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إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين**

**DRAFT VERSION
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**Cross-border Women Traders and
Hegemonic Masculinities in Zimbabwe**

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5 - 9 / 12 / 2011

Rabat Maroc / Morocco

Introduction

Women cross-border traders have defied mainstream conceptualizations of masculinities and femininities in Zimbabwe. This defiance, however, has not come without its skeptical reception on the part of some social actors such as men in nuptial relations with these entrepreneurs. A mélange of issues has influenced these women to deconstruct a general feminine perception of women as delicate, home-bound, and feeble economic 'children' who are risk averse. Research conducted by Muzvidziwa (1998) on cross-border women traders in Masvingo revealed the optimism these women traders had in relation to equitable intra-household resource access and use as a result of financial independence that comes from being cross-border traders. In his research, all but two cross-border traders felt that through cross-border trade they were able to overcome many of the disadvantages that deny women equal access to resources. Today, this optimism is still as strong a driving force as it was in 1998, and, coupled with this optimism of economic independence is Zimbabwe's economic plunge, which began in the year 2000 and is attributable to a myriad of factors that are not the focus of discussion in this paper. Unemployment levels that reached a crescendo of 95% and runaway inflation of around 235 million % as of July 2008 and estimated at over a billion per cent in December 2008 (The Zimbabwe Human Rights Watch, 2008) were other influencing factors to women's involvement in cross-border trade.

This unprecedented hyperinflationary environment motivated most previously domesticated housewives to brave the conventionally male dominated public economic spheres for livelihood prospects. According to Muzvidziwa, these women felt that they had found a domain in which men were second-best players. Silberschmidt (1999) notes that discussions of gender division of labour within households involve the kinds of activities associated with men and women. But such discussions of this division of labour, notes Silberschmidt (1999:101), "also involve how 'trade-offs' are negotiated in response to the many pressures that derive from 'internal' changes in the domestic cycle and from 'external' changes in the socio-economic context in which households are located". Even though Silberschmidt was making reference to the Kisii District of Kenya, considerable convergences in terms of the structuring of division of labour can be drawn between the Kisii District and many parts of Zimbabwe. In a changing economic situation such as that of Zimbabwe, the gender roles of men and women are redefined, resulting

in marked changes in gender relations. Married women are forced by circumstances to participate more and more in public economic activities to augment dwindling salaries earned by their husbands.

In the wake of this economic environment, Zimbabwean women have continued to brave international borders as they take part in cross-border trade. They have also become the dominant players in this trade. The merchandise they traded in is as varied as their socio-politico-economic background. For instance, some of the wares traded in outgoing trade include crafts (souvenirs, curios, artifacts, woodcarvings and stone sculptures), textile products (clothing materials, clothes, crochet work, embroidery, macramé and knitwear, hand-made jerseys), and farm products (roundnuts, groundnuts, beans, sun-dried vegetables and mushrooms). Commodities traded in incoming trade comprise of electrical and mechanical appliances (radios, TV sets, solar panels), textiles/footwear (shoes, jackets, cloth), second-hand clothes and curtains, building materials (cement, tiles, roofing, window frames, basins), cosmetics (perfumes, body and hair oils), toiletries, cooking oil, etc).

An understanding of the skeptical reception to cross-border trade can be better 'appreciated' if situated within the context of a conventional analysis of masculinities and femininities in Zimbabwe. Haywood *et al* (1994) define masculinity as forms of gendered identities marking out "correct" or "appropriate" styles of being a man, which are exhibited in institutional patterns, behaviours, experiences, appearances and practices. In the same vein, femininity refers to gendered identities that mark out 'correct' and 'appropriate' styles of being a women. Masculinities and femininities are society-specific, multifaceted, multidimensional, and entail having the power to define what is 'normal' or 'ordinary' male or female behaviour. Such definitions of masculinities have not been an exception in cross-border women's trade where 'normal' definitions of masculinities have been defied by women who dominate this typology of trade. This is contrary to the mainstream conceptualization of the private-public debate in which women are expected to be economic 'children', dependent on the breadwinning capacities of men in various social relationships with them. Hearn (1996) notes that masculinity is no longer a single entity which is universally accepted but changes from one generation to another as men change social (and economic) positions through class, age, ethnicity, disability, race, sexuality

and other related social divisions in the modern world. Changes in economic positions of most middle-class men as a result of Zimbabwe's economic somersault since 2000 have also compromised their masculinities. An inability to single-handedly fend for the family has proffered in married men an identity of effeminacy.

