

Married Women Breadwinners: A Myth or Reality?

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Abstract

There are many studies that show that in the face of collapsing and declining economies of the Third World the war against poverty has seen the emergent of married women breadwinners. Married women breadwinners are an economically active group that show signs of possibilities of translating gender equality policies and strategies into something meaningful. This group of women who are economically independent is referred to in the Shona language in Zimbabwe as *varume pachavo* (*They are real men themselves*). We need to ask how and why economically independent women are constructed in the idiom of honorary men. Ethnographic studies do indicate that in reality the situation of women breadwinners is more complex, as more women in this category are at pains to reassure society and their 'man' that the husband remains the logical and legitimate head of household. The women even resort to the use of the moral-religious arguments to support their views that a man is the head of the household. Could such statements that appear clearly to be in support of patriarchy be taken at face value as an indication of the failure by married women breadwinners to break through the 'glass ceiling' at the domestic level in terms of redressing the ideology of male domination? Or should we see the women's strategy of deferment as part of the strategies adopted by independent married women to safeguard their newly found liberated space by appearing to be supporting patriarchy when in fact the opposite is happening? Could this be part of what Scott (1985) would refer to as 'weapons of the weak'? Is it a way of providing soft landing for the husbands of these women who are undergoing a crisis of masculinity through loss of the breadwinner status? We need to see the emergent of independent married women breadwinners as a more complex process which embraces equality notions as well as the continued

subordination of women at the domestic and public domains. The article also explores Nuttall's notion of entanglement and how this can explain the socio-cultural and economic specificities of married women breadwinners.

Keywords: married women, breadwinners, household, subordination, gender violence

Introduction

This article examines the experiences of married women breadwinners in Zimbabwe in the light of economic forces that contributed to more women becoming increasingly economically active. All the women in the study were cross-border traders. The increase of married women breadwinners became more pronounced in the post economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) by the Zimbabwean Government in 1991 and in the first decade of the 21st century following the much publicised farm invasions. The article seeks to interrogate the notion of breadwinner status of married women and its impact on households and women's lives. When called upon to adapt to changing circumstances such as the effects of retrenchment which mostly affected men given the preponderance of men in the formal labour market and women's dominance in the informal markets of the economy it meant women were generally better positioned to respond to unfavourable markets compared to men.

This article draws its data from an ethnographic study spanning over a period of 12 months from December 2001 to November 2002 involving a selected group of cross-border women traders who lived in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital and Chinhoyi a provincial capital of Mashonaland West Province some 115 km to the north of Harare. The organisation of Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) funded the research. While multiple research methods were adopted during the data gathering phase data for this article mainly draws from the in-depth and length intensive interviews. Twenty women 10 from Harare and 10 from Chinhoyi were selected through snowball sampling techniques. In contrast to the 1994/95 study in the provincial town of Masvingo in Southern Zimbabwe when married breadwinners constituted a smaller percentage of women heads of households in the 2001/2002 study married women breadwinners half of the selected women's population of 20. It is important to note that a lot of

data using interviews as well as observations was collected from many other people including officials. To date its worth noting that the study has resulted in a book, three refereed journal articles as well as several conference papers and yet a lot of the data remains unexplored. This article seeks to explore issues related to breadwinner status of the purposively chosen four cases out of ten married women cross-border traders. It is useful as a starting point to examine the concept of household headship before explaining the meaning of breadwinner status and the complexities surrounding this concept.

