used to send remittances directly to his parents, explained her experience thus, "They did not respect me as his wife, and in the end I really did not care either, although there were times when it was hard not to. Like the time when one of his (the husband in Canada) brothers married and I was not told. I felt like I was not part of the family".⁴⁷ Elsewhere in her narration, Molly also noted that the husband's relatives would just come to her place without alerting her, including male relatives, and this made her very uncomfortable.⁴⁸ She attributed this lack of respect to the fact that the in-laws were not concerned about her feelings as she had no say in what her husband did for them, as opposed to a situation where they would have been receiving their money through her.

Migration, in some instances, perpetuated the breakdown of the 'extended' family values sustained and represented by visiting one another, caring for and being with each other in troubled as well as good times. The narratives capture this breakdown. Judith, who was staying with her daughter whose husband (the son-in-law) was in South Africa, felt strongly that migration was disrupting African social patterns because under normal circumstances, a married woman's welfare is supposed to be the responsibility of her in-laws and yet in her case, she had to stay with her daughter while the husband was in South Africa.⁴⁹ In another case, a mother of four sons in South Africa complained that her children now had a weak appreciation of the importance of the extended family. She narrated her observation:

In our culture we place a lot of value on relatives, our extended family. However, being so far away I realise that my sons have sort of forgotten some of those values. Early last year I lost a brother, their uncle, but they did not come for the funeral. It was fortunate that some of the wives were around...Even after the burial my sons did not bother to come and see my brother's resting place. I thought this was because it was my brother, a maternal relative, but then their father's brother also passed away and I called to let them know. They did not do anything about it.⁵⁰

The breakdown of the extended family value system is, however, broader than simply a product of migration. It is a result of complex factors, among which is the westernisation of the African way of life.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Judith, Interview with author, Gweru, 25 April 2011.

⁵⁰ Mai Mapfumo, interview with author, Chitungwiza, 27 May 2011.

On the whole, having a family member or partner in the Diaspora does not seem to be the answer to family woes. Parreñas (2005: 33) concludes thus:

[D]espite rapid advancements in technology from instant messages to email correspondence, transnational intimacy does not provide 'full' intimacy to the family. The joys of physical contact, the emotional security of physical presence, and the familiarity allowed by physical proximity are still denied transnational family members.

This can be so true for children left behind who are deprived of parental love and role models. The phenomenon of 'Diasporan orphans' has resulted in many negative developments emanating from the complex but vulnerable position of these children.

Migration and Reversal of Gender Roles

Society has certain expectations that it places upon men and women, based on their biological constructions. Masculinities and femininities become integral in society and go a long way in shaping the gender terrain. With regards to migration in the post-2000, gender perceptions influenced trends in migration, while migration itself entrenched and, in some instances, engendered certain gender constructions.

The narratives indicate some of the gender stereotypes associated with migration. One such stereotype was that since traditionally men are the ones who migrated, migration was therefore the preserve of men. This is succinctly captured in Mai Mapfumo's narrative:

Going away is not something new, it is there even in our history. When we were growing up, men used to go away for years to work and the women would stay at home raising children and running the home. But now wives have become their husbands' 'tails', following the husbands everywhere they go.⁵¹

For her, women had to stay behind to develop the home and instil good moral values in the children, adding that, "mothers just need to remember that their children's well-being is in their hands. They are the only ones who can instil society's values and principles in their children".⁵²

In some instances, the migration of a spouse led to multi-tasking on the part of the partners left behind in terms of gender roles. Men and women left behind took up roles perceived by society to be suitable for the other sex. Mwatwara (2012: 157) also observes that emigration transformed gender

⁵¹ Mai Mapfumo, interview with author, Chitungwiza, 27 May 2011.

