

Fathering and Gender Transformation in Zimbabwean Transnational Families

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Abstract: Migration research in Southern Africa has paid little attention to migrant men's involvement in the family, including their emotional and cognitive work, as well as associated gender transformations. Based on a qualitative study of six Zimbabwean migrant fathers in Johannesburg and three non-migrant women in Zimbabwe, this article argues that transnational migration at once presents opportunities for and obstacles to the reconstitution of gender-normative forms of parental involvement in migrant families. The analysis of the narratives of migrant men and their spouses demonstrates that, although maternal and paternal roles may become considerably indistinct in the context of transnational separations, non-migrant women may emphasize gender-normative expectations in their negotiations with distant fathers when faced with huge responsibilities at home. Such negotiations tend to reinforce gender-normative parenting in transnational split families.

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1. Introduction

Whereas considerable literature exists on parental involvement in non-migration settings in Southern Africa (RICHTER & MORREL, 2006), fathering practices and beliefs of migrant men in the region have received scant attention. Most research into parental involvement in non-migration settings in Southern Africa seeks to illuminate the complexities around fathers' absence, which is generally understood as a crisis, especially in South Africa (MADHAVAN & ROY, 2012; PADI, NDUNA, KHUNOU & KHOLOPANE, 2014). This research suggests that, while fatherhood—cultural images of what it means to be a father—does impact

on what fathers actually do in the family, the practice of fathering is equally shaped by the economic context within which it unfolds. Nonetheless, the existing literature does not sufficiently demonstrate how the experience of cross-border economic migration might shape migrant men's parental involvement. [1]

What is clear, however, is that in South Africa—the main migrant-receiving country in the region—restriction-oriented migration policies and legal discrimination in the labor market tend to discourage co-residential living arrangements among families of lowly skilled migrants (DODSON, 2000; PALMARY & LANDAU, 2011). Therefore, while cross-border migration provides opportunities for migrant men to fulfil the traditional breadwinner role in the family, it may simultaneously limit their participation in those nurturing roles which require regular contact. However, it is possible that the periods of absence from home, away from the spouse and children may offer migrant men in South Africa some time to reflect on their paternal involvement in the family. This view finds support in the international literature. For example, in a study of immigrant fathers to Canada and Israel, Dorit ROER-STRIER, Roni STRIER, David ESTE, Rena SHIMONI and Dawne CLARK (2005) demonstrate that transnational migration may present opportunities for fathers to contemplate and reassess their contribution to family life. Despite this view, existing research conducted in the Southern African region has yet to consider adequately how distant fathers reflect on and mitigate the negative economic and socio-cultural implications of their prolonged absence. Similarly, the impacts of migrant men's reflexive practices on gender relations in the family are largely under-explored. [2]

These limitations are not unique to migration research in Southern Africa. Whereas studies conducted in the Global North to understand how parental involvement and gender relations are transformed after migration are numerous (see for example, MADIANOU, 2012; MCKENZIE & MENJÍVAR, 2011; PARREÑAS, 2005, 2008; ZONTINI, 2010), they tend to under-privilege migrant fathers in the analysis of family processes (KILKEY, PLOMIEN & PERRONS, 2013). There is, thus, a knowledge gap in the regional and international literature on fathering and gender transformations in the context of cross-border migration. [3]

In response to this gap in research, this article interrogates fathering practices in Zimbabwean transnational co-resident and split families with the view of illuminating subtle transformations in gender relations. It argues that transnational migration of men at once presents opportunities and obstacles for the reconstitution of gender-normative forms of parental involvement in migrant families. The article draws on my doctoral study, which explored how Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg construct and sustain notions of family and belonging. Zimbabweans are one of the most itinerant and visible migrant groups in Southern Africa. After the introduction, the article proceeds as follows: a literature review section considers relevant aspects of fatherhood and father-involvement in non-migration and transnational settings. The next two sections deal with methods and findings. The findings section presents narratives of six migrant men in Johannesburg and three non-migrant women in Zimbabwe. The

conclusion highlights the relational nature of fathering and the subtle changes that occur in transnational split families. [4]

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fatherhood and father-involvement

For many decades, fathering in non-migrant two-parent families has been the subject of multi-disciplinary research (LAMB, 2000; MARSIGLIO, AMATO, DAY & LAMB, 2000; TIEDJE & DARLING-FISHER, 1996). Today, scholarly interest in fatherhood—understood as cultural images of men's fathering role—remains high (PADI et al., 2014; YEUNG, 2013). According to John GILLIS (2000), sustained scholarly interest in paternal involvement can be attributed to the fact that fathering has always been a problematic role. The sight of father-less and father-away families feeds into a popular narrative of abandonment and inadequacy—a pessimistic view of fathering which emphasizes men's failure to meet the material and emotional needs of children (GILLIS, 2000). In Southern Africa, interest in researching fatherhood among African families is fueled by the phenomenon of father absence, which is "embedded in socio-economic and political contexts" in the countries of the region (PADI et al., 2014, p.44). In both colonial and post-colonial times, African men have generally sustained a tenuous relationship with the labor market. As migrant workers, they have had to endure a persistently insecure urban lifestyle. Consequently, as a way of coping with urban insecurities, African men lived apart from spouse and children for prolonged periods of time, except for intermittent home visits. One can thus argue that African men's fathering roles, including breadwinning, were negatively affected by structural limitations beyond their control (MADHAVAN & ROY, 2012). [5]

