

Transnational labour migration, intimacy and relationships: how Zimbabwean women navigate the diaspora

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Globalisation, defined here as the increasing interconnectedness of the world, along with shifting socio-political and economic landscapes predominantly in the Global South culminate into increased transnational labour migration processes. These transnational processes call for new interpretations and conceptualisations of gender and sexuality with respect to notions of intimacy, relationships and identities in the diaspora. Drawing on interviews with 28 Zimbabwean women (14 living in the diaspora and 14 resident in Zimbabwe) aged between 25 and 90 years, this paper analyses ways in which transnational processes influence how women experience and assign meaning to their gendered and sexual lives. The 14 diaspora-based interviewees illuminated how Zimbabwean women located in South Africa and the United Kingdom often redefine their gendered and sexual identities as they exercise agency by challenging economic barriers and simultaneously crossing socio-cultural boundaries from their homeland. Conversely, the 14 Zimbabwe-based interviewees discussed how women from a different generation and geographical location read emerging questions of gender and sexuality in the diaspora. Overall, the paper offers profound gendered lenses through which one could analyse the dynamics of transnational processes, especially how labour, intimacy and relationships in the diaspora are experienced by immigrants and subsequently engaged by diaspora studies scholars.

Keywords: transnational labour processes; women immigrants; gender relations; sexual identities

Introduction

Globalisation in the 21st century has been characterised by increased movement of people, goods, services, technology, and capital across the world. With globalisation, the world has become increasingly interconnected from a socio-cultural, political and economic perspective. Globalisation has thus resulted in new markets and new forms of labour as people migrate predominantly from the Global South to what Sassen (2003, 255) terms global cities often located in the Global North in search for green pastures. Locating their works in the Global North/Global South binary, scholars (Parreñas 2000; Sassen 2003; Oishi 2005; George 2005 & 2000; Gamburd 2000) expose the interplay between global processes and some of the most private aspects of our lives especially those around gender and sexuality; and they explore the socio-cultural and economic shifts that emerge as people live in spaces foreign to them. Given that these scholars particularly analyse Asian women's experiences in

the diaspora, the paucity in research that explores transnational labour migration in relation to gendered and sexual identities among Africans in the diaspora calls for theoretical and empirical investigation.

The works of George, Oishi, Sassen, Parreñas and Gamburd are gateways into insightful discussions of how transnational migration, intimacy and relationships are experienced by women from other Global South contexts apart from Asian countries. Building on a small but growing body of African focussed gender, sexuality and diaspora scholarship (Pasura 2014; Tinarwo and Pasura 2014; Fonkem 2013; Pasura 2012), this article examines ways in which transnational labour migration processes influence how Zimbabwean women experience and assign meaning to their gendered and sexual lives in the Global North, the United Kingdom (UK) to be specific. Based on the realisation that transnational migration is not limited to movements from the Global South to the Global North, focus in this paper is also on South-South migration patterns (Oishi 2005) through which countries in the Global South serve as stepping stones in “a process of global step-migration” (George 2000, 153). Thus beyond the UK, the paper analyses empirical findings of how Zimbabwean women located in South Africa navigate the diaspora.

Through studying notions of labour, intimacy and relationships among Zimbabwean women in the diaspora, the paper demonstrates how these Global South women challenge longstanding sexual and gendered hierarchies that governed access to their bodies prior to migrating to their new diaspora locations. Zimbabwean women’s experiences in South Africa and the UK expose how their socio-cultural and economic positions have shifted in response to transnational migration and increased participation in re/productive labour in the global economy. These experiences are captured through notions of intimacy and relationships particularly those around gender relations; sexual identities; marriage and *lobola* (bridewealth); abortion and transactional sex that emerge as Zimbabwean women exercise agency in their new transnational spaces. Grappling with the meaning of the prefix ‘new’ in the context of globalisation – ‘new forms of gendered labour and the global economy, new social and sexual relations’ – the paper analyses how these transnational developments mark the passage of time and the subsequent shrinking of socio-cultural boundaries evident in the ways immigrant women subvert norms that governed their bodies prior to exiting their homeland.

The empirical discussions noted above form the very foundations on which the paper engages the interplay between transnational and local processes, especially how the global

economy, transnational labour, gender and sexual relations are shaped by local socio-economic realities and vice versa. Questions of gender and sexuality in this paper are analysed from a feminist standpoint that is interested in understanding the shape of transnational social relations and gender equality and the ultimate influence of such on the lives of women. As the paper explores the broad theme of transnational migration and labour vis-à-vis intimacy and relationships, it endeavours to stimulate critical debate between and among diaspora studies scholars located in different parts of the world in order to advance our theoretical and empirical engagements with questions of gender, sexuality and globalisation.