In the light of changes in household responsibilities and increased income earning power by married women it is useful to briefly look at the notion of household headship. Muzvidziwa's (2002:163) observation that 'despite shifts in terms household responsibilities and the burden of household survival increasingly being shouldered by married women, household power structures that vested authority in men have remained intact', appears to be replicated in the study reported here. Casimir and Tobi (2011) noted that the term household is largely left undefined in the literature. In a selection and review of selected literature an operational definition of household is attempted in only three out of 58 papers. Despite difficulties in defining precisely what constitute a household Casimir and Tobi (2011:504) concluded that 'a household is a single person or group of persons who share resources, activities and expenditures on a regular basis for a specified period of time'. This definition resonates well with Muzvidziwa's (2002:166) observation that a household 'refers to shared or co-operative resource allocation between individuals who may or may not be permanently co-resident'. On the other hand Youssef and Hetler (1983:232) identified five broad categories of *de jure* and *de factor* woman-headed households:

- a) Households with no male spouse or partner at any time. These include households headed by single mothers, divorced, widowed or separated women, deserted wives; and dissolved non-legalised unions.
- b) Households with transient male partners.
- c) Households in which the male spouse or partner is temporarily absent for example married women whose husbands are away for unspecified periods.
- d) Households where the woman earns or contributes more than the male partner towards the maintenance of the household.

- e) Households with one or more adult males in residence but no male spouse or partner.

While data on married women breadwinners in my study do not conform to Youssef and Hetler's definition of headship, their definition nevertheless remains useful in discussions of women household headship. For the married women breadwinners in Harare and Chinhoyi study criteria c and d above do not necessarily result in female headship. Husbands may earn less or might even be temporarily absent that does not automatically translate into female headship. In fact there is all the evidence that in situations like this the married woman will go to great length to reassure the man that despite the circumstances he s still the head of household.

This article excluding the introduction and conclusion consists of four sections. The first section presents a descriptive account of five married women breadwinners selected from the 20 women who participated in the in-depth interviews. The five cases will help readers to situate and understand the study. The second section discusses lessons derived from the five cases examples of married women breadwinners. The third section examines issues focusing on power and gender relations within married women breadwinner households. The last section explores the notion of entanglement as presented by Nuttall and how this reflects on the everyday lived experiences of married women breadwinners under discussion.

Case Studies of Married Women Breadwinners

In this section I present a descriptive account of four married breadwinners from the sample of 20 cases. These married breadwinners are purposively selected to include recently married and those married for more than 30 years.

Case 1: Amai¹ Tendai

Amai Tendai, a 25-year-old married woman and mother to a five-year old son began her cross-border operations in March 2002. She lived in Chinhoyi. She

¹ *Amai* means mother but can also be used as a mark of respect, calling a mature woman *amai* irrespective of whether one has a child or not is a mark of respect.

stayed with her husband, son, 19-year-old sister-in-law and domestic worker. She was initiated into cross-border trade by her mother but raised cross-border start up capital from savings from her saloon. She completed O levels in 1993 but from 1994 until March 2002 operated a hair dressing salon in Chinhoyi town. She employed a saloon assistant. Both her salon and cross-border trade were viable though proceeds from cross-border trading operations exceeded those of the salon. In 2002 Amai Tendai visited Tanzania on a monthly basis as a cross-border trader. The combined income from the hair dressing salon and cross-border operations was much more than her accountant husband's income. Besides sourcing items for household use and resale she bought chemicals needed in her saloon. She had a separate bank account from her husband but made joint decisions when it comes to investments. They had managed to invest in a stand and were planning to build their house in the coming year after the rain season. The couple had also managed to access a five-hectare piece of land through the fast track programmes on which they planned to grow crops for food and sale. Amai Tendai was in the climbing² out of poverty category.

Membership cards issued by the Zimbabwe Cross-border Association assisted them in doing business in Tanzania. The women were accommodated in lodges during their business trips to Tanzania. Amai Tendai was practising a Catholic. She was also a member of a 15-person credit and savings club which allowed members to borrow money, which was repaid with interest. Despite her success as a business woman Amai Tendai felt that her husband's job was more important for the family. Hers was a supplementary role. She was still responsible for housework and household management.