Apart from the perceived failures of fathers, continued scholarly interest in this area can be attributed to the complexity of the related notions of fatherhood, father absence, masculinity and paternal involvement. One notion of paternal involvement—that of the so-called "new father"—is widely discussed in the literature. In addition to breadwinning (which is widely considered men's primary family role), the "new father" is expected to do his fair share of housekeeping duties, nurturing and caregiving (McGILL, 2014). While the image of the involved father does have an egalitarian appeal, at least, in terms of parental involvement, what it means to be a responsible father tends to vary with time and place (LAMB, 2000). Although the idea of the "new father" draws on Western norms and is widely covered in the literature, it has no universal appeal, since various societies hold their own ideals of paternal involvement against which they evaluate fathering practices. For example, Sangeetha MADHAVAN and Kevin ROY (2012) observe that some communities in the northern parts of South Africa de-emphasize co-residence, nurturing and material provision as key markers of positive fathering, and devise different ways of appreciating fathers. Thus, even when a father is ill-prepared to assume fathering roles, acceptance of paternal responsibility is regarded as a marker of good fathering. [6]

By the same token, no one universal way of appreciating father-involvement exists. Some researchers theorize that engagement, accessibility and responsibility are key indicators of father-involvement (LAMB, 2000). Still, standardizing and operationalizing these concepts across studies remain highly impossible. Other scholars posit that responsivity—defined as the extent to which fathers recognize and attend to the needs of their children and spouses—is a more appropriate indicator of father-involvement (MATTA & KNUDSON-MARTIN, 2006). Responsivity captures fathers' sensitivity and attention to the emotional needs of other family members; housekeeping, logistical and child care tasks; and issues of authority within the couple relationship (ibid.). The construct of responsivity is relevant to the current article, as it relates to both fathers' cognitive involvement and actual paternal acts. [7]

By considering scholarly concern with fatherhood and fathering, this section has reviewed relevant concepts to explore paternal involvement in transnational families. The following section reviews relevant research on parenting in the context of transnational migration. It also examines literature on gender transformations in transnational families. [8]

2.2 Parenting and gender transformation in transnational families

Interest in the behaviors and perceptions of parents in transnational families is increasing (HOANG & YEOH, 2011; PARREÑAS, 2008; ROER-STRIER et al., 2005), despite the abundance of literature on parenting and fatherhood (DREBY, 2006; LAMB, 2000). This continued interest in migration and parenting can be attributed to the fact that migration researchers view transnational migration—defined as a pattern of international migration in which migrants sustain social connections with people in their country of origin after relocation (LEVITT, 2001)—as an appropriate context for far-reaching gender transformations. Brenda YEOH, Shirlena HUANG and Theodora LAM (2005) and many others (e.g., COE, 2011) claim that after migration, members of transnational families are forced to adjust their practical living arrangements as well as their expectations of family life. Furthermore, as noted earlier, restriction-oriented migration policies are known to force migrants to live apart from non-migrant spouse and children for prolonged durations. As a result, researchers anticipate that prolonged separations between members of transnational split families potentially stimulate fascinating negotiations and transformations in family roles as well as beliefs about what constitute family (HOANG & YEOH, 2011). Yet transnational separations may negatively disrupt affective ties between members of the transnational families, compounding emotional distress in the family (COE, 2011). [9]

Most scholars regard information and communications technologies (ICTs) as tools with which migrants can relieve post-migration emotional vulnerability. Migrants can take advantage of ICTs to communicate in ways that address children's feelings of insecurity, grief, ambivalence and other emotional needs created by migration (MADIANOU, 2012). Thus, with ICTs, there is huge potential for migrants to perform parental roles from a distance (YEOH et al., 2005). But, as Rachel S. PARREÑAS (2005) observed, access to ICTs is contingent upon

the migrant's economic and working conditions, gender and rural-urban variations in both the receiving and sending country. This implies that non-elite migrants—those lowly skilled movers whose incorporation in the labor market is, by and large, marginal—may struggle to communicate with non-migrant family members, and fail to address the emotional needs in the family (YEOH et al., 2005). Therefore, despite the existence of ICTs, transnational split families have to negotiate ongoing tensions between, for example, pursuing material provision through migration and remittances, on the one hand, and fulfilling emotional needs of family members at home, on the other. Consequently, researchers anticipate that in the context of competing demands, role-making and decisioning in transnational families may spawn innovations in the family's gendered practices (HOANG & YEOH, 2011). [10]

Against this backdrop, interrogating paternal involvement in migrant families is necessary to illuminate some of the transformations in how couples negotiate and perform roles in migrant families. Yet studies of transnational fatherhood are few and far between (ROER-STRIER et al., 2005). Largely due to the influence of feminist concerns, the research on parental involvement in migration settings has over-prioritized distant mothers at the expense of migrant men (KILKEY et al., 2013). According to Rachel S. PARREÑAS (2004), paternal involvement is under-researched, because society tends to normalize the migration of fathers. Unlike mothers from whom family members expect emotional security and communication through face-to-face interactions, fathers could fulfill their breadwinning obligations through migration, without considerable threats to their notions of self. However, women's access to an income through migration will likely disrupt both women's gender-normative mothering role and their notions of self. [11]

What is more, women's economic migration is believed to lead to qualitative changes in relations with other family members. Some studies have documented evidence of positive transformations in the conventional division of labor between spouses who are migrants. Filio DEGNI, Seppo PÖNTINEN, and Mölsä MULKI's (2006) study of Somali families in Finland where both husband and wife were unemployed recipients of unemployment and social security benefits documented interesting shifts in parental roles. In addition to their marginal participation in the labor market in Finland, Somali families had no access to extended family support systems. Thus, whereas this was the case in Somalia, Somali migrant men were no longer breadwinners. Unemployment, coupled with the absence of support from extended family members, forced Somali men to increase their involvement in parental caring roles, including participation in child birth, cooking and cleaning. Moreover, Somali families developed more egalitarian forms of decision-making. [12]