On a methodological note, the paper draws on a sample of 28 Zimbabwean women (14 living in the diaspora and 14 resident in Zimbabwe) aged between 25 and 90 years. I work with three sets of empirical data on transnational labour migration, gender and sexuality gathered during fieldwork in South Africa, Zimbabwe and the UK. My choice of these countries is fully alert to how South Africa and the UK have emerged as some of the leading transnational destinations for Zimbabweans who, by the turn of the 21st century, migrated in numbers to different global destinations subsequent to shifting socio-economic and political terrains in their homeland (Kufakurinani, Pasura, and McGregor 2014). Against this backdrop of massive transnational labour migration, the first and second data sets were collected through formal and informal in-depth interviews with six Zimbabwean women based in South Africa, and eight in the UK between January and October of 2014. Research participants, in addition to gender and age, were purposively selected based on diverse categories such as occupation, marital status and the number of years they have lived in South Africa and the UK focusing specifically on those who arrived around 2000, at the turn of the century. I negotiated entrée in both South Africa and the UK through personal contacts who then introduced me to people in their sphere of influence with whom I established rapport and generated a snowball sample of possible research participants. It is noteworthy that I met the eighth of the UK-based participants on a 12 hour flight from London to Johannesburg and what started as small talk about general life in London turned into a very insightful discussion about lived experiences of gender and sexuality in the UK. With the consent of the participant, I made follow up questions to narratives captured during the flight which the participant responded to via email.

The third set of data existed prior to the conceptualisation of this paper. This is a data set that draws on life histories of 14 older women born as early as 1910 who took part in a

research on gender and sexuality between October 2009 and March 2010 in rural Zimbabwe. Out of these older women's narratives emerged insightful discussions around marriage, gender and sexualities in the diaspora. Combined, the three data sets illuminate how Zimbabwean women located in South Africa and the UK have either negotiated or challenged longstanding constructions of gender and sexuality with respect to intimacy and relationships; as well as how women from a different generation and geographical location (Zimbabwe) read gender and sexuality questions emerging in the diaspora. The data sets offer profound gendered lenses through which one could analyse the dynamics of transnational processes, especially how labour migration, intimacy and relationships are experienced by immigrants and subsequently engaged by diaspora studies scholars. Last but not least, I have anonymised names of all interviewees to conform to the ethics around individual privacy and confidentiality.

The global economy and gendered transnational labour migration

Narratives of interviewees who participated in this research suggests that the socio-economic and political meltdown Zimbabwe experienced in the decade 1990-2000 and beyond (Pasura 2012) significantly contributed to lack of employment opportunities and the subsequent mass exodus of citizens. The presence of many Zimbabweans in the UK among other transnational destinations illuminates how the effects of shifting political economies in the Global South have over the years forced many citizens to explore the Global North. Furthermore, the narratives of Zimbabwean women living and working in the UK speak to the shifts in the global economy and labour structures evident in the international division of labour (Sassen 2003) and that of reproductive labour (Parreñas 2000). Core to the international division of labour is the interplay between upper circuits and marginalised lower circuits of global capital characterised by the transnational migration of women from economically struggling countries in the Global South to global cities in the North which “concentrate some of the global economy's key functions and resources” (Sassen 2003, 255). Lorraine, a 60 year old qualified primary school teacher who left Zimbabwe for Britain in 2003 had this to say,

I was working as a teacher in Zimbabwe, and due to serious economic problems, raising school fees was indeed a challenge. I could no longer afford to take care of my four children as a widow...my husband died in 1999...and I decided to move to the UK. Life in the UK has its own challenges but it is far much better than in Zimbabwe. You can afford to live a decent life irrespective of the work you do...so I prefer it here...I am better off in London because

the British pound is a strong currency.

Implicit in Lorraine's words "life in the UK has its own challenges" are the realities of living and working in these global cities. It is imperative to highlight that as Global North women join the productive labour force in response to the professional demands of the global economy, they create "a professional household without a 'wife'" (Sassen 2003, 259). In her analysis of the international division of reproductive labour, Parreñas (2000, 564) notes that responsibilities that emerge as Global North women join the workforce in increasing numbers often include domestic work, nursing and caring for the elderly or children. Professional women in the Global North rely on transnational migration and labour supplies that emerge as women from economically challenged countries in the Global South move into global cities where they fill up the void in the household (Oishi 2005). The analysis above is evident in the story of Wadzanai, a 65 year old qualified high school teacher who left Zimbabwe for London in 2005.

I trained and worked in Zimbabwe as a high school teacher but there was a drastic shift in Zimbabwe's economic terrain and I found myself earning peanuts. I decided to leave the country and when I got here as a visitor in 2005, I deliberately overstayed. This had serious implications on my immigration status and I could not work as a teacher... so as an illegal immigrant...I had to work as a maid without documentation...doing all domestic duties for a British family in London.