⁵² *Ibid.*

roles and responsibilities within the family, with women being forced to take on the role of *de facto* heads of households. Jestina, whose husband had gone to Uganda, explained her circumstances: “The other thing is that there are some duties that should be done by the man, but with my husband away, I have to play the role of both the mother and father”.⁵³ She then explained how she had to make some decisions about their children as well as her in-laws, which decisions, she argued, would normally require the presence of the husband. Ganda explained how the departure of his wife left him with the responsibility of his three-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter. He even found himself in ‘an awkward position’ of having to shop for sanitary items for his daughter, something expected to be done by the mother or female relatives: “What I have ended up doing with my daughter is that I just buy the sanitary pads in bulk and put them in her room. That way she will not have to confront me asking me to buy her those items”.⁵⁴ This is because in Zimbabwean culture fathers and daughters are not expected to discuss issues to do with menstruation or other related topics.

In the Zimbabwean society, like in many societies, masculinities uphold men as ‘providers’, ‘protectors’ and ‘procreators’. In a number of instances, women have lamented the migration of their spouses, especially where any one of these three p’s has been violated. The issue of protection came out more prominently. Molly expressed the insecurity of having to come home alone, sometimes during dark nights, because of the nature of her job. The distance between the bus stop, where she would be dropped by public transport, and her place of residence, “was not one that a woman had to walk alone at night. I was afraid and insecure. I needed my husband to come back and take up his responsibilities”.⁵⁵

Turner (2008: 1051) observes that “while transnationalism may be liberating for some at one level, it may be restrictive for others at another level”. Indeed, as the narratives indicate, the migration of husbands, in some instances, brought some degree of liberty for women. This liberty was not always channelled into acceptable behaviour. Narratives talk of women who practised polyandry, a custom which is alien in the Zimbabwean patriarchal society. Polygamy too is an offshoot of the migration. However, society tends to be less accommodating where a woman is involved with multi-partners as opposed to when it is a man. This is partly because of the construction of gender in the Zimbabwean culture.

⁵³ Jestina, interview with author, Harare, 2 May 2011.

⁵⁴ Ganda, interview with author, Harare, 14 January 2012.

⁵⁵ Molly, interview with author, Harare, 17 May 2011.

Emancipation for some women left behind has come in the form of increased mobility, flexibility and ability to engage more with the 'outside' world as opposed to being confined to the home front as dictated by the dominant gender constructions. Mike tells the story of his aunt:

Here in Harare my aunt belonged to two groups, a prayer group and an evangelical group. She would travel with these groups to different places to preach the gospel...She was able to travel because uncle was not around. When he was around he would come up with excuses for her not to be involved. He was against too much involvement in the church. I noticed she only got involved when uncle was away.⁵⁶

While migration may have brought some kind of emancipation, this must not be over-emphasised. In several cases, women remained exposed to the hegemonic patriarchies that oppressed them. A married woman, for instance, was expected to behave in a certain pattern and dress in a certain way even if her husband was not around.

For young married women, having fun, being outgoing, dressing in mini-skirts and shorts can easily be interpreted as being of loose morals. If it is the men being outgoing and having fun, society is more likely to sympathise with them. Molly narrated her ordeal:

Sometimes friends from high school would invite me to go out with them for braai and drinks. Each occasion requires a certain dress code. For an afternoon like that I would put on something like a pair of shorts or jeans. I cannot always be in a long skirt just because I am married. My ring alone says I am married. When some people saw me having fun they believed I was a woman of loose morals, especially since my husband was away. However, I believe even if he had been around we would still have gone out with friends and no one would have thought it immoral. So people would tell him whatever they believed was going on, that is, that I was having extra-marital affairs. The people who told him these things about me are people that he trusted.⁵⁷

In a way, the wife continued to be under some kind of surveillance that governed her degree of liberty. In fact, the husband is alleged to have been sending people, especially relatives, to their house to 'spy' on the wife: "They would come to my house unannounced at any time and claim they were checking to see if I was okay".⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Mike, interview with author, Harare, 13 May 2011.

⁵⁷ Molly, interview with author, Harare, 17 May 2011.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Parreñas' (2005: 332) study of the Philippine case indicates that "[t]he men left behind, the so-called 'househusbands', rarely [did] housework". However, in the case of Zimbabwe, narratives collected indicate that there were exceptional cases to this scenario. Ganda explained his 'agony' with 'domestic' duties in the first days that his wife had left for South Africa with the children.⁵⁹ The case of Chitanda, who had to raise a daughter and a son after the mother left for the UK, has already been cited.⁶⁰ Initially, he employed a domestic worker to assist with children, but after a year or so he took over until such a time the elder girl child began to assist the father with some of the responsibilities. To lighten his domestic responsibilities, he also sent the children to boarding school.