Taxonomies of masculinities are diverse and include, *inter alia*, dominant or hegemonic masculinities and subordinate masculinities. Hegemonic masculinities are the dominant forms of male behaviour in a particular situation or setting. Such masculinities pervade all aspects of social, political and economic life and are a quintessence of manhood. Men (and women) who epitomize such masculinities are characterised by an insatiable desire to assume leading positions in all aspects of life in which they will be a part of. A desire to live by and in this dimension of masculinity has resulted in married men fighting by all means to amass cash that enables them to maintain a position of dominance in the family or household institution. However, the currently prevailing economic situation in Zimbabwe has detracted such men from their efforts. This is so in view of how women have penetrated the public sphere in general and cross-border trade in particular with most of such women gaining economic dominance over men. The result has been a subjection of men to deplorable and despicable subordinate masculine identities. Subordinate masculinities are those forms of male behaviour that are perceived to be less competitive and hence are not manly. Such masculinities are shunned by 'real' men since they reflect weakness, docility, and destitution of virility relative to 'real' men. Subordinate masculinities can paradoxically be labeled feminine masculinities.

Research Methodology

The study is grounded in qualitative methodology and triangulated data from different sources, both primary and secondary, in a bid to bring in-depth and generalisable data. Unstructured interviews were employed as primary data collection instruments to gather information from both men and women. Questions evoked men and women's conceptualizations of female cross-border trade vis-à-vis impact of married women's financial autonomy on decision-making powers in families and households. Secondary sources of data such as Zimbabwe's home affairs documents, International Organization for Migration (IOM) data and findings of previous researchers also corroborated primary information. The research has a strong ethnographic

alignment, especially in view of its inclination towards eliciting female cross-border traders' comprehensive analysis of their activities and men's perceptions of this entrepreneurial activity. Snowballing and availability sampling techniques were utilized. The feasibility of these sampling techniques derived from the observation and realization that the population of cross-border traders is diffuse, haphazard, mostly undocumented and often evasive to researchers. Employing snowballing and availability sampling techniques therefore enabled the researcher to cumulatively access these elusive respondents. Availability sampling was also crucial in the selection of male respondents given the unavailability of a convenient sampling frame.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Expressions of Hegemonic Masculinities

While situated in a milieu that highly sanctions the economic independence of women, Zimbabwe's economic environment requires that husband and wife augment each other's meager salaries and or wages to cushion them against falling below the poverty datum line. It makes financial logic that these two conflate their financial endowments in a country where middle class civil servants such as teachers and nurses are earning an average salary of US\$150 per month (as of December, 2010). Although men subtly acknowledge the financial contribution of their wives to family income, they try by hook and crook to maintain hegemony through reversion to conservative definitions of masculinities and femininities. In these conservative constructions of manhood and womanhood, girls are socialized into accepting their domestic roles and not having ambitions that infringe on the 'male domain'. The male domain is the public arena where political and economic activities that affect both men and women are mediated, ideally by men. For instance, in an analysis of girls' generally poor performance in Zimbabwean schools relative to men, Kajawu (2001:27) highlights that motivating factors seem to discourage girls' high achievement. He points out that in the Western context, pictures portraying achievement-oriented characteristics are usually physically unappealing. Girls who wear heavy glasses, ugly shoes, conservative clothes and unattractive hairstyles are usually presented as the 'brainy' ones. In the African context, the portrayal of a 'brainy' woman is that of a feminist who looks down upon cultural and traditional customs and is most likely to be immoral, a portrayal with potential to discourage high achievement (ibid). In this regard,

therefore, married women have to demonstrate their acquaintance with the 'proper' moral pedagogy through practicing reservedness even in economic activities.