The excerpt above raises questions around the politics of nationality, citizenship and class core to how Zimbabweans among other immigrant women from the South navigate the diaspora. The narratives, as captured earlier by Glenn (1992), illuminate that transnational labour and migration flows are indeed gendered, classed and raced processes. Why, because it is predominantly immigrant women of colour who often find themselves not only fulfilling the domestic void but sustaining the middle-class lifestyle of the "new rich" as evidence from both the Global North and South suggests (Oishi 2005, 2). Jane, a 48 year old Zimbabwean woman who works as a nanny for a British family in London, relayed

I came to London in 2006 where I have lived and worked as a nanny. Prior to that, I had an office job...I worked as a bank teller in Harare. The money that I earn here is insignificant compared to the salary of a professional in the UK but at least I can now afford to take care of

my family. So I have to engage in other tasks like waitressing...working night shifts to supplement the money I get from the British family. I am a nanny during the day and a waitress at night...that is how we survive in London...you snooze you lose.

One could infer from the narratives above that the work that immigrant Zimbabwean women do and the money they earn is demeaning such that they have to constantly negotiate “conflicting class mobility” (Parreñas 2000, 574) that emerges as they engage in reproductive labour in global cities. Their experiences concur with Parreñas’ findings from Rome where immigrant Filipinas on one hand earned more than they would have had they not migrated but on the other negotiated a “sharp decline in occupational status and face[d] a discrepancy between their current occupation and actual training” (574). This downward mobility is evident in Wadzanai’s narrative below.

The irony is, in Zimbabwe, I had a maid who used to work for me and I never imagined that I would do ‘dirty work’ for a living. This is a new identity that I constantly negotiate especially when I go back home where people know my previous occupation.

The work that Lorraine, Wadzanai and Jane do is constructed within the ambit of reproductive labour as “traditional women’s work” (Parreñas 2000, 564) or “intimate labour” (Boris and Parreñas 2010). Such construction is entrenched in the longstanding belief that these are jobs that women perform to produce and “sustain the productive labour force” (Parreñas 2000, 561) and that the tasks are women’s second nature. Justification for low pay is therefore deeply embedded in women’s roles as wives, mothers and care givers that they have historically performed without pay. Though located in the analysis of gender and factory work, the observation that women “have naturally nimble fingers, [are] naturally more docile...than men...and naturally to be more suited to tedious, repetitious, monotonous work” (Elson and Pearson 1981, 93) ties in with the naturalisation of skill alluded to above. When viewed through such gendered and naturalised lenses, low pay for women’s reproductive skills and engagements automatically gains legitimacy in the private sphere and beyond.

Irrespective of the extremely low pay that immigrant women get after fulfilling their reproductive duties in the Global North, these women constitute what Sassen (2003) terms “survival circuits” which emerge as financially struggling countries in the Global South rely on remittances immigrant women send back home to support their families and communities.

Beverly, a 45 year old Zimbabwean woman who works as nurse in a hospital in London shared her experience with remittances,

I have three sons who are studying at different universities in Zimbabwe. I send money home for their studies and their general upkeep. My immediate and extended families heavily rely on the financial support I give them because my siblings are all civil servants who earn very small salaries. So I take care of my mother, nieces and nephews...I send a lot of British pounds home which they receive as American dollars on a monthly basis. The money sustains all families and I can safely affirm that I am the breadwinner...I am a proud mother, daughter and aunt...you name it.

As immigrant women like Beverly embrace their multiple breadwinner identities and send remittances to their country of origin in the Global South, they do not only contribute towards household income but they boost the economy of their homeland. According to Sassen (2003, 270), the remittances that immigrant women who engage predominantly in reproductive labour in the Global North send home “are often very significant for struggling economies” in the Global South and in 1998, these remittances amounted to “\$70 billion globally.” The figure, akin to Beverly’s narrative above, points not only to a social but a political and economic relationship between women, families and nations (Parreñas 2000). This relationship is also supported by findings from Asia revealing that “Filipino workers overseas send home an average of almost \$1 billion a year” (Sassen 2003, 271). These remittances could be read as a subtle nationalistic or patriotic gesture, an inference which concurs with Sassen’s argument that third world countries’ economies are built on the back of immigrant women who send money to their countries of origin.

Although women have traditionally been categorised as “supplementary earners” (Salzinger 2004, 45) who rely on the support of male breadwinners, immigrant women emerge as key economic actors who through their roles in transnational spaces navigate and subvert longstanding notions of gendered hierarchies. Similar to the socio-economic impact of women’s transnational migration from Asia to countries in the North and in the Middle East, Zimbabwean women’s experiences in the UK suggest that global processes transform existing ways of thinking about gendered labour and women’s financial position which call for new theorisations of gender and sexuality in the diaspora.

