

Diaspora, Gender and Identity Transformations in the Context African Philosophy and Culture: A Case of Zimbabwe.

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Abstract: This paper sought to explore diaspora, gender and identity transformations in the context African philosophy and culture. The paper explored diaspora, gender and identity transformations of Zimbabwean society and the concomitant demise of socio-cultural practices, dissecting how diasporas have shaped its cultural identity. 20 participants were purposively drawn from adult Zimbabwean family members living in the diaspora or with diasporic lived experiences of more than three years. The author used a scoping review of literature related to African philosophy, diaspora, gender and identity using search engines. Questionnaires and interview schedule were also used to gather data. Results show that diasporic experiences produce fused, identity and gender modes of cultural dimensions marked by significant, negative transformations. Gender was found to be a central cog that affects every stage of the migration process, interactions and subsequent outcomes. Additionally, it was noted that men are the worst affected as they are faced with challenges of trying to model families within the philosophy or context of African gender, sex and identity whilst children born in the diaspora face a myriad of challenges trying to meet the desired or accepted status. From these findings it could be concluded that diaspora life and identity exist under highly toxic and polarized relations which harbours identity confusion, mental instability, altered gender roles and to some extent self-destructive behaviours like prostitution, drugs and substance abuse, mutilation and suicide. The researcher therefore recommends collaborative, large-scale researches with those in the diaspora. The government should establish Zimbabwean culture centres in countries where Zimbabweans are diaspora to preserve our philosophies. Another recommendation is to curb the diaspora ecstasy as well as provision of multicultural counseling to those in the diaspora.

Key words: Diaspora, Gender, Identity, Transformations

I. Introduction

Globalisation has drastically increased the scope for migrants and their descendants to sustain long-distance links with origin societies, albeit with an immense impact on their traditional gender roles and identity. Zimbabwe has entered a migration plateau partially explained by a growing disjuncture between sluggish and uneven political and socio-economic development that has seemingly benefitted a certain clique. This has spurred a fast socio-cultural change across all social classes and regions rapidly increasing everyone's aspirations for lifestyles and freedoms that they find difficult to imagine in their own country. An increased appetite for a better world has resulted in many Zimbabwean crossing borders. This created a huge diaspora population among Zimbabweans. This also results in reconfiguring the nation's economic and socio-cultural dimensions. There is a plethora of factors that played an important role in this process of transformation. This paper explores Diaspora, Gender and Identity transformations of Zimbabwean society and the concomitant demise of socio-cultural practices, dissecting how Diasporas have shaped its cultural identity.

II. Literature review

The author conducted a literature review from previous researches in order to investigate this transformation and inform the audience from an evidence-based perspective. The word 'Diaspora' is derived from the Greek word 'Diasperio' which means to distribute, to fling. The term originally associated with the Jewish chronological experience but today the term has acquired a more expanded meaning and it refers to common inherited homeland, voluntary or involuntary migration and a sense of peculiarity in the country of residence, Jayaram. N. (2004). On the background of globalization, the term 'Diaspora' raises the questions of acculturation, assimilation, the loss of identity etc. The immigrants, whatever their reason for migration be, financial, social, political, no matter whether

It is not essential for one to take it for arranged that the problem of nation and identity take place in the life of person only when he accept migration and mobility. Since, it is a psychological feeling; there is a possibility of its experience even within his native land. Mostly the migrants suffer from the pain of being far off from their homes, the memoirs of their motherland, the anguish of

leaving behind everything familiar agonize the minds of migrants. The expatriate literature also reveals the psychological inner quarrel in the context of cultural dislodgment.

The immigrants away from the families swing between crisis and renovation. They are thrice alienated from the native land they left behind, from their new horde country and their children. Nostalgia, loss, betrayal and duty are the basics of new homes as diasporic protagonist adjust to new countries. In adjusting to new countries, issue of acculturation and assimilation become the central point as these immigrants consult the unbalance of their hyphenated identities, Bhabha, Homi K. (1994)

Conceptualizing Diaspora

Many geographic investigations use the term diaspora as a descriptor for movement. Rather than exploring questions of identity, modernity, violent exile, collective histories, and ambivalent nation-making, diaspora is simply synonymous with migration and immigration, Brubaker, (2005).

The major critique of diaspora and diaspora studies is focused on the highly metaphoric understanding of migratory experience. Because diaspora is primarily theorized through the production of identity, rather than a materiality of displacement, many geographers have noted that questions of hybridity, imagined communities and returns, and collective histories have also brought disequilibrium among families in diaspora.

Diaspora communities represent and maintain a culture different from those of the countries within which they are located, often retaining strong ties with their country and culture of origin (real or perceived) and with other communities of the same origin in order to preserve that culture Cohen., (2008). Diasporas can play an important role in the economic development of their countries of origin. Beyond their well-known role as senders of remittances, diasporas can also promote trade and foreign direct investment, create businesses and spur entrepreneurship, and transfer new knowledge and skills.

III. Cultural identity and migration

Besides economic effects, the immigration of a large number of people may trigger identity problems for both the immigrants and the native population. Taking account of the empirical results concerning cultural distance of the previous section, the problems for cultural identity of both groups may be larger; the greater the distance between the cultures, the bigger the extent of disparity. For the persons involved, the change or even loss of cultural identity may be individually much more important than economic effects. Immigrants in general have two options in the destination country, an 'inward turn' to group solidarity and an 'outward turn' to assimilation., Karst, (1986). Of the two, which turn they choose use may depend on several factors. The most obvious is that the cultural identity of immigrants is normally upheld in comparison to the cultural identity of the destination country. Thus, the greater the cultural distance between them, then the higher will be the probability for an inward turn.

Although the outward turn in the direction of the host country's culture might be desired by the native population, it may not be necessarily the most wanted option of migrants. Thus while whilst migrants would like to retain their cultural identity, the odds will not be in their favour. In an attempt to protect their own cultural identity, the diaspora offers an alternative options like adaption assimilation and acculturation.

It is during this process when some diasporas adopt either an alloplastic or autoplatic mechanism depending on their strengths or weaknesses. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED076248>

"Cultural identity is an individual's sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life" Jameson, (2007). Therefore, it may be suspected that social bonds depend on cultural identity Gellner, (1983). Individuals who migrate experience multiple stresses that can impact their mental well being, including the loss of cultural norms, religious customs, and social support systems, adjustment to a new culture and **changes in identity and concept of self**.

Whilst sociocentrism may also frustrate an outward turn to assimilation and adaptation to the local culture, in real relations between immigrants and the citizens of the destination country it is shown that diversity is neither the preferred strategic choice of immigrants nor of the native population. Instead, given the assumed payoffs, the subgame-perfect equilibrium implies that immigrants prefer living in a diaspora through an outward turn in cultural identity, Bhatia, Sunil and Ram, Anjali (2009).

Autoplatic adaptation is changing oneself when confronted by a problem or stressful situation whereas alloplastic adaptation which is when the individual attempts to change the environment or situation. In this context, migrants have two options, either to retain their true identity and face rejection or adopt the foreign one and be accepted. This process is not an easy stroll in the park. There are various factors involved with varying degrees of interference. As pointed out by Gelfand et al. (2012), parochial

altruism and outgroup hostility are strong in collectivistic cultural environments. This is in sharp contrast to the more fluid individualist practice which has less value for teamwork and *Ubuntu* as enshrined in the African, Zimbabwean included, set-up.

The transnational movements of Africans within the continent are seldom conceptualised as leading to diasporic identifications and relationships. In stark contrast, the migration of Africans beyond the continent, which occurs on a smaller scale, is routinely associated with diaspora formation. Marking out the social boundaries of ethnic groups is part of the process of constituting a diaspora, and the maintenance of ties to the homeland requires the reproduction of markers that allow for members, or potential members, of a diaspora to assert their claims. Bakewell and Binaisa (2016). set emic and etic definitions against one another in their analysis of diasporic strategies of identity formation and the ways in which struggles for resources (be they economic, social, cultural, or political) are fundamental to the dynamics of diasporic identity.

IV. Methodology

A qualitative design was used in this exploration. By nature of the study, the qualitative design was the most appropriate as supported by Richard (1990) who said that you can't fix by analysis what you bungled by design. It is against this background that the researcher opted for the best design to enhance a better outcome. This design was used in the study in order to gain a phenomenological understanding of experiences and perceptions through interaction with participants. This qualitative approach enabled the author to gather information through questionnaires and interviewing. 20 participants were drawn from adult Zimbabwean family members living in the diaspora or with diasporic lived experiences of more than three years. The selection was done using purposive sampling combined with snowballing. Adding on to a scoping review of related literature, data was collected using questionnaires and an interview schedule. Data collected went through the process of thematic content analysis which involved analysing transcripts, identifying themes and gathering examples from the text and it was presented in tables.

V. Results/Findings.

Table 1. N=20Age of respondents

Age group	Frequency	%
25-35 years	9	45
36-60 years	11	55
Total	20	100

Of the 20 participants, all (100%) were within the 25-60 years old range

Table 2. N=20Gender distribution

Age group	Frequency	%
Male	10	50
Female	10	50
Total	20	100

There was a 50% gender representation from each side

Table 3. N=20Which zone were/are you based

Diaspora zone	USA	UK	SA	ASIA	total
Frequency	3	10	5	2	20
%	15	50	25	10	100%

The majority, 50%, of participants have experience in the United Kingdom

Table 4. N=20Years in diaspora

Age group	Frequency	%
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3-5 years	4	20
6-10 years	11	55
Above 11 years	5	25

16 (80%) of the participants had experience of over 5 years of being in the diaspora.

Table 5. N=20 Is there any impact of diaspora on, Gender and Identity transformations of Zimbabweans?

Age group	Frequency	%
Yes	20	100
No	0	0
Total	20	100

100%, all participants acknowledged the presence of diaspora impact.

Table 6. N=20 Would you recommend someone to stay in diaspora?

Age