Men therefore find themselves in a dilemma; on the one hand, an outright curtailment of women's economic activities through cross-border trade may be financially ominous to the family or household, on the other hand, failure to harness women's economic power jeopardizes their hegemonic masculinities. This curtailment, in essence, can also have negative ramifications on the definition of man as breadwinner. How, then, do men strike a compromise between economic adventurism for women and hegemonic masculinity for themselves? How do women who are in cross-border trade respond to this?

Findings from the field highlighted men's employment of symbolic violence as an antidote to cross-border women traders' potentially unfettered economic freedom; freedom that also has the potential to mutate into political power. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as the imposition of systems of symbolism and meanings upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997). It is a 'soft' form of violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:167). This symbolic violence is practiced indirectly, largely through cultural mechanisms, and stands in contrast to the more direct forms of social control.

The language of dominance

Men who are in marital relations with female cross-border traders claim to possess dominant masculinities, despite their lacking in material resources, which are the predominant preconditions of power. By virtue of being the man of the house, men express their desire to control women, dependent children and other male counterparts, either by salient or subtle means. Osborne (1995:637) argues that masculinity is connected to men's attempt to control women through force, coercion, abuse and silencing hence women's experiences of subordination and violence in various social settings. Findings from field work indicated that men employ the language of dominance to maintain their assertive positions over financially masculine female cross-border traders. This language can entail a constant reminder to the wife that being endowed with financial strength does not translate to manhood. Some men have even

gone to the extent of reminding their wives that they paid bride price for them, not vice versa, something that is taken to imply that women should be relegated to a position of subordination to men. Such masochistic remarks have reinforced the existing body of literature that campaigns against the payment of bride price (Chanetsa, 2005).

It also emerged that men employ threats to bring to subjection women who brag about their financial independence over men to whom they will be married. These threats have included blatantly telling the 'crowing' wife that he would bring to a halt the whole entrepreneurial activity. The basis for the ability to do so lies in that it is from the husband that the wife first sought consent when she started engaging in cross-border trade. Therefore, any suspicion that the wife has become mischievous invites incessant threats on the part of the husband. One man indicated that "*Imbwa ikarebesa muswe tinodimbura*" (Meaning that men harness the power of women with euphoric unfettered power). It is only in isolated cases that continued defiance to such reprimands has resulted in female cross-border traders being forced to stop their entrepreneurial activities.

Trade and child care

The active participation of mothers in CBT implies that most of these mothers' duties have to be carried out by their children, regardless of their age. Even in the absence of their wives, most men express their hegemonic masculinities through their outright reluctance to take part in household chores. Men's presence does not relieve children of these household duties. Since definitions of hegemonic masculinities incorporate gender role socialization as the major tenet (Silberschmidt, 1999), men prefer relegating household chores to relatively grown up children. They are therefore able to condescendingly maintain their threatened masculine identity intact, reminiscent of a radical analysis of social movements (Alcoff, 2006).

This participation of children in household chores deconstructs biological essentialism in relation to the definition of a child. Childhood becomes a social construction (James and Prout (1990), cited in Katsaura, 2010:119). In this case, socially constructed notions of children as immature and fragile beings as warranted by their economic dependence and school-going status are questioned (James and Prout, 1990). This involvement of children in household chores

evokes questions regarding child abuse and child labour even as it results in questioning of their definitions. Taking part in prolonged CBT implies that dependent children are left without parental care. This way, they get exposed to an assortment of social ills. Reports abound of children who are left in the hands of abusive distant relatives, who would not even allow them to go to school. Most of these children become appendages of the household heads of their temporary attachment, subjected to all sorts of grimy work such as sweeping backyards and digging gardens.