Intimate relationships and shifting gender roles

Emerging from the analysis above is the realisation that Global South women's involvement in the global economy through reproductive and productive labour challenges longstanding gendered hierarchies paving way for theoretical and empirical engagement with how social relations respond to ever evolving socio-political and economic terrains. The position of immigrant women in the global economy especially their role in the international division of reproductive labour provides transnational lenses for analysing notions of femininities and masculinities in the diaspora. Exploring the interplay between globalisation, gender and sexuality, this thematic section grapples with dominant questions around intimacy and gendered social relations that emerged as Zimbabwean women navigated the diaspora. Empirical data presented below points at how Zimbabwean women located in the UK have either negotiated or deconstructed existing gender relations within and beyond the home. Michelle, a 38 year old mother of two who cares for the elderly at an institution in London described how labour is divided in her household,

My husband and I moved to London in 2006, and we did not have children then. But now we have two daughters aged two and four. We both work but not professional jobs...I am an equal earner who contributes towards household income like he does and when I am away during the day he takes care of our children because we cannot afford day care. He works night shift so when I come back from work he leaves the house and I take over...My husband cooks, does dishes and laundry, and looks after the children in my absence...there are no male or female roles, we share responsibilities in this house...something we never used to do in Zimbabwe.

Clearly evident in Michelle's narrative is the notion of reserved gender roles in the UK, a privilege she never enjoyed prior to migrating. Her narrative is a way into new conceptualisations of gender in the diaspora that are cognisant of shifting financial or economic positions of women and the subsequent effect of such on their gendered identities within households and beyond. Laura, a 56 year old nurse in London resisted gender discourses and simultaneously deconstructing the way the marriage institution controlled her in Zimbabwe.

I was married when I came here in 2001, but my husband failed to get his paperwork through immigration after the UK visa was introduced for all Zimbabweans in 2002...so he could not

join me...but that is not my point...my point is I was sick and tired of cultural obligations and expectations from his family as a wife. Taking advantage of the new environment, the dynamics of work and financial challenges coupled with some degree of autonomy, I exercised agency...I am now married...my husband is 25 years old. If I was in Zimbabwe, this union would not have earned legitimacy, I was going to be labelled an immoral woman who settles for young innocent men...tags that are emotionally violent and brutal. My husband respects me privately and publicly. He cooks for us among other household duties...we have a mutual understanding that our society in Zimbabwe might fail to comprehend...but we are happy...no cultural obligations.

Akin to Wadzanai, Laura's immigration experience above hints at how questions of nationality and citizenship shape diaspora narratives on gender and sexuality. Likewise, Theresa, a 36 year old woman who works as a nanny in London relayed her experience which somewhat celebrates the 'moving in arrangement' where the cohabiting couple disregards socio-cultural expectations.

I arrived in London in 2000...single...I was not married or attached...the friends I lived with showed me the door after my first three months and I had to move in with my newly found British boyfriend...moving in is normal here no one questions you...you can stay unmarried without any fear of condemnation from family and society. We are planning to get married legally but there is no talk about paying *lobola* at all. That is the beauty of living in the diaspora...no socio-cultural restrictions whatsoever. You move in and you share responsibilities from financial obligations to household duties.

The deconstruction of gender roles and masculinities is not only peculiar to Zimbabweans in the diaspora but it is also common among immigrants from other Global South countries. Experiences of Asian immigrants in the United States (US) and Europe suggest that dominant notions of masculinity are going through significant shifts. George (2000; 2005) demonstrates how Indian women framed as "dirty nurses" in the US earned money in a way that challenged traditional gendered roles, defied acceptable gendered boundaries and dominant construction of men as sole breadwinners. In response to shifting gender roles in the US, Indian men who engaged in childcare tried to reclaim and reaffirm their lost masculine identity and power through participation in church (George 2000, 165) – a position which was further challenged by fellow Indian men (George 2005) in this

transnational space.

Gendered identities and sexual rights in the diaspora

Increasing levels of transnational labour migration from the Global South to the Global North (and South to South movements as well) – where socio-cultural, economic and political landscapes governing gender and sexuality are different – justify further analytic engagement. It is within this understanding that questions of intimacy and relationships are engaged through discussions on inter/national gender and sexual rights discourses and the subsequent sexual identities that subvert longstanding gendered hierarchies which in the Global South, Zimbabwe in particular, are often reinforced by patriarchal socio-cultural and religious structures and nationalist discourses. The diaspora for many Zimbabwean women is a space for sexual independence where one has the freedom to be without any fear of reproach and rebuke from kin. As such, the diverse ways in which Zimbabweans living in South Africa and the UK navigate and challenge longstanding gender and sexuality constructions that policed their gender and sexuality prior to migrating beyond national borders are worth exploring. Paula, a 53 year old care giver at a hospital in Johannesburg shared her experience of being lesbian in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