Case 2: Amai Tafara

Amai Tafara a 42-year-old married mother of four a married 21-year-old daughter, an 18-year-old son doing A' levels, a 10-year-old son in grade four, and a pre-school four-year-old daughter. She completed two years of secondary education. She lived with her mother-in-law and four other dependents, two sisters-in-law, a brother-in-law and a nephew all still at

² Used as per Muzvidziwa 1998. Climbing out of poverty referred to those who had relatively healthy domestic budget, savings and investments.

school. She started cross-border trade in 1992. Her start-up capital consisted of her personal savings and a grant from her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law had to prevail over her husband's refusal to permit her to engage in cross-border trade. Initially she conducted her cross-border business in Zambia. A friend who has since died initiated her into cross-border trade. Typical trade items taken to Zambia were foodstuffs, drinks (beer and minerals), tobacco, and sewn clothes. From Zambia the women purchased second-hand clothes, fish and bags for resale. Amai Tafara stopped going to Zambia in 1994 and has been going to Lesotho ever since. She travelled to Lesotho monthly and spent at least two weeks selling her wares. She pooled resources with two other cross-border women traders to rent a room at SAR100 monthly in a Maline block with 14 rooms. Amai Tafara is in the poverty³ coping category. Her husband was retrenched sometime in 2002 but because of her cross-border operations the family's welfare was not compromised. She is able to raise at least SAR4000 as profit from each trip she makes to Lesotho. While she acknowledges that the trip to Lesotho is very tiresome, she points out that there are not many restrictions placed on traders in Lesotho thereby making this a safe and encouraging destination. She mostly carries with her tie & dye materials, doilies and clothing items. No goods are purchased for resale in Zimbabwe in Lesotho. Amai Tafara makes a stopover in Johannesburg to enable her to source for grocery items.

Amai Tafara had just finished extending the family house where they lived. Her husband was quite happy despite the fact that he had been retrenched and was not working as she gave him money for personal use. Amai Tafara made every effort to involve her husband in decision making and to make him feel useful despite contributing nothing to the household budget. She was planning to purchase at least two more stands.

Case 3: Amai Shingi

Amai Shingi, a 53-year-old married woman and mother of seven (aged 34, 31, 29, 26, 25, 19, and 15). She had five sons and two daughters aged 25 and 26. All her children are married except the youngest two. The 19-year-old and 15-year-old were in form five and form three respectively. Amai Shingi

³ Used as per classification by Muzvidziwa 1998. Coping referred to those who could balance the household budget.

was in the poverty coping category. She had lived in Harare early in her married in 1971. She was a homeowner and over the years had managed to extend the four-roomed house into a seven-roomed house. They had also managed to build a small three-roomed flat adjacent to the main house. The flat brings in rental income. Part of the building materials was sourced from South Africa. Amai Shingi represented the early pioneers into cross-border trade who had made it a career. Her husband has always supported her in her cross-border trade and had advanced her with part of the start-up cross-border capital. Her first cross-border trip was in 1979 to South Africa, Johannesburg. At that time in 1979 women formed clubs and applied for foreign currency allocations from the banks, they also carried some doilies with them for resale in South Africa. In the late 1980s she used to make trips to Botswana. She took for resale to Botswana goods such as doilies and clothing, as well as jackets. From Botswana she sourced car parts and electronic goods. In the early 1990s Amai Shingi moved to a new destination Mozambique to boost her cross-border chances. Then the trade from Mozambique was dominated by second hand clothes something that came to be known as *mazitye*. She sourced second hand clothes mainly from operations in Beira. Mazitye found their way into the several second hand shops *mupedzanhamo*. Later in the mid to late 1990s she went to Zambia as well as South Africa. They sold tinned beef in Zambia, as well as jackets sourced from South Africa. Other foodstuffs sold in Zambia included sugar and flour. Unlike in South Africa where the women carried a lot of goods for resale back in Zimbabwe, the women returned with little for resale in Zimbabwe from Zambia.