The gendered nature of this work means that girl children are the most affected. This is so in recognition of the conventional stereotypical categorization of girls' work and boys' work. On account of the point that in urban centres of Zimbabwe at least, there is not much of boys' work to be done, girls find themselves the busier of the two sexes. Coupling this gender role socialization with a second class citizenship status accorded to girl children in Zimbabwe (as in many other countries) has produced a perennially under-achieving girl relative to the boy. These findings find corroboration in Kajawu's (2001) findings from research on gender stereotyping during secondary schooling in Zimbabwe. In the research, Kajawu indicates that since 1980, girls have consistently performed worse than boys on ordinary level examinations. This has resulted in fewer girls than boys proceeding to tertiary education institutions.

Attributing this poor educational performance of girls relative to boys to the activities of women in cross-border trade may, however, constitute an over-extrapolation of findings. This is so on account of the fact that the research could not control for other confounding variables. This is confirmed by results from the respondents, both men and women, who admitted that female cross-border trade is one among diverse factors impinging on academic excellence in girls' educational performance. In spite of this existence of other confounding variables, men whose wives engage in CBT continue to find fertile grounds to moderately implicate their wives in child negligence cases. In doing so, men have exercised their symbolic violence over women through such allegations.

It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of female entrepreneurs interviewed registered their disappointment in what they felt to be unfair in this allegation. These businesswomen argued

that it is the desire to fend for children that motivated them to engage in CBT such that they even forego the comfort that comes with staying at home as they brave hitherto unknown territories. In line with this, Muzvidziwa (1998) indicates that on account of parental responsibilities, most cross-border traders avoided participating in the most lucrative illegal trade, fearing what would happen to their children if they were arrested.

Most female cross border traders have also respond to the above implication by pointing to the ephemerality of this form of labour on the part of children. The argument is that children only partake in household duties during the time when their biological mothers will not be at home. This means that as soon as they come back from their trading activities, they assume their socially defined responsibilities in the private sphere. Challenges, these traders opine, only emerge when their selling market is financially dry, which is an exception rather than the norm. One lady who sells souvenirs in Mafikeng, a small town in South Africa, highlighted the importance of timing in CBT. Based on her ten years' experience in this business, she indicated that it is not economically wise to engage in trade during public holidays such as Christmas, Independence Day, Easter holidays, among other days. This is so because during such days buyers' financial coffers will be channeled to goods germane to the holidays in question. In her words, "*Mubasa redu iri ukaresva timing unotambura nekumanya bani*", a colloquial expression which contextually means that in CBT ill-timing implies futile laboring. Likewise, trade trips that coincide with the opening of primary and secondary government academic schools are financially abortive. In such cases, the need to pay school fees for school going children will override the jovial craving for cosmetic and other materially frivolous goods.

Rendezvousing female cross border traders often leave their dependent children in the custody of any one of the following household members; female relatives, be they distant or close, male 'carers', usually the father of the children, or housemaids (which are rare cases given the financial costs of having one). Those who are in a relatively sound financial footing send children who are not of school-going age to nursery schools where they spend the better part of the day. The age of a child is often the most salient variable determining the would-be holder of the transient custodianship of the child. Children who are still at tender ages of six or below are the ones most likely to be temporarily 'fostered' to female relatives since these relatives, by

virtue of social definitions of feminine qualities of caring and nurturing abilities and gender role socialization, are in a better position to look after such delicate beings. Male relatives often accept temporary custodianship of relatively grown up dependent children who are seven years of age or above. They prefer such age groups given the fact that these children are capable of being menials or to be on an errand. Depending on the nature of goods to be traded, female cross border traders can be away from home for as long as two months. Some even go beyond this time frame. This absence therefore highlights the importance of leaving children in the custodianship of responsible people.

The number of reported rape cases on young children has also been on the increase since 2002. Muyale (2010) notes that in Zimbabwe there is an average of four reported rape cases every day, most of which are cases of children. While it may constitute an over-extrapolation of data to argue that this exorbitant and unimaginable data of child rape incidences is solely attributable to CBT, it is one of the major causes of this increase in rape cases. This is so in view of the fact that most cases of rape are perpetrated by close relatives who prey on the vulnerability of their would-be victims. In the absence of their mothers, children become vulnerable to every possible form of abuse.