I have always been a lesbian but it was very difficult for me in Zimbabwe...I lived a double life. I even got married because of the pressure from family and society but deep down...I knew I was living a lie. Coming to South Africa, Johannesburg...in 2004...everything changed...this is the only place I have managed to live a real life. When I am on my way to work...when I go to the mall...you name it...I see a lot of gay people...people who were celebrities in Zimbabwe, [laughs]...yes...flaunting it here...something one could not do in Zim[babwe]...yes...it is normal here. I enjoy my sexual identity which I had to hide for so many decades prior to moving to South Africa...it feels so good to be yourself.

The autonomy that sexual minorities enjoy predominantly in the Global North, and in isolated Global South spaces like South Africa could be attributed to progressive legal structures and gay/lesbian rights movements that publicly condemn discrimination based on sexual orientation. Similar to Paula, Rose, a 25 year old university student relayed how she feels about being lesbian in South Africa.

I am lesbian and Zimbabwean [laughs]...I am laughing because these are two conflicting

identities that I negotiated...yes, in very gendered ways...because in Zimbabwe, one cannot openly be lesbian or gay...so I had to live in the closet...throughout my teenage life. When we relocated to Cape Town, South Africa...after my parents got accounting job offers in 2007, I realised that I had landed in a very liberal space...a space I personally refer to as 'a gay/lesbian nation'. Ever since I came to South Africa, I feel that I belong...this relocation has helped my parents who over the years have learnt how to live with a lesbian daughter. Yes...my parents were resistant at first but now they accept me for who I am...they have seen gay prides...parades across the country...lesbian clubs/bars in Cape Town...and I am sure they have come to terms with the homosexual reality...they have accepted sexual diversity, something they never wanted to hear or talk about in Zimbabwe.

Although her lesbian identity has been contested from a socio-cultural perspective by her family in London over the years, Virginia, a 30 year old researcher at one of the universities in Brighton in the UK shared how she embraces that same identity against all odds.

When I first came to the UK in 2000, I was a teenager but I knew I was lesbian. I did not discuss this with my parents who always referred to socio-cultural prescriptions located in our Zimbabwean identity but the irony is, I do not identify with this culture at all. Yes, I spent part of my teenage life in Zimbabwe but I have lost touch with this country which we seldom visit. One day...on vacation...I decided to open up...oh no...my parents were mad...my mother suppressed her anger...and the only thing that stopped my father from hitting me was the rights discourse that protects children in the UK...yes. Now that I am mature and financially independent...no strings attached to my parents except that they gave birth to me...they have to accept me...and that I am lesbian...this is not Zimbabwe.

It follows that notions of intimacy and relationships, with respect to gender and sexuality in the diaspora are redefined as immigrants negotiate and embrace new meanings that contest and subvert restrictive socio-cultural, customary and constitutional frameworks and nationalistic discourses that governed and continue to govern women's bodies in Zimbabwe. Being gay/lesbian in diasporic spaces where homosexuality is legalised becomes a reality for many Zimbabwean sexual minorities. As these women access or assign meaning to their bodies and celebrate sexual diversity, transnational migration becomes a powerful tool for reaffirming gender and personal sexual identities that were suppressed over the years in their homeland.

Zimbabwean women further resist old structures of gender hierarchy by exploring new ways of engaging with their bodies through abortion practices. The control of women's bodies through socio-legal frameworks silences and censors their ability to express themselves freely. In Zimbabwe, such control is exacerbated by the fact that women are policed when they try to access termination of pregnancy services – whether through legal or illegal means. Legal frameworks along with socially punitive and restrictive moral prescriptions often leave women with very limited options (if any), such that women resort to very risk illegal backyard abortion both in hospitals and at home. Transnational migration has generated new ways of living through gendered and sexualised bodies especially for Zimbabwean women who landed in countries like South Africa where abortion is legal. As Nyasha, a 35 year old nurse at a hospital in Johannesburg revealed, Zimbabwean women gain control and reclaim power over their bodies by renegotiating and exploring new gender and sexual identities in the diaspora.

My husband and I had two unplanned pregnancies but I had to carry the pregnancies to full term because abortion from a cultural and legal perspective was a no-no in Zimbabwe. I was told upon marriage that I had to fulfil my responsibility as a wife...extending the clan by giving birth to as many babies as possible. So abortion was never part of my vocabulary beyond my working environment...I had to endure. When we migrated to South Africa, I got pregnant and this time my husband said yes to early termination of the pregnancy arguing that his conscience was free for he knew that termination was legally acceptable. I believe our geographical location...in South Africa, far away from our own cultural values and norms, and a punitive legal framework has contributed to my husband's ideological shift with respect to abortion.