Due to low profit margins in Zambia Amai Shingi settled for South Africa as her preferred destination. She went to *Vryheid* and KwaZulu Natal on a monthly basis. Generally because of the fixed unfavourable foreign currency rates in the official markets something like SAR1 to Z\$140 many informal cross-border traders like Amai Shingi changed their money in the foreign currency parallel markets rates where a SAR1 could fetch as much as Z\$1000. Amai Shingi felt that Zimbabwean custom officials were generally too strict and sometimes conducted body searches. She thought officers should avoid becoming overzealous in their dealings with informal cross-border traders.

Amai Shingi was a devout Christian who belonged to the Salvation Army. She took care of her sick mother and father. She cared for some of her sisters' and brothers' children. She was a member of at least two credit and

savings associations. Members could borrow money but made a 10% interest on repayment of funds at the end of each month. Amai Shingi had a lot of cross-border trade experience and knew how to overcome trade obstacles. She had spent nearly half of her life working as a cross-border trader and had been the main income earner in her household yet she acknowledged that biblically the man is the head of the house she respected this religious ruling.

Case 4: Amai Tsitsi

Amai Tsitsi a 32-year-old married woman has four children three sons and a daughter, sons aged 14 were in form one, the 12 year-old in grade six, the 9-year-old in grade four and lastly a six-year-old daughter in grade one. She left schooling in form three her parents could no longer afford to pay for her education. She came to Harare from her rural home in 1987 and married the following year in 1988. Amai Tsitsi lives in rented accommodation. Her urban household consists of herself, her husband, her four children, plus a sister-in-law in grade one, a cousin aged 20, a niece aged 21 and a domestic worker aged 22. Amai Tsitsi is in the poverty coping socio-economic category. She also looked after her mother who stayed in Chiredzi and sent her goods on a regular basis. Amai Tsitsi rarely bought goods for her mother-in-law.

She started cross-border trade in 1996. At that time she was a regular visitor to South Africa. A friend initiated her into cross-border trade. For sometime Amai Tsitsi specialised in doilies only. She has since diversified her product portfolio. She started going to Zambia in 1998. Then from 1999 to 2002 she was going to Botswana. She specialised in clothing items. From 2002 she started going to Sango-Chicualacuala border post with Mozambique. Visas are not required for Sango. Many people do travel for the sake of business. The kinds of goods traded at Sango included vegetables, maize, sugar, clothing items, banana, and oranges. She generally travelled to Sango border post on Tuesdays. She brought back from Sango household and grocery items for domestic consumption. These items included grocery items, like rice, tinned foods. She was saving money to purchase a stand, which she accorded a high priority. She however, had a housing property in her name in Beitbridge from which she got rental income of Z\$10 000.

Amai Tsitsi was an active Anglican Church member. She also belonged to two rotating and credit groups. In one of these groups the

members contributed Z\$400 per month. Money could be borrowed at 15% interest rate in return. This group had a membership of 14. The second group is composed of four members. They contribute Z\$10 000 monthly which is given to one of the members. They took turns to get the money.

Amai Tsitsi confessed that her marriage was strained and her husband did not approve of her cross-border trade activities even though he brought in little in terms of household maintenance. He had no regular income. She gave her husband additional income as an allowance. However between herself and her husband each one of them did his/her own things. For her this is what had made her achieve progress and financial stability.

Lessons from Case Studies

The four cases include those who were recently married with five plus years and those who have been married for more than 30 years. Most women tend to defer to husbands or would want to act in ways that give credence to acts of deference. There is always however a minority of married women who tend to defy the old age tradition of deference as is the case of Amai Tsitsi. Crompton and Geran's (1995:26) observation of an increase in the proportion of families in which both husband and wife are income earners and 'the growing proportion of working couples in which the wife earns more than her husband' is rising in North America the process seems to be replicating itself in Third World countries such as Zimbabwe too. Glynn (2010) noted the increase in wives supporting their families something that has been on the increase in recent years both in developed and developing countries. However in Zimbabwe the rise of married women breadwinners is not necessarily a reflection of women's upward mobility and an increase in female wage earning power it might have happened by default mostly due to the negative impact of ESAP on men's jobs and the disastrous land resettlement programme embarked upon by the Government in the post 2000 era. Most of the people who were retrenched and found themselves out of employment were men. Consequently some of the married women had to strategise and find other means to raise an income for household survival.