PASURA's (2010) case study of Zimbabwean co-resident families in the United Kingdom where women, rather than men, were themselves primary migrants and the main breadwinners is another case in point. In contradistinction to their husbands, these women moved up economically due to a new-found access to a secure residence and a steady income. Subsequently, these migrant women

managed to pass some or most of the traditional feminine housekeeping duties on to men. And yet PASURA also notes that husbands in this situation did not simply acquiesce; some explained away such transformations as largely impermanent—something bound to be reversed upon return to Zimbabwe. Others fiercely resisted the changes, in some cases leading to the dissolution of marital bonds (*ibid.*). Thus, as Lan HOANG and Brenda YEOH (2011) argue, instances of gender role reversals among transnational families may well be transient phenomena. [13]

Congruent changes in spousal involvement were observed among transnational split-families where women migrated while men remained behind with children. For instance, HOANG and YEOH's (2011) research of Vietnamese transnational mother-away families demonstrates that when women migrate abroad to assume breadwinning roles at home, their non-migrant husbands adjusted their livelihood strategies to accommodate the demands of raising children in the family. HOANG and YEOH further observe that in the Vietnamese female migration context, notions of fatherhood as well as practices of father-involvement were being reworked. DEGNI et al. (2006), PASURA (2010) and HOANG and YEOH (2011) argue persuasively that women's migration can potentially bring about a "reconstitution of gender and mothering" (PARREÑAS, 2008, p.1058). [14]

So, considerable clarity exists as to how shifts in gender relations and parental involvement in the context of transnational mothering may unfold. In contrast, the nature and extent of transnational fathering and associated transformations in parental involvement and gender relations remain largely unclear. Existing interpretations of transnational fathering are severely limited, as they tend to incline toward a deficit view of fathering or the so-called narrative of abandonment (see ROER-STRIER et al., 2005). That is to say, they tend to find fault in migrant fathers' parental involvement. For instance, PARREÑAS' (2008) research into non-migrant members of Filipino transnational families demonstrates that, unlike the transnational migration of women, the departure of migrant men tends to reinforce gender-ideological norms, because men maintain authoritarian forms of paternal involvement. Distant fathers, argues PARREÑAS, may fare well in aspects of breadwinning but not in the provision of emotional intimacy and security. Still, one is led to ask: Can distant fathering create a favorable setting for revising and reworking gendered parental practices in other contexts? Given the paucity of research on transnational fathering, a literature review alone is inadequate to fully address these issues. Hence this study intends to illuminate these issues using qualitative methods. [15]

3. Methodology and Methods

The study used a qualitative interpretivist design (GUBA & LINCOLN, 1994) and employed a combination of ethnographic methods, including participant observation and interviews, in the context of multisite fieldwork in Johannesburg and Zimbabwe. The participants whose narratives are analyzed in this article were purposively selected after a prolonged period of observation at two congregations of the Forward in Faith Mission International—a transnational

religious formation that has its origins in Zimbabwe (MAXWELL, 2006). The two congregations (City Christian Centre Assembly and Berea Assembly) are based in Johannesburg's inner city, where the majority of Zimbabweans live and work (MAKINA, 2010), and have a large Zimbabwean following. During participant observation, interviews (which I consider informal) were used largely to enhance participation. They took the form of spontaneous conversations between the congregants and me, both on a one-on-one basis and in small groups. The questions which I posed were largely not pre-set; they flowed from naturally occurring talk. Since this article draws mainly on the narratives of six migrant men and three spouses in Zimbabwe, it is not relevant to provide a detailed description of observation methods here (see CHERENI, 2014, for a more comprehensive discussion of methodology). [16]

Nonetheless, it is perhaps useful to say something about the sampling approach used during fieldwork. All migrants were purposively selected for interviews based on the following criteria: they were regular migrants with ties in South Africa and Zimbabwe; they had resided in South Africa for at least two years prior to fieldwork; and they represented legal categories of migrants and various family forms such as co-resident families and split-families. Six migrant men and two women in Johannesburg were included in the study. The narratives of the six migrant men are considered in this article. Only two of them (Mashumba,¹ 34, and Tembo, 30) were living with spouse and children in Johannesburg at the time of fieldwork. The other four men were distant fathers whose families lived in Zimbabwe. Unlike Mashumba and Tembo, who both had valid work permits, all the distant fathers were asylum seekers and had maintained this status for many years prior to fieldwork. Three of the four distant fathers, namely, Chizivi (50), Majuru (48) and Siwela (38) allowed me to interview their spouses in Zimbabwe. The names of these women take after their husbands' names: Mai Chizivi (41), Mai Majuru (38), and Mai Siwela (37). Mai Chizivi and Mai Siwela were based in an urban area and peri-urban area respectively. In contrast, Mai Majuru lived in a rural area, where subsistence farming was the main livelihood activity. Thus, apart from the eight migrants interviewed in Johannesburg, three migrant spouses who had remained in Zimbabwe were included, since gender roles in transnational families are believed to be relational (McKENZIE & MENJÍVAR, 2011). [17]

Since the research explored Zimbabwean migrants' notions of family and belonging and how these concepts were sustained in practice, the interviews used to generate data with selected participants incorporated elements of both the "conceptual interview" and the "narrative interview" (KVALE, 2007). Whereas the conceptual interview helps the researcher to clarify participants' perspectives of concepts, the narrative interview focuses on their stories. During the interview, the researcher deliberately elicits such stories or they emerge spontaneously during conversations. Both the conceptual interview and the narrative interview are variations of what KVALE described as in-depth, semi-structured, life world interviews. Such interviews are flexible and, therefore, they allow participants to