The position that women find themselves in as a result of taking part in CBT highlights that symbolic violence is expressed through a conjuncture of issues, among which include the pawning of children at the centre of the economic and political power gamut between men and women. Needless to say, however, that most middle-class men have begrudgingly allowed their wives to engage in cross-border trade, a move that has resulted in these men's 'manhood' being questioned. Men in connubial families have therefore found themselves between a hard surface and a rock; while they may want to relegate their wives to the position of permanent housewifery (thus in essence emasculating them), Zimbabwe's structural economic conditions detract them from their efforts. It is worth noting that in a Zimbabwean social context in general, men who cannot exercise authority over their wives and dependent children are regarded as effeminate and, therefore, under 'petticoat government' (meaning that they are subject to women's authority).

CBT, children and socialization

As women engage in CBT, primary socialization of children is relegated to becoming a secondary issue despite the importance that it holds in inculcating socially context specific values, norms, and belief systems in children. Children become very much exposed to secondary socialization. Socialization refers to the general process by which people acquire their views and values from others (Howard, 1989). Secondary socialization is the re-socialization of a human being that takes place after childhood and is a continuous and lifelong process (Kottak, 2002). Muyale (2010) articulates the impact of CBT vis-a-vis child social development in the following fashion:

Children no longer sit around the fireplace in the evening to listen to stories that promote the values of respect, integrity, peace, love and unity, even in the rural areas where this sort of environment would fit best. People - men, women and children - are all engrossed and embroiled in the struggle for survival - the struggle to get a bowl of mealie-meal to fill the tummy at least for the day.

Most men interviewed in this research lamented the sprouting of nursery schools as complementing women cross-border trade. These schools can be seen in almost every residential area of major cities such as Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Kwekwe, and Mutare. At fees that are contingent on school to school, children as young as two years of age can be enrolled. Some of these nursery schools work in 'cahoots' with commuter omnibus owners who make a door-to-door pick-and-drop of these children. Children are taken to their respective nursery schools and then back to their custodians at any time between 12:00pm and 4:00pm depending on the school. The existence of nursery schools means that women have found a haven to leave their tender children, thus enabling them to go on their entrepreneurial activities without having to worry about who will fend for and, at times, spruce their babies during their absence. This form of secondary socialization is seen by some conservative male parents as inculcating in children an alien culture that, more often than not, will be at variance with the family's cultural mores. For instance, most men complained that nursery schools have become breeding grounds for *masalads*, an idiomatic term referring to a person who is destitute of his/her cultural mores,

especially as a result of being foreign brewed. The qualities of a real *musalad* are epitomized by the dress code, food preferences, and the musical genre that is often adopted. All these qualities will be allochthonous to the values, norms, and belief systems of their society of origin.

Extra-marital affairs? And the irony of success

A skeptical reception of cross-border female trade has also been influenced by reports, whether authentic or baseless, of married women getting involved in extra-marital affairs once they cross the border. The assumption is that cross-border female traders prostitute themselves to truck drivers. They do this, according to these reports, either en route to the drivers' destinations or at the actual destinations. Some of the men I interviewed were even doubtful of whether these 'so-called' businesswomen engaged in conventional trade at all other than indulging in commercial sex with truck drivers, a situation which they said complicates and worsens the already precarious HIV and AIDS situation in Zimbabwe. The basis for suspicion was that these women succeed in amassing cash when they crossed the national boundaries yet there are a lot of potential income-generating activities which they have failed to tap for financial benefits.

That CBT is dominated by women is another source of suspicion on the part of men. One male respondent noted that most men who attempt CBT are generating profits that are between slim and nothing. Some of these men, indicated the respondent, had to return home with their merchandise after futile efforts to penetrate the market. This respondent found it ironical that the majority of cross-border female traders have succeeded in this line of business. The basis of this irony is that, on account of the diffuse nature of the market most of the products these women trade in, long distances are covered before the whole merchandise can be purchased by the final consumer. This diffuse nature of the business would have meant therefore that, on average, men's socially defined mettlesome quality would proffer them a comparative advantage over women. Such a response is premised on mainstream definitions of masculinities and femininities in which men are believed and expected to be exudative of energy and resilience in the face of challenges while women, on the contrary, exhibit their destitution in these qualities, thus radiating muted femininities and frailties (Lovell, 2000).