Breadwinner role is emerging as a major survival and coping strategy of married women called upon to deal with situations of increasing economic disadvantage and impoverishment. Mutopo (2010:465) observed that 'a recent growth of female entrepreneurship in the sale of agricultural food

products from Zimbabwean smallholdings, across the border in South Africa ... has been motivated by the deepening economic, social and political problems in the country'. Cross-border trade in food by women some of them are married is seen as a strategy to deal with economic disadvantage and impoverishment. In three of the four cases noted above the married women are in the poverty coping category. Cross-border activities had allowed them to stay afloat in the midst of the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe.

The four cases presented in this article do show how in the context of economic challenges married women had moved from the traditional setup of the dominance of domestic wifely household roles to that of economic success, entrepreneurship and breadwinner status. All the women appear to be of humble beginnings uninitiated in the world of business entrepreneurship yet the picture that emerges as they began to engage in survival economic modes through cross-border trading activities is that of well school shrewd entrepreneurs who are able to adjust and take advantage of business opportunities in the environment. The above cases reflect on the experiences of women on the move. The story being told of Zimbabwean cross-border married women breadwinners is replicated in the case of narratives of three Chinese women cited by Newendorp (2010) in a special issue of *International Migration*. Just like in the Zimbabwean cases three Chinese married women who had migrated from mainland China to Hong Kong and decided to engage in wage labour reveal a story of challenges, family tensions, coping with split families, hard work, sacrifice, success and salvation. Newendorp (2010:88) citing Siufung one of the three married women in the study noted that 'Siufung's discussion of her work life was animated; she spoke about her long working hours, the difficulties she had undergone to get to her present position of responsibility, and the sense of accomplishment'. For a married woman being a breadwinner is no easy walk and yet it is a highly potentially rewarding and fulfilling experience. This is to a large extent the same experience of the four women in this article. They were happy to be doing what they had done and were determined to succeed and appeared to be succeeding. Newendorp (2010:96) concluded by noting that the narratives of the three Chinese women immigrants in Hong Kong 'seem to support well-documented ethnographic accounts of the advantages that women may experience in power relationships ... through processes of migration that introduce women to new value systems, wage-earning possibilities and so on'.

One key area of interest that has strong implications in terms of shared burdens is related to women's housework workload as they find themselves increasingly engaged in activities outside the home in order to put food on the table for their households. None of the four married women breadwinners expected their men to take up housework. As one of the women noted '*hazviiti kuti baba vaite basa remumba*' (it's unheard of for a husband to do household work). Being a bread winner did not bring relief in terms of housework. It is possible that some husbands do a great deal of housework but their wives would not acknowledge this in public as this would make them appear to be the bad wife. Thebauld (2010:334) observed that 'across diverse national contexts the role of a man, as a breadwinner in the family is a central aspect of hegemonic masculinity'. Thebauld (2010:349) further noted that 'the hegemonic gender expectation that men should be breadwinners provides a fruitful way of understanding how gender expectations play themselves out in implicit spousal exchanges between housework and income'. Thebauld (2010:330) pointed out from the outset that there is an abundance of literature 'that demonstrates that bargaining over the division of labour in the household is not typically characterised by a one-to-one exchange between income and household work'. In fact she noted that in some instances in a few cases where men are dependent on wives they did far much less housework than they would normal do. All the women in my sample acknowledged that *baba ndivo musoro wemba* (the man/husband is the head of the household). A husband doing housework would be a contradiction hence the attempt by the married women breadwinners to resolve this by not demanding or expecting their husbands to do housework. In the process the women end up carrying a multiplicity of burdens.