Similar to Sibongile, a 26 year old sex worker who revealed that she aborted all unwanted pregnancies in South Africa, Ruth, a 40 year old sex worker, shared her past experiences and how migrating to South Africa subsequently created room for agency.

Before I came to Johannesburg in 2001, I used to have challenges related to contraceptives. To this day, my body naturally rejects contraceptives and this means that when I come across a client who does not want to use protection during my fertile days...I am in trouble. Normally, these are clients who pay good money so you wouldn't want to miss such a great opportunity. When this happened back in Zimbabwe, I got pregnant...twice and I had to rely

on illegal and dangerous backyard abortion. My experience in South Africa is totally different...I can now access free, safe and legal abortion...I feel empowered because my needs as a sex worker are somewhat addressed...something that was missing in Zimbabwe. I only have to deal with the issue of criminalisation of sex work in South Africa which for me is a better devil because it is not life threatening compared to illegal abortion.

The way Zimbabwean women engage with their bodies in the diaspora is a clear contestation of a state (Zimbabwe) that is morally and legally repressive of its sexual minorities. Failure to recognise women as central agents in sexual and reproductive decision-making by the fundamental governing body (the state) widens disparities between international and national law. It is noteworthy that transnational social movements pushing for sexual diversity, pro-abortion policies and general equal rights are in tension with national discourses and legal frameworks of Global South countries like Zimbabwe such that 'the national' becomes a site for contestations of rights in relation to nationhood. However, these are often contested by immigrants who have found new homes in transnational spaces that celebrate gender and sexual diversity. Thus, Zimbabwean women's diasporic experiences emerge as powerful tools for sexual liberation in the realm of personal and political identities through which these women redefine who they are in spaces beyond their homeland.

Older women's perspectives of gender and sexuality in the diaspora

Though not directly affected because of geographical location, women who exercise agency and embrace new gender relations and sexual identities in the diaspora are often challenged by those who remain in their home countries as experiences of immigrant Indian women in the US who were labelled 'dirty nurses' back home (George 2005; 2000) suggest. Older women located in rural Zimbabwe interrogated questions of intimacy and relationships in the diaspora and narratives that emerged out of their discussions illuminate tremendous shifts in marriage and lobola practices; and how these shifts are experienced and conceptualised in view of agency and transnational migration.

Older women on marriage

As older women read and assigned meaning to intimacy, relationships and marriages among the new generation, they pointed at the fading away of the practice *rooranai vematongo* – the traditional expectation on men and women to marry within their geographical and socio-cultural boundaries. It is noteworthy that these socio-cultural shifts incited older women to share their perceptions of transnational dimensions of gender and sexuality demonstrating

how socio-cultural practices have lost meaning with globalisation. The tremendous shift in the conceptualisation of marriage was of great concern to these older women who concurred with Mbuyaⁱ Vatsa's exposé

...there is absolutely nothing positive these days...everything is now chaotic.

The chaos alluded to above creates space for discussing the intersections of gender and race/ethnicity within marriages that have emerged subsequent to transnational mobility. Older women noted that immigrant women are at liberty to explore and engage in inter-racial/ethnic marriages, and Mbuya Tugu in this vein added, "We often hear that some get married to white people in foreign countries" – a remark which concurs with Theresa's experience in London analysed earlier. While Mbuya Mhiri contended inter-racial marriages by simply saying "white people are not that good", Mbuya Tugu spelt out the cultural differences inherent in such marriages including a lifestyle totally different from that of black people. Adding to different dressing styles and eating/dietary habits, she said

People have to communicate [with the foreigner] in English, which is not a problem for in-laws who can speak English, but my concern is that we would be more comfortable if we could speak in Shona [vernacular]. The situation is very complex my grandchild!

Mbuya Tugu's narrative resulted in conceptualisations of marriage that challenged inter-racial/ethnic marriages from the standpoint that the foreign spouse's failure to meet or carry out gendered socio-cultural expectations. Similar to Mbuya Dzachi who argued that "what these children are now doing is not marriage at all", Mbuya Tugu concluded: "if one settles for a foreign partner, he/she is married but not according to our culture." For Mbuya Mushandira who noted that bringing a foreign spouse home makes the situation totally different from long ago, the 'inter-racial/ethnic marriage' discourse 'tacks back and forward' across the barrier of time. Although Mbuya Mushandira admitted that immigrants' chances of marrying a Zimbabwean are limited by the fact that they are based in a foreign country, the excerpt below confirms that inter-racial/ethnic marriages are of great concern to her.

Do you think I will be able to handle such [foreign] in-law? Our cultural backgrounds are different.