1 All names are anonymized.

build their own life narratives during conversations with the researcher (WEISS, 2006). [18]

Each interview followed a unique course. In other words, conversations which occurred between a participant and me did not follow a uniform question-and-answer pattern. For example, some interviewees gave information about their employment history ahead of family history. For some it was *vice versa*. Interviews also varied since I used different tactics of questioning consisting of timely use of open-ended questions, minimal verbal and non-verbal responses, probing, encouragement, commenting and seeking clarification, and reflexive summaries depending on the particular talk. I deliberately attempted to make all interviews as casual as possible by employing largely non-directive techniques of questioning which give the participant ample room to frame personal narratives. On average, the interviews took approximately three hours to complete. Participants preferred to discuss the themes under investigation in two or three separate interviews. Participants selected venues such as coffee shops, fast food outlets, restaurants, church premises and home settings. Similarly, they each had room to use either Shona or English or a mix of both languages. Collection of interview data followed the principle of data saturation, that is, recruitment of participants stopped when interviewing more respondents ceased to generate new insights and understanding about the research question. [19]

Two phases of analysis of data that were generated through observation and interview methods can be identified as in-the-field analysis and after-the-field analysis (HAMMERSLEY & ATKINSON, 1995). These phases were not exclusive to each other. The former denotes activities of data analysis that were accomplished during data collection. After the completion of each interview, I embarked on preliminary analysis which, among other things, involved transcribing and "listening to the interview to get a sense of the whole" (HYCNER, 1985, p.281). [20]

After-the-field analysis involved the use of field notes, my reflections during fieldwork, relevant primary and secondary documents, and interview transcripts. Transcription and translation were important stages of after-the-field analysis (OLIVER, SEROVICH & MASON, 2005). Practices of transcription followed in this study can be said to lie somewhere between two modes namely; naturalism and denaturalism. Overall, transcription was generally closer to the former, which means that every utterance is transcribed as much as possible. When the latter method is followed, idiosyncratic elements of speech such as stutters, pauses, and involuntary vocalizations are removed (*ibid.*). Transcription enabled me to begin to form a sense of the whole, that is, the entire narrative of the participant or even an event. After transcription, those interviews conducted in Shona were translated to English to enable further analysis. [21]

Content analysis was used to generate themes from interview data and to enable interpretation (HSIEH & SHANNON, 2005). While several content analysis techniques exist, thematic content analysis was adopted because it is appropriately designed address the themes in a text (FRANZOSI, 2004). In

thematic content analysis, extraction of meaning from a text depends largely on the richness of a coding scheme, that is, a set of coding categories to be applied to the text. In this study, the design of the coding scheme benefited from the deductive approach (FINFGELD-CONNETT, 2013). This means that theoretical specifications, such as how belonging and family were defined prior to fieldwork, provided a starting point in the process developing a coding template. [22]

The process of coding entailed first, delineating meaning in a word, a phrase, and a quotation. Second, it involved assigning the same code to other words, phrases or quotes with the same or close meaning. These codes were used to build themes which were relevant to answer the research questions. Computer-based software (ATLAS.ti) was used to segment text and to assign codes (FRIESE, 2012). As expected, initial codes excluded many important segments of the text, prompting me to update the coding template. Relevant codes were then combined to build categories and themes such as fathering and fatherhood, which are discussed in subsequent sections. [23]

4. Results

4.1 Non-migrant women's parental involvement and their expectations of distant fathers

Non-migrant women's narratives corroborate the idea that familial roles and strategies as well as expectations of family life are reconfigured after migration (COE, 2011; HOANG & YEOH, 2011). For example, Mai Chizivi (41), a mother of three daughters and a grandmother to two children, described how she guided and disciplined her children during the absence of her husband as follows: "You become two in one."² And she went on to elaborate:

"I intervene as their mother but also as the father. If one of my daughters lacks discipline I have to sit down with her and talk to her effectively, bearing in mind that I am assuming the place of both mother and father." [24]

Mai Chizivi's remark reflects the idea that paternal and maternal involvements are distinct roles. In a sense, Mai Chizivi implies that unlike the time before Chizivi (her husband) relocated to South Africa, she had had to assume paternal roles. This description of her familial involvement after the departure of Chizivi echoes the views of non-migrant women in Honduran father-away families who felt that their parental responsibility doubled-up after migration (McKENZIE & MENJÍVAR, 2011). Yet the fact that Mai Chizivi doubled up parental involvement after Chizivi's departure is at variance with the deficit model—a view of fathering that emphasizes how little men *actually* contribute to family life, even before they migrate (ROER-STRIER et al., 2005). This perhaps implies that men's contributions to the family are less appreciated in research. [25]

2 Mai Chizivi, a mother of three daughters only, meant doubling up as mother and father.

Conversely, Mai Chizivi's perceptions of a heightened involvement underscores the view that in poor families marginal access to remittances compounds labor shortages, prompting an intensive involvement on the part of non-migrant women. In fact, non-migrant women mention a lack of additional sources of household income, including remittances, when explaining their involvement. Consider what Mai Majuru (38), a non-migrant mother and subsistence farmer who lived with her two daughters and one son in the rural part of Midlands Province, said about her involvement after migration: "I was left to take care of the family but I could only farm enough to eat" Mai Majuru seems to imply that when Majuru relocated to South Africa she had to assume the role of primary material provider by default in a rural context where subsistence agriculture was the dominant livelihood activity. But, as Mai Majuru elaborated, even after a good harvest, subsistence farming remains an insufficient source of income for addressing financial needs at home. Due to successive intra-seasonal droughts and widespread famine in Zimbabwe after 2000, the year in which the controversial Fast Track Land Reform commenced (KINSEY, 2010), Mai Majuru quickly learnt to live by her wits. In 2009, she traveled to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, and bought clothes, which she sold back in her village in Midlands Province. As a marketing strategy, Mai Majuru allowed her customers to pay in cash or grain or small livestock, as shown in the following quote:

"I started off with only 60 USD [United States Dollars]. I sold my wares and went back to get more ... In total I generated USD 260 in cash, but some paid in kind. Some paid chicken for cloths, some ground nuts and round nuts ... I stocked up these things in case we lack food ... I also used part of the profits to have the huts re-thatched. I used the remainder to buy maize seed for the up-coming planting season." [26]

The above quote captures Mai Majuru's enterprising efforts as she struggled to fulfill the breadwinning role during her husband's absence. Mai Chizivi, who lived in Chiredzi—a small town located approximately 400 km south of Harare—with her two daughters and a grandson, similarly recounted the difficulties of dealing with material deprivation during her husband's long absence from home. She reminisced that,

"Last year I tried to buy and sell fish but power blackouts hindered the business. I would bring the fish from Harare and refrigerate them ... then power switches out until midnight. The fish get bad and you can't sell them." [27]

The narratives of both Mai Chizivi and Mai Majuru capture the strategies these women adopted when faced with the prospect of meeting their families' material needs with little support from the migrant men and extended family members. Such narratives hint at the limits of African extended families as a source of paternal support during the absence of the father. They strengthen the view that transnational split-families operate as nuclear households in terms of economic decision-making and the distribution of parental responsibility—an observation PARREÑAS (2008) also made in the context of Filipino transnational families. [28]

One might therefore deduce that the absence of men in two-parent split-families may reorient women toward an intensive form of mothering—that is, a heightened and persistent involvement in parenting and housekeeping roles. However, based on my experiences of living and doing research in Zimbabwe, I do not see the livelihood strategies these non-migrant women adopted in order to provide for their families as unusual. In fact, during fieldwork in Zimbabwe, I learnt that non-governmental organizations such as Christian Care and Care International³ were encouraging women in two-parent non-migrant families to engage in similar projects. Then, one is made to ask why women were complaining about their involvement during migrant men's absence. It would appear that, unlike the Honduran non-migrant women who participated in Sean McKENZIE and Cecelia MENJÍVAR's (2011) study, the Zimbabwean women studied here were troubled by the prospect of assuming overall parental responsibility in the absence of men, and not necessarily work overload. Non-migrant women's views regarding the discipline and moral guidance of children reinforce this view. Mai Chizivi's account tellingly exemplifies this point: although she perceived that she had assumed the place of both father and mother when disciplining and guiding her children during her husband's absence, she also noted that,

"If she [any of her children] continues with unpleasant behavior, I would tell her that I have tried to intervene as her mother, so I have to let the father know ... he will see how he can talk to you." [29]

It seems that as far as disciplining children was concerned Mai Chizivi was prepared to intervene up to a certain point, after which she deferred the issue to Chizivi, her husband and father of her children. Mai Siwela, a mother of three children who lived in a peri-urban settlement north of Harare, made similar remarks, as shown in the following quote:

"I can discipline my children. I can say this or that but I can't be the father because there is only one father and his words carry more weight. Sometimes you have to spank your child to instill discipline, but when the father says a single word, he is heard." [30]

Mai Siwela, it appears, believed that her husband was culturally suited to dispense discipline and guidance in the family. The above quote suggests that Mai Siwela's children were more inclined to heed the father's advice than her own reprimands. We can infer that non-migrant women's involvement was complicated by their deference to the gender-normative authority of the men as head of the family and ultimate disciplinarian (KESBY, 1999). Since, in keeping with tradition, non-migrant women regard migrant men as head of households, they tend to shoulder the huge responsibility of disciplining children even though they lack the ultimate authority to finalize parental decisions and act upon them. Importantly, however, the views shared by these two women serve to reinforce patriarchal and hegemonic notions of the father as the ultimate disciplinarian and

3 An international non-governmental organization involved in development aid work in Zimbabwe and other developing countries.

a unique source of father-influence in the family (TIEDJE & DARLING-FISHER, 1996). [31]

Congruent with other studies, non-migrant women's narratives reinforce the idea that father-involvement is indispensable in bringing up children (MARSIGLIO et al., 2000; MCGILL 2014). During fieldwork I gathered data to suggest that non-migrant women agonized over the perceived lack of quality father-child interactions. For example, when reflecting on her husband's lengthy absence from home, Mai Majuru observed that her children "don't know what he [the father] likes or what he doesn't like," because of the protracted physical separation. Mai Majuru especially fretted over her husband's disengagement with their adolescent son at a time when he was going through puberty: "You see I have got a son here, he is growing up ... he may get involved with many things and this needs his father to guide him." Non-migrant women's apprehensions about poor father-child interactions indicate that, for these women, fathers are unique in their parenting influences; they are indispensable gender role-models and moral guides. Linda TIEDJE and Cynthia DARLING-FISHER (1996) are two of numerous researchers to observe such normative expectations of men as fathers in non-migration settings (LAMB, 2000; ROER-STRIER et al., 2005). Non-migrant women's attitudes toward men's paternal involvement are consistent with the individualist and Western models of fatherhood, which underscore the indispensability of the father as breadwinner, nurturer and moral figure in two-parent families (LAMB, 2000; WILLIAMS, 2008). They cast doubt on the reliability of extended kin as a source of paternal support in African settings, which some researchers have observed (MADHAVAN & ROY, 2012; MOORHOUSE & CUNNINGHAM, 2012). [32]

4.2 Migrant men's paternal involvement

4.2.1 Making ends meet in the family

Literature on fathering in non-migration contexts suggests that economic provision remains the dominant and idealized role of fathers (WILLIAMS, 2008). Existing research on transnational fatherhood asserts that migration encourages the conventional forms of fathering and cultural images that underpin it, particularly the breadwinning ideology (DREBY, 2006). We can discern men's inclination toward economic provision and breadwinning ideologies among both co-resident and non-resident migrant fathers in this study. Parallel with many studies of fatherhood, especially those conducted in non-migration settings (MARSIGLIO et al., 2000), breadwinning elements featured ahead of other aspects of fathering in migrant men's own descriptions of paternal involvement. [33]

Tembo is a 30-year-old legal migrant, business management professional and a co-resident father of a four-year old boy. Given his elite migrant profile, he fits the profile of the "new father" who is more inclined to equally perform breadwinning and nurturing roles at home (MCGILL, 2014; YEUNG, 2013). And yet breadwinning featured stronger than other fatherly roles in his description of his paternal involvement: "I ensure that I provide food, clothes and toys ... Boys want

toys and games ... I make sure I provide these things, including educational material ... anything that improves his life." [34]

Majuru (46), a lowly educated asylum seeker and non-resident father, who rarely visited his children, similarly described his parental involvement: "My son will be writing high school examinations this coming year. His sister is enrolled in secondary school too ... I send them school fees, groceries and anything they might need at school." The emphasis on providing materially for the family and facilitating educational outcomes for children permeated the narratives of other migrant men. Therefore, based on what men say they actually do in the family, one is convinced that the migration of family men reinforces the gender-ideological ideals of fathers as material providers and mothers as caregivers, even as it hampers gender transformations (DREBY, 2006; HOANG & YEOH, 2011; NOBLES, 2011). Nonetheless, as argued below, such an interpretation does not hold firmly across all aspects of migrant men's narratives of fathering. [35]

4.2.2 *Nurturing intimacy*

How do fathers mitigate the non-economic, socio-cultural and emotional consequences of their physical absence from home? The existing literature suggests that, unlike mothers, who tend to continue their nurturing roles after relocation, transnational fathers remain emotionally distant and uncaring (HOANG & YEOH, 2011; PARREÑAS, 2005, 2008). It is further argued that fathers' failure to address the emotional gap—for example, children's feelings of ambivalence, discomfort, insecurity and loss—created by their departure is connected to their authoritarian involvement (PARREÑAS, 2008). The findings of the present study demonstrate that considering what non-resident fathers think they should do in the family together with what they actually do generates alternative conclusions. I observed that not unlike co-resident fathers, distant fathers talked about either actual or future involvement in nurturing roles or both. For example, Mashumba is a 34-year-old father and a skilled auto-body specialist; he managed to acquire a work permit and helped his wife and three children relocate to live with him in southern Johannesburg. Mashumba summarized his paternal involvement as follows:

"My role is to ensure that they [the children and spouse] get shelter, clothing and food ... the basics of life; they should feel secure ... And they should feel the love of their father. They should feel that dad is around." [36]

Evidently, Mashumba's narrative implies that he combined breadwinning and nurturing tasks in his fathering practice. Particularly interesting is his concern to make his children feel secure, comfortable and loved. Mashumba, who described his six-days-per week and waged auto-body repair job as strenuous, further observed that, "when there is a need, I make breakfast. Sometimes I clean the house. Usually, Sunday mornings when everyone is still bathing ... I put breakfast there [at table]." Although at the time of the interview Mashumba's wife had just weaned their youngest child and was hunting for a job opening, Mashumba still made time to do the emotional and logistical tasks of child-rearing which,

traditionally, are reserved for mothers, especially in the African and Asian contexts (PASURA, 2010; YEUNG, 2013). When considered in the context of his time-consuming job, Mashumba's contribution can be seen to be well-aligned with contemporary normative expectations of fathering, which equally emphasize breadwinning and nurturing (KILKEY et al., 2013; MCGILL, 2014). [37]

Tembo similarly performed child-centered activities (COLTRANE & ADAMS, 2001), including chauffeuring of his son to and from school. For example, he described how he typically spent time with his son when off-duty: "During weekends I drive to places [in Johannesburg] with him. For example, as you know, currently, the [soccer] World Cup [in South Africa] is underway. I took him [to watch one of the matches]." We can infer from the interviews of both Mashumba and Tembo that these co-resident fathers partook in domestic child-care tasks at different levels, including recreational activities, and were considerably attuned to the needs of children—an indicator of involved fathering (MATTA & KNUDSON-MARTIN, 2006). Thus, to a greater extent, the fathering styles of the two co-resident fathers contradict African popular stereotypes of the "present but dominant and uncaring" father (MORRELL, 2006, p.19). [38]

Unlike co-resident fathers, virtually all distant fathers were asylum seekers who could not travel legally to visit non-migrant family members in Zimbabwe. Therefore, their actual fathering practices vary greatly from those of co-resident fathers. Apart from their legal status, distant fathers typically sustained a marginal relationship with the labor market in South Africa (RUTHERFORD, 2008). Accordingly, unlike economically well-positioned migrants for whom transnational communication has become "a mechanism for retaining gender norms" (YEOH et al., 2005, p.310), these distant fathers sustained a varied and limited access to ICTs. [39]