Household headship is closely linked to issues related to decision making. Breadwinner status did not necessarily confirm headship on the women. This is something noted by Calvalho (1998:190) who observed that 'in many cases women's growing centrality in contributing to and managing the household budget did not mean an improvement in social status'. Women are caught up in a double bind. As good wives they must be seen to defer to their financially dependent husbands. Amai Tendai, Amai Tafara and Amai Shingi involved their husbands in decisions concerning investment, cross-border trade and other family and social related aspects of their lives. Amai Tsitsi is an interesting case she did not invest nor make joint decisions with her husband. Reasons for this were not pursued though she stressed that it

was this independent pursuit of goals that had let her to success. Increasingly more women might opt for this type of independence in household management. This might be an indication of weakening of traditional holds on wives.

Amai Tendai, Amai Tafara and Amai Shingi presented a traditionalist outlook of life where a wife is expected to be subservient to her husband. They even go to great pains to try to shield their husbands from the pain of lack of financial resources by giving them a financial allowance to spend as they like. The married women in the study shielded their husbands from public scrutiny. They did not fault their husbands for failing to support the family financially. For them what was important was that a family/household had *baba* (father). This brought about respectability and stability on the part of children. The women's behaviour in my study is similar to that observed by Mundy (2012). Mundy (2012:5) observed that 'married women ... go to great lengths to praise their stay-at-home husbands for what they do, to suggest that identity can attach to resources other than salary'.

While the study did not explore in detail issues related to gender violence there are glimpses of possibilities in this direction as reflected in the reported tensions in Amai Tsitsi's household. While Amai Tsitsi did not hint on spousal violence this is an area where some men when they feel inadequate and jealous about their wives' successes in business and personal life end up resorting to violence to assert their manhood. However while living with a retrenched, pensioned and non-working husband is potentially stressful all the women valued their marriages. They were determined to save their marriages firstly by investing their energies in productive work that put food on the table and secondly by privileging the husband's household headship status. It appears that outside the traditional formal sector jobs men found the going tough and men were not innovative enough to succeed financially compared to their wives.

Power and the Gendered Nature of Social Relations

The married woman breadwinner status did not result in apparent shifts in marital power relations for the women in the study. None of the women in the study talked about gender equality. Despite all the evidence that the four women cases were highly successful economically this did not translate into gender equality in the home. It looked like shifts in power relations taking

place in the rest of society did not reach out to influence the domestic sphere. While the husband's status increasingly became shake women are at pains to present an image of subservience. They place less demands on their househusbands, unemployed and/or husbands earning less income. As noted in Muzvidziwa (2001:174) 'rather than producing autonomy among married women, the breadwinner status could be seen as representing an intensification of the condition of powerless and the state of female subordination'. However this is no longer a universal condition as there are women like Amai Tsitsi who are beginning to challenge patriarchy albeit with limited success. The increase in married women breadwinners points to a bright future as exemplified by studies by Terregrosa (2011) where the reverse gender is taking shape in countries like the United States where women are beginning to outshine men in a number of areas such as education and in the economy. While shifts in power relations might appear slow and rather insignificant Mutopo (2010) observed that there was clear evidence of real change in husband–wife relations within households where women brought in an income settling for joint decisions.

Kulik's (2011:427) observation that 'the question of gender equality in the household remains complex' is true for the married women bread winners in my study. Kulik (2011:427) further notes that 'although women's participation in the economic domain has increased men's involvement in caring for children and in maintaining the household has not increased to the same extent'. None of the women in the study acknowledged the husband's contribution in terms of childcare and housework roles. Drago, Black and Wooden (2004) note that the rise of the married woman breadwinner is there for all to see but in some instances it is temporary though in other situations the breadwinner status is much more enduring. This has had varying impacts on relations between couples. While improved gender equity in the home and market is not that noticeable there is evidence that in some instances married women breadwinner status has produced positive results by promoting gender equity at the domestic level (Drago, Black & Wooden). However, there is the observation that gender role reversal is rare and that men's commitment to an ideology of equity /equality does not imply taking over traditional female roles like housework. This is also a trend observed in the study reported in this article.