Mbuya Mhiri for the same reason recommended that it would be better for a person to marry someone from Zimbabwe in order to maintain their cultural values and norms. Her suggestion is based on her theorisation that couples understand each other better if they are of the same culture, and the chances are high that they will grow old together. As much as older women's narratives maintained the status quo, it is clearly discernible that experiences of intimacy, relationships and marriages among the new generation point at how the socio-cultural practice *rooranai vematongo* is increasingly becoming of no significance with transnational migration as women [and men] living in the diaspora marry outside their geographical and socio-cultural boundaries.

The absence of lobola and shifting sexualities

Older women's concerns about shifting sexualities were discussed in view of the 'absence' of *lobola* both in the diaspora and in present-day Zimbabwe. Mbuya Vatsa pointed out drastic changes to the marriage customs, which traditionally drew two families to the negotiating table. She reported that "it is very rare for *lobola* payments to be made these days. Instead, 'contemporary children' quickly become 'husband and wife'." What Mbuya Vatsa meant is that young women and men have sex as soon as they are in a relationship, which is contrary to the traditional custom where *lobola* payment marked the beginning of the couple's sexual roles. Mbuya Rava added that these 'children' no longer respect each other "for they now exchange *nduma* [gifts] in the bush", where there is no aunt present. Traditionally, the exchange of gifts, which could be dresses and handkerchiefs, marked the beginning of a serious non-sexual relationship and nobody would date a woman or man who had already exchanged gifts. The word bush used by Mbuya Rava could be read as the diaspora where Zimbabwean women enter into intimate relationships, and even get married without involving any close family members as Theresa's experience in London revealed earlier. Mbuya Zindoga expanded on this assertion in order to show the shift in intimate relationships,

As soon as a girl is given *nduma*, she sleeps with the boy. Assuming she gets another *nduma* from a different man, she sleeps with him, and by the time she gets married, she would have 'known' several men.

The diaspora is blamed for birthing new sexualities among immigrant women such

that virginity – whose meanings often intersect with religion and culture and are translated or interpreted in the context of patriarchy – is no longer normative. As the older women searched for possible explanations for this change, they located their questions on emerging sexualities in the marginalisation of the traditional role of the aunt. The question: “Do you ever see any daughter who takes her boyfriend to her aunt for introductions these days?” posed by Mbuya Rava suggests that the aunt/niece relationship that existed before has weakened. Mbuya Nguvo noted that “people no longer value their aunts and their role”, an inference which again indicates the fading of this traditional practice. Older women observed that due to modernisation and transnational migration, women now get married without the proper coaching and in ‘undignified’ ways that run counter to the traditional order. Adding to Mbuya Vatsa’s observation that “most of them elope, but we never used to do that traditionally”, Mbuya Nguvo emphasised that traditionally, a woman could not just move in with her boyfriend without *lobola* being paid [like what Theresa did with her British boyfriend] because payment came with more sex-related advice from aunts.

Once *lobola* was paid, aunts would tell you what you were expected to do. Not what is happening these days!

Elaborating on what was expected to follow *lobola* payment in her time, Mbuya Mhiri said that the new wife was not supposed to go straight into her husband’s bedroom, “you would sleep in the kitchen with your mother-in-law/grandmother until they took you to his bedroom.” When young women choose to elope and head straight for the blankets as Mbuya Dzachi and Mbuya Zindoga explicitly stated, they miss out on essential coaching or training in preparation for sexual intercourse, for example, learning how to ‘clean’ a man after sex. Mbuya Zvitura to this day remembers how she used ‘exclusive bedroom toiletries’ that she had received from her aunts before she left for her husband’s home.

We used to keep some water in our bedrooms in containers, and I used this water to ‘clean’ my husband after the ‘game’. I would take my cloth and wipe myself and my husband whenever we finished our ‘job’, and he would walk out of the room a clean person. I would then wash the cloth in my dish using the soap, throw away the water, clean the dish and take it back into the room without people noticing.

Transnational migration leaves no room for older women like Mbuya Pumho to

prepare today's young women for marriage because there is no physical interaction between the two generations of women. Conversely, Mbuya Ndari observed that young women are too independent such that they even resist coaching prior to leaving their homeland. Hence the conclusion that neither distance nor a change in geographical location should have any effect on one's morals informed by her belief that a child of good morals maintains that behaviour home and away.

Older women do not simply condemn young women and their sexuality. Rather, they recognise the impact of the changing socio-economic landscape on marriage and *lobola*, both as ideology and a practice. Mbuya Ndari who concluded that people have neither cattle nor money for *lobola* also admitted: "There is a shift in societal norms and values because of the challenges and hardships of life." Marriage in the absence of *lobola* has become about eloping and moving in – a situation which Zimbabwean men who are often preoccupied with survival issues – find very convenient. Older women on the contrary found the use of the term 'marriage' problematic when there has been no *lobola* payment. Mbuya Tamba like Mbuya Bvura expressed her reservations,

Do you think I can raise my lips as a mother and say my daughters are all married, when we received no *lobola* at all?