Nonetheless, all migrant men acknowledged that they were less involved in the family than they should be. While distant fathers could not directly share in domestic labor and the logistical tasks of raising children as much as co-resident migrant fathers, they all related a strong aspiration to serve as role models, guide their children, and prepare them for adult life. For example, when reflecting on his long absence from home, Majuru pined: "If I was living there permanently, you see, I would be in a position to pick up the weak points [...] in each one of them." Due to the forbidding costs of telephonic communication, Majuru relies on his wife to discipline and guide their children, as shown in the following quote: "when she [Mai Majuru] phones me, she often updates me ... I advise my children through her but my voice remains absent." According to Majuru, co-residence could enable him to sufficiently influence his children's moral and ethical development to the extent that they internalize his teachings. [40]

Siwela, an asylum seeker in South Africa since 2005, echoed this sentiment when responding to the question about how migration impacts on his fathering role. He observed "come to think of it, I spent one and half years apart from my children ... Can a child who grows up without his father at home internalize his father's voice?" He added in an emotionally charged tone of voice: "It is painful ... you ask

yourself how on earth my children still relate with me as their father when I let things go on like this." Siwela was profoundly troubled by not being with his children and not being able to directly influence their moral development. Like Siwela, other distant fathers commonly perceived co-residence as a necessary setting in which children can effectively imbibe the fathers' moral teachings and foster the values of respect, honesty and hard work. While migrant fathers' concern with children's moral development is a common feature of transnational fathering (ROER-STRIER et al., 2005), distant fathers in this study neither retained the exclusive responsibility of disciplining nor viewed it as gendered masculine, as others contend (see PARREÑAS, 2008). Rather, they relied upon non-migrant spouses to assume their own responsibility when there was a need to reinforce conduct—something interpreted as a key feature of responsive and less authoritative fathering in literature (MATTA & KNUDSON-MARTIN, 2006). Thus, as Wei-Jun J. YEUNG (2013) observed among Asian fathers, non-migrant women in this study played the role of an indispensable link between children and the distant father, and were not sidelined. Through communication with the mother, distant fathers kept abreast of their children's educational progress and moral development. Evidently, these findings are at variance with the view that distant fathering perpetuates the separate feminine and masculine spheres; that distant fathers sustain an authoritarian and disengaged form of paternal involvement, one that is centered upon the imposition of discipline (PARREÑAS, 2008). [41]

Apart from fathers' role as moral guides, a salient theme in absentee fathers' narratives is their concern with keeping families emotionally intact. The word "love" featured prominently in distant fathers' rich descriptions of their own practices of and aspirations for fathering. Chizivi is a 50-year-old asylum seeker, a lowly skilled casual employee in Johannesburg, a father of three girls and a grandfather of two. At home in Chiredzi he left his wife, Mai Chizivi, and their last-born daughter. In his own words, being at home with his daughter could help him,

"[h]ave a closer relationship with my daughter ... I would be in position to talk to her ... she will be able to appreciate her father's love and I would be able to appreciate her love to me. I will be able to see areas where my daughter needs my help; areas where I need to advise her about life." [42]

From the above quote, we can construe that Chizivi was aware of the need to purposively cultivate quality father-child interactions with his daughter through communication and direct expression of his love to her. Siwela similarly acknowledged the need to sustain emotional closeness and relational attachments in the family. Yet when asked to describe what he was actually doing, Siwela grumbled about how prohibitive costs of telephonic communications force him to make his calls shorter than he would like. He went on to agonize:

"With time, even words of love desert you ... when you phone your wife, she expects to receive words of love from you, and you don't tell her ... you only talk about pressing issues ... You can only ask after the kids at the end of the conversation." [43]

Due to prohibitive telephone costs, Siwela and his wife prioritized financial issues and other urgent matters at home. The quote shows that Siwela was concerned that expressions of love, desire and pain associated with prolonged periods of physical separation came at the very last part of the telephone conversation. Some studies treat distant fathers' emotional expressions as indicative of maternal nurturing acts (see YEOH et al., 2005). Besides, from MATTA and KNUDSON-MARTIN's point of view, fathers' acknowledgment of other family members' emotional needs suggest a higher degree of attunement, that is, "the ability to read and notice the needs of their wives and children" (2006, p.26). Indeed, distant fathers' cognitive involvement and emotional work do not lend support to the dominant narrative of transnational fathering, which views distant fathers' contribution as "a heightened version of conventional fathering" characterized by authoritative paternal involvement (PARREÑAS, 2008, p.1058). On the contrary, distant fathers in this study commonly exhibited a strong commitment toward sustaining verbal father-child interactions, intimacy and love. To further illustrate this interpretation, Mai Majuru's own evaluation of Majuru's verbal interactions with their three children during his short visits is useful. She disclosed:

"When he [Majuru] comes on short visits, he wants the children to love him and to be happy around him so that they overlook his long absence. Even if you tell him about the children's lack of discipline, he won't rebuke them. He will not talk about it ... he will go back without addressing anything." [44]

The quote above implies that during his short and infrequent visits, Majuru purposively chose to interact with his children in recreational and play-centered ways that boost familial bonds instead of imposing discipline as this would have pushed them further away. In this sense, Majuru's fathering behavior flies in the face of such characterization of traditional gender norms as "strict father, kind mother" (YEUNG, 2013, p.155). Distant fathers' preoccupation with maintaining intimacy and relational bonds between family members is quite notable; it suggests that they were more inclined toward interactive nurturing than the imposition of discipline and authority evident in the deficit narrative (NOBLES, 2011; PARREÑAS, 2008). [45]

I observed more evidence to contradict the prominent narrative of transnational fathering—that of abandonment and inadequacy. Where transnational fathers are generally considered disengaged, strict and non-expressive (PARREÑAS, 2008), Zimbabwean distant fathers in the study deliberately used economic practices to address intergenerational and emotional gaps created by spatial distance. For example, since Chizivi had left behind one of his three youngest daughters at home, I was keen to learn how he addressed the insecurity and loss of intimacy fostered by his long absence from home. He revealed the following:

"I make sure she has got uniforms, school fees, stationery ... food ... She shouldn't feel that I am not there for her. I want her to see that my absence is actually better; that she benefits more than children with parents who are there." [46]

Siwela recounted a comparable strategy:

"I try by all means to send things home. I get them [children] small things and I indicate that this one is for Abraham, this one is for Enoch, and this one is for Rebecca, and so on ... my wife tells each one of them: 'Dad bought this for you' ... I can even send a packet of biscuits or sweets ... So I surprise them with small things and I know they say, 'Dad hasn't forgotten about us.'" [47]

Siwela's comments, together with some of the views already underscored, lend support to Cati COE's (2011) interpretation of Ghanaian fathering behavior. COE contends that among Ghanaians the flow of material resources is more important in sustaining familial bonds than is co-presence. Communication was important for these fathers too. Notwithstanding prohibitive costs, virtually all distant fathers intentionally used the telephone to sustain emotional attachments with their children. Matondi (38), an asylum seeker, a divorcee and a father of four children, invested much of his meager earnings in making calls to his children and also to his sister who looked after them. Here is why he persisted with telephonic communication despite the high costs involved:

"I try to show them love. I phone them. And when I call, I talk to them and we share a lot of laughter. I ask them what they would like me to do for them. They too have many questions for me." [48]

Absent fathers' remitting and communication behaviors conform to existing interpretations of "gift-remitting" in both non-migration and transnational settings. McKENZIE and MENJÍVAR (2011) observe that transfers from Honduran absentee fathers fulfill material even as they "convey assurances that the men have not forgotten them and they become expressions of love" (p.63). In the same vein, Lisa CLIGGETT (2005) notes that internal migrant fathers in Zambia remit in order to assert their claims as fathers, and to elicit recognition from their children. By analyzing distant fathers' strategies for sustaining intimacy, the aim is not to evaluate their success. Instead, this article argues that, in a context of prolonged spatial separation, the mutual recognition fostered by such material flows are more crucial for migrant men's lived experiences of fatherhood than hegemonic norms. [49]

5. Conclusion

By considering narratives of migrants and their non-migrant spouses, the article discerned evidence to suggest that maternal and paternal roles might become more indistinct in a migration context. As has been observed in other case studies (McKENZIE & MENJÍVAR, 2011), non-migrant women in transnational split families assumed either the sole or primary responsibility of breadwinning and moral guiding—roles that are conventionally performed by men—over and above the traditional primary caring role of raising children. [50]

An interesting finding of this study is that in transnational split families, non-migrant spouses play a prominent role in shaping specific fathering behaviors. It

found evidence to show that non-migrant women embraced the notion of the "new father" (McGILL, 2014): they expected distant fathers to play a significant role in the developmental outcomes of children by providing materially and emotionally for the family. Perhaps, in response to such expectations, distant fathers were visibly self-aware of their limitations as fathers. In common with co-resident fathers, they typically recounted profound concerns with and aspirations for keeping the family emotionally secure. Notwithstanding structural limitations unique to non-elite migration, distant fathers perceived their economic practices, including gift-remitting and communication as a vehicle for mitigating the negative implications of their absences. Thus distant fathers' commitments to non-migrant spouse and children transcended material provision. In fact, distant fathers were considerably attuned to the needs of their families (MATTA & KNUDSON-MARTIN, 2006). Their practices and aspirations for involved fathering are strikingly congruent to maternal behaviors of distant mothers, who are known to retain nurturing roles after international relocation (HOANG & YEOH, 2011; MADIANOU, 2012; PARREÑAS, 2005). Hence, the study's findings strengthen the view that the transnational family is characterized by "the experience of negotiating webs of relationships and developing intimacies," in spite of the ideological foundations of masculinity (YEOH et al., 2005, p.309). [51]

Interpreted differently, the findings speak to arguments that emphasize the gap between men's expectations of ideologies which draw on patriarchal norms and their lived experiences as fathers (WILLIAMS, 2008). My findings complement the notion that fathering is a contingent practice. That is to say, men do not simply act on the basis of ideological norms: they reflect on their fathering role in light of unique familial circumstances, including the logistical demands of doing family (ibid.). Migrant fathers are capable of revising their parental involvement: therefore, tapping into their aspirations—or cognitive work—is a vehicle for capturing such revisions, however subtle they may be. Still, one must note that inversions of the gendered role-making in the context of migration may be less enduring, after all. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that women negatively perceived their intensified parental involvement as something of a deviancy to be corrected after distant fathers' eventual return. Moreover, non-migrant women held over certain parental tasks until men were present at home. This interpretation corroborates HOANG and YEOH's (2011) claim that vicissitudes in gendered role-making may be very transient phenomena. [52]

A few important points must be noted with respect to interpreting the narratives of migrant men and non-migrant spouses included here. It is necessary to observe that the interpretations in this article draw on a small sub-sample of a qualitative study which explored a number of themes, including fathering. Therefore, while the article offers stimulating insights into the dynamics of parenting in the context of migration, the results are less generalizable. More research is needed to illuminate the social dynamics of fathering in south-south migration contexts. [53]

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