The rise of married women breadwinners as reflected by the cases in this article has a bearing on household power dynamics. It cannot continue

forever being business as usual. Amai Tsitsi is a case indicating possible future trends. As Mundy (2012:4/5) note in the face of women's rising power and changing expectations, many men experience an existential crisis. When a woman takes on the role of primary breadwinner, it takes away an essential part of many men's identity: that of providerSo when you take that away, men have nowhere to turn for guidance. There is no map through the wilderness.

A process of renegotiation of gender roles including the male provider identity seems to be taking place for the married women breadwinners in my study.

Scott *et al.* (2012) noted the successes of Avon in South Africa which promotes entrepreneurship in order to assist women to escape from poverty. The Avon study calls upon the adoption of pragmatic feminism that puts emphasis on what works in redressing gender inequities and that in some instances the capitalist condition through entrepreneurship can be mobilised to bring about gender equality. Improving the financial status of women like the case of women breadwinners reported in this article can be a liberating influence contributing to improved gender relations. Among the Avon beneficiary married women 46% were primary breadwinners yet only 10% of them considered themselves to be heads of households. In the light of structural violence women's deference and seeming obedience might be another strategy to survive. Issues raised in the Avon study by Scott *et al.* (2012) reflect closely on what the cases in the study reported in this article concerning married women breadwinners.

Hamber (2010) drawing on examples from South Africa observed that structural changes and the struggle for gender justice must continue. While gender inequalities persist there is all the indication that the system has been disrupted and this could lead to positive outcomes in the long run. The situation of married women breadwinners presents us with an opportunity to see what works and areas that need improvement. As Hamber (2012:86) observed there is a need to harness 'all opportunities for further change and in so doing encourage a sustainable positive peace that allows both men and women to reach their full social, economic and political potential'. There should be less focus on negative and violent masculinities but more on what leads to greater participation in the economy by women especially married women.

The Notion of Entanglement, Empowered Women or Disempowered Women

Entanglement is a quantum physics concept that describes the way particles of matter interact with each other. They exhibit a high degree of interconnectedness. Particles are entangled with each other in pairs and retain some degree of connectedness or correlation. Entanglement retains elements of unpredictability of phenomenon. Objects are always described with reference to each other. Another key notion in entanglement is the notion of multiple viewpoints as a result of differing interpretations. There is always what one might call a simultaneous presence. Entanglement also refers to a complicated, compromising, confused relationship or situation. It is about involvement and interaction. This concept is very useful in our quest to understand the complex nature of the lives of married breadwinners. Breadwinner status as exemplified by the lives of the four married women presented in this article represents in a way Sarah Nuttall's (2009) notion of entanglement. Nuttall explores the notion of entanglement in her book through readings of literature, new media and forms of paintings. She examines issues relating to sameness and difference in ways that illuminate on post-apartheid life worlds in South Africa. Nuttall seeks to explore the contradictory mixture of issues like innovation and inertia, loss, violence and xenophobia and the rise of the new South Africa premised on a new set of democratic progressive values. Nuttall's approach is very useful in our quest to understand the lived experiences of the married women breadwinners.

Rao (2012:28) points out that 'togetherness, more than autonomy or independence, is central to conjugal relations. Men and women exercise agency in shaping mutual relationships involving personal feelings and emotions'. Entanglement should enable us to view marital relations as far much more than simple issues of domination and subordination. It therefore makes sense when the four women privilege togetherness as opposed to equity issues in marriage. Deeply embedded in the psyche of married women is the desirability of marriage. This is why married women breadwinners in the study tried hard to ensure that their breadwinner status did not challenge the perceived headship of husbands. In discussing issues of power and autonomy it might be useful to go beyond tangibles such as income and breadwinner status to focus on intangibles such as mutuality, love and companionship.

The notion of entanglement is also seen in the way the women re-

acted to patriarchal forces. The married women breadwinners were highly religious. They tended to back up their deference to their husbands by citing biblical exhortations that recognize the man as the head of the household. They observed though that while St Paul taught that wives must obey their husbands by the same token husbands were to love their wives. Generally the women seem to be going along with church teaching that put an emphasis on male headship. By appearing to be colluding in their own oppression the women were much more effective in undermining the traditional set up of male headship. By appearing to be going along with patriarchy the women were much more effective in negotiating a stake in decisions affecting the household. The position of none or minimally contributing husbands would become increasingly untenable and was likely to result in multiple possibilities like the case of Amai Tsitsi's or other compromises and possibilities were likely to emerge.

The idea of entanglement with confusing contradicting tendencies co-existing best describes the lives of the four married women breadwinners described in this article. Breadwinner status is both empowering and disempowering. This is something noted by Drago Black and Wooden (2004) who noted the lack of role reversal despite the rise of married women as breadwinners but at the same time note the occurrence of profound changes in families which include gender equity. A similar situation is observed by Mutopo (2010) who noted that while things might appear the same real changes are happening in households in terms of shared decision making and the centrality of women traders' contributions to the household budget. Thebaud, (2010) also observed that bargaining of roles at the domestic levels has resulted in minimal shifts despite of the rise of married women as breadwinners. The notion of entanglement helps us to understand the situation of married women breadwinners in the context of the socio-cultural and economic specificities of women. Married woman breadwinner status can lead to a sense of loss, confusion and uncomfortable feelings in the wife. This is what Chesley (2011) observed in the USA. Chesley (2011:655) noted that 'Melissa whose husband Richard stayed at home for a year after a layoff, describes how she was eventually uncomfortable having her husband at home, despite being enthusiastic initially, because of her growing feeling that he should be working'. In other words married breadwinner status can be both a source of empowerment as well as a source of disempowerment for wives.

Conclusion

The issues raised in this article help to clarify notions of the breadwinner status of married women. The rise of married women who are primary or sole income earners for their households following the adoption of ESAP as official policy in 1991 and the economic meltdown following the 2000 land invasions in Zimbabwe is a reality. Married women breadwinners do exist they are there and signs are that they are on the increase and in some sectors like cross-border trade are dominant and are able to contribute meaningfully to household maintenance. The breadwinner status has added to the triple roles of women instead of diminishing their household responsibilities. What is clear from the reported case studies is that shifts that have resulted in an increasing number of married women taking up the breadwinner role have not produced similar shifts in terms of shared responsibilities at the domestic household level. All the married women in the study continue to perform the role of housework as their primary role despite assuming breadwinner status. The paradox is that the married women breadwinners continue to justify the gendered household level division of labour on the basis of both tradition and religion. The renegotiation of roles at the domestic level is yet to occur though one can hypothesise that it is only a matter of time before this begins to happen. In the meantime there is evidence that shows that gender relations are deeply rooted in patriarchy and are supported by an ideology that continues to privilege men as compared to their wives.

The emergent of independent married women breadwinners is a far much more complex process which embraces equality notions as well as the continued subordination of women at the domestic and public domains. Nuttall's notion of entanglement characterised by paradox and embracing both sameness and difference, order and confusion helps to explain the situation of married women breadwinners. An area that is likely to take centre stage in future discussions of married women breadwinners is in relation of issues of power and control at the household level. The impression one gets from the discussions in the article is that this remains an uncontested area. There is evidence that some women are beginning to publicly subvert male authority albeit with some success. For the majority of women they continue to subvert the patriarchal forces by pretending to be going along with the system when their actions point otherwise. More studies need to be done in the area of women breadwinners. This will contribute to a better

understanding of the impact in the long term of breadwinner wives and secondary breadwinner or house husbands.

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