In extreme cases, this 'domestication' of men has challenged masculinities that view men as the providers, as women became the breadwinners through their sending of remittances which men would manage back home. Georgina gives one case scenario:

Then there is my friend Mai X...in the UK. She is a teacher there but her husband lives here in Gweru. The husband did not want to go and live in the UK so she went alone, but she comes back to visit...The husband is a pensioner who stays at home...The wife is the one who pays the children's school fees and attends to their general welfare as well as that of the husband. She sends him money for their savings and he takes care of the children and their home.⁶¹

As Pasura (2010: 214) observes, the reversal of the breadwinner roles and the resultant reconfiguration of power relations within families can result in the breakdown of marriages or, at the very least, tension. The domestication of men itself is seen as some kind of emasculation and is usually not perceived well by society.

The very fact that spouses separated for months on end or even years, made the marriage of these spouses a high-risk undertaking, in terms of the spread of HIV/AIDS. First, separated spouses have less restraint over their sexual lives when compared to spouses living together. Second, women find it difficult, if not impossible, to ask their husbands to have protected sex or go for HIV tests on their return from abroad. Such requests could easily be interpreted as either lack of trust or a confession, on the part of the wife, of her infidelity. Two narratives illuminate the above points. Judith, a nurse and counsellor, narrated one of her encounters:

⁵⁹ Ganda, interview with author, Harare, 14 January 2012.

⁶⁰ Chitanda, interview with author, Darwendale, 28 September 2011.

⁶¹ Georgina, interview with author, Harare, 25 April 2011.

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I met a man when I was working as a counsellor, who had brought the woman he was having an affair with for HIV testing and counselling. He said his wife had lived in the UK for the past six years and that it was impossible for him, being a man, to be without a woman for that long. The wife comes to visit once in a while and when she does, he stops entertaining the girlfriend for the duration of the wife's visit. She sends him money which he sometimes uses to develop their property, and at times he spends it on his girlfriend.⁶²

A number of issues are discernible in this narration. First, coming for HIV/AIDS counselling sessions could be interpreted as demonstrating some level of consciousness to protect oneself from the scourge as well as the partners involved. For instance, if the husband contracted the virus, his wife would be at risk of contracting it as well. However, not everyone is concerned about the spouse's health as the case cited above. Second, the narrative resonates with masculinities which claim that a man cannot go for a certain period without having sex and, therefore, justifies his sexual exploration, while the woman is expected to be faithful.

Another reason that has been given to explain the high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS for spouses living separately is clearly shown by Molly, a young woman in her 20s:

Being separated from your partner for a long time, anyone can be tempted to have an affair. The sad thing with these couples is that when they meet they rarely use protection or think of going for HIV tests. Maybe it is our social background and upbringing where it is difficult to suggest these things because you will be implying that your spouse cheated on you...My father worked away from home for a long time while mum stayed home to raise us... The probability that my dad never looked at another woman is zero, yet when he returned from South Africa my mother...could not say, "Now that you are back, first thing tomorrow we will go for HIV tests". That is not the norm, and demanding sexual protection for a married woman in our culture is taboo.⁶³

Because of the challenges that women have in demanding protection from their partners, they have been exposed to the disease. These challenges, however, are not peculiar to those with spouses abroad.

Conclusion

The discussion has used a collection of narratives to explain the post-2000 unprecedented levels of emigration for men and women, as well as to demonstrate the impact that this migration has had on gender and family.

⁶² Judith, interview with author, Harare, 25 April 2011.

⁶³ Interview with author, Harare, 17 May 2011.

Viewed at a grand scale, migration has, by and large, brought about crises of expectation for both the emigrants and those left behind. This is partly because, despite the coming in of remittances, migration has also bred a set of unexpected and more often negative developments with regards to family relations and welfare as well as on the gender landscape, among other things.

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