Mbuya Dzachi's statement "unlike us, who got married and our fathers enjoyed the *lobola*, we no longer expect our children to get married...not anymore" affirms that older women have come to terms with the absence of *lobola* today. Mbuya Mhiri's statement "ZW\$2 was enough to cover all *lobola* payments" hints at the exorbitant *lobola* a (diaspora-based) son-in-law has to pay and the 'commodification' of women's bodies today. For Mbuya Zindoga, the understanding that *lobola* should strengthen the social relations between the two families has been lost, "It no longer serves the purpose of just uniting families." Mbuya Ndari likewise concluded that "people have lost their norms due to changing times...this shows how life has changed." Inflated *lobola* or its absence is a thread that marks the passage of time by connecting gender and sexuality 'then' and 'now' both in Zimbabwe and in the diaspora.

Individual agency and transnational migration

As much as older women appreciated the agency Zimbabwean women exercised in the

diaspora, they contested some of the engagements with the body in transnational spaces. They observed that young women who escape dire poverty by migrating to the global cities are not bound by societal norms governing sexual purity nor are they pressured into marrying and bearing children. To substantiate her assertion that a lot of things happen in these new spaces, Mbuya Tamba said

Some of them take out their uterus...and live without one [a claim with which Mbuya Zindoga agreed: They leave the tummy empty, for sure!].

Beyond simply condemning contemporary women who live far away from home for bad behaviour, the language that older women used reiterated the influence of socio-political and economic changes on contemporary gender and sexuality issues. For instance, Mbuya Dzachi's phrase "an act of sheer poverty" reduced contemporary sexual relationships to a strategy for navigating the volatile economic terrains that have forced many Zimbabwean women to explore transnational contexts as they strive to make sense of the country's ever evolving realities. The older women equally acknowledged that immigrant women venture into sex work in the diaspora as part of their efforts to adapt to the realities of their new diasporic circumstances.

The discourse of transnational labour migration engaged above served as analytic lenses that allowed older women to create a discursive space for progressive re/conceptualisations of gender and sexuality in the diaspora. Though replete with tensions and contradictions, older women's conceptualisations of womanhood shifted from the socio-cultural expectation of marriage towards theorisations in which economic independence is central. These theorisations challenge the limited opportunities girls had in the past captured by Mbuya Ngeno, "all a daughter knew within traditional societies was getting married and having children, nothing else!" The notion of economic independence is evident in the narrative of Lydia, a 29 year old Zimbabwean living and working in South Africa.

I am a proud single woman...and I do not have any plans of getting married any time soon. My career is my baby...I am passionate about changing my financial situation...and that of my family back home...in Zim[babwe].

Akin to the experiences of the eight UK-based interviewees, Lydia's narrative does not only challenge the conventional gendered view of women as merely sexual and

reproductive beings but it appreciates the positive impact economic empowerment has had on women's position in society especially for Zimbabwean women who among other Global South citizens travel beyond national boundaries as they endeavour to meet their socio-economic realities.

Conclusion

Globalisation has witnessed an increase in transnational labour migration processes which influence macro-level interactions between Global North and Global South countries as well as South-South interactions. The analysis above has demonstrated how central transnational gendered labour migration is to sustaining global cities and boosting struggling economies of immigrant women's home countries through remittances. It is within these macro-level interactions that transnational migration as a part of globalisation impacts on women's socio-economic status both in the diaspora and in their homeland. Participation in transnational migration and engagement in re/productive labour has created a platform for Zimbabwean women in the UK and in South Africa to transform longstanding constructions of women's work and their economic potential. With increased economic power, Zimbabwean women in the diaspora attain greater agency that empowers them to transform gender hierarchies by blurring conventional gender roles and relations as men take on household duties and yield to their wives' status as equal earners. Immigrant women who engage in re/productive labour in transnational spaces emerge as key economic actors with the ability to contribute towards household income in the diaspora, and sustain families and communities in their home countries. The normative male sole breadwinner image is challenged and the male/female dichotomy somewhat collapses. The processes alluded to above not only leave women with an identity beyond submission but they create new meanings for gender and sexuality. A substantial part of Zimbabwean women's gendered relations and sexual identities is renegotiated through their re/productive engagements and economic positions in the diaspora. As economically empowered Zimbabwean women exercise agency in South Africa and the UK, away from the gaze of kin, the diaspora emerges as a conducive transnational platform for renegotiating restrictive frameworks that police/d gender and sexuality in immigrants' homeland.

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¹Mbuya – a vernacular word which means grandmother – is used here to denote respect for the older women.