Muzvidziwa (1998) highlights the innuendo of Zimbabwe's media in relation to cross border women traders and the constraints they had to deal with in the 1990s, particularly from officialdom. Such allusive remarks found premise in erroneous assumption that these female entrepreneurs were using *muti* (concoction believed to bring luck to a businessperson) in conducting their entrepreneurial activities, among others. Consequently, financial proceeds from this trade were abased and shunned as blood money, especially in view of the allegation that these female traders used human body parts as their concoction to induce vibrancy in business.

Subscribing to this conventional analysis of masculinities and femininities would equate women cross-border traders to what Bourdieu (1997) conceptualizes as inappropriate habitus. While Bourdieu acknowledged the durability and transposability of a habitus, he also pointed out that it is possible for people to have an inappropriate habitus, to suffer from what he called hysteresis. Ritzer provides an example of an inappropriate habitus of someone who is uprooted from an agrarian existence in a contemporary precapitalist society and put to work on Wall Street. The habitus acquired in a precapitalist society would not allow one to cope very well with life on Wall Street. Bourdieu (1979) defines the habitus as a set of dispositions created and reformulated through the conjuncture of objective structures and personal history. People are endowed with a series of internalized schemes through which they perceive, understand, appreciate, and evaluate the social world. Dialectically, habitus are the product of the internalization of the structures of the social world (Bourdieu, 1989). While a conformist understanding of gender role socialization would expect women to be confined to domesticity, women's partaking in CBT has deconstructed this conventional wisdom. Cross-border women traders have employed their dispositions (and by implication, habitus) in an 'inappropriate' manner in the sense that while mainstream conceptualization of womanhood would expect women to be docile, fragile, home-bound and economically passive, their taking part in CBT has entailed a salient and enormous veering from such expectations. This status of women as assuming an inappropriate habitus is also rubber-stamped by tabloid that label cross-border women traders as clandestine dealers who specialize in the smuggling of all sorts of wares using illegally obtained foreign currency (Muzvidziwa, 1998). Buying this analysis implies perceiving

these businesswomen as deviants who have derailed from conventional male-dominated entrepreneurial activities.

It is noteworthy, however, to present cross-border women's moral disclaimer to the above accusations. This repudiation of mainstream accusation of these entrepreneurs' sexual morality centred on the defense of the means of transport used in cross-border trade. Due to the fact that most of these businesswomen will be in possession of above average luggage, they prefer using trucks as their major transport system. This transport preference is also motivated by the negotiable nature of truck fares, a rare occurrence in cross-border bus fare charging systems. During these negotiations, compromises in relation to the fares charged are almost always inevitable, which is to the advantage of these women. Failure to negotiate a reduction in luggage fare has negative repercussions since this entails the fares increasing expenses incurred, thereby eating into profits. Women also hired haulage truck drivers to transport their merchandise as a way of evading what they felt to be exorbitant customs and excise duties. Given this very high duty paid, most women had to connive with truck drivers who, at a fee, would deliver their goods to the other side of the border.

One female entrepreneur argued that mainstream allegation of sexual immorality on their part is nothing but an embodiment of scapegoating. She indicated that it is the defiance of **domesticity** by cross-border women traders that has relegated them to this disparagingly low ebb of sexual purity. She indicated her continued defiance to being curbed to the private sphere when she said, "*Hatidzori tsvimbo nekuti gudo rabata kumeso. Saka totofazve nenzara nekuti nyika inozotaura?*" (Meaning: We will not renege on our entrepreneurial activities. Shall we die of hunger just because society will accuse us (of sexual immorality)?). This response, therefore, reflects the diverging perceptions and conceptualizations of the phenomenon of cross-border trade between men and women.

Furthermore, to understand the roots of women's competitive urge over men in CBT, one needs to situate it within the national historical context of division of labour on the basis of gender. For instance, during the colonial period, men had been trained to take up jobs in the formal sector, an emphasis that continues to characterize the post-colonial Zimbabwe state. The result has been

that men have found it difficult to acquaint themselves with informal sector activities (Muzvidziwa, 1998). The implication of this historical structuring of division of labour has become a blessing in disguise for Zimbabwean women cross-border traders since they have penetrated the markets to become the dominant players in this trade.

The informality tag and sustainable development

The informality tag associated with women cross-border trade carries with it connotations of clandestine and shoddy dealings, reminiscent of street vending and other lowly ranking trading activities. Because of this informality tag, government programmes to assist women cross-border traders have been very slim. National governments, regional bodies, and most civil society organisations seldom educate or empower women cross-border traders with knowledge on how they can meaningfully participate in regional trade. For instance, in 2009 Masheti Masinjila conducted research on the gender dimensions of cross border trade in the East African community and found that women who were interviewed showed little knowledge of the East African Community Customs Protocol, and those who did had little motivation to use it to facilitate trading activities. In Zimbabwe, the existence of the Zimbabwe Cross Border Traders Association has not been enough to avert the challenges these traders face in their business. This is because of the assumption by many traders that this association is elitist and caters for those who are well-established in the business.

Consequently, most women cross border traders resort to social networking as a way of learning the germane business etiquette. Bourdieu's cultural and social capitals become very invaluable in determining business nodes. Such a snowball type of business networking has had varying degrees of success. Some would-be cross border traders have opted to 'acculturate' to the art of CBT through skills acquired from close relatives. Although this has been helpful to its own extent, some overtones of jealous have been reported on the part of those rendering assistance. Prospective cross border traders who employ the services of non-relatives to penetrate CBT cited jealous as one of the main causes for not soliciting assistance from close relatives. Thus in the absence of clearly defined institutions to formalize and assist these women traders, their activities will run the risk of economic and political suffocation and shrinkage. There is therefore a strong need to formalize informal trade to make it more beneficial to the country's economy. It

is interesting to note that since the year 2000 informal trade has sustained the country's economy when the formal economy failed to provide employment and revenue base for the majority of unemployed Zimbabwean youths.

Coupled with the informality tag is the perception by most men of women as second class citizens. As second class citizens, women in general and women cross border traders in particular are relegated to the position of peripheral economic players. This situation manifests itself not only in CBT but also in other economic activities such as land ownership and use, representation in parliamentary portfolio, and other economic platforms where women's voices are subtle. In most of these fora, a piecemeal quota system has been introduced to ensure that women are not only seen but also heard. The anticipation is that continued efforts to ensure equitable participation of men and women in national economic activities will reduce conflicts between men and women, which in and of themselves are retrogressive to smooth operations of women cross border traders and, by implication, economic growth. There is therefore need for men in general to change their perception towards CBT and to perceive these women traders as economic beings who contribute to economic growth in a positive way.

Conclusion

The assumption that a considerable financial contribution to household income by married women translates to socio-political autonomy in conjugal families is polemical. Being financially independent does not always proffer in women the power that comes with this typology of independence, especially when it is men who would have amassed the money. Women who obtain their money from cross-border trading activities have to endure a myriad of symbolic violence on the part of their husbands. This symbolic violence is part of an attempt to stamp dominance in the nuptial family. Given the degree to which hegemonic masculinities are envied by most Zimbabwean men, it is not surprising to learn how women cross-border traders have not easily succeeded in having a major say in intra-household decision-making activities, not even when their financial position is highly pronounced to make their voices audible. Instead of according women the high socio-political status that comes with this financial autonomy, men have implicated women cross-border traders in a number of activities by way of curbing their 'bragging' about being financially muscular relative to their husbands. Such subtle but powerful

attempts to harness women's authority mean that narrow conceptualizations of women's vulnerability need to be seriously scrutinized. Results from this study have indicated that even where women provide considerably for the family, men may still continue to curtail their influence in decision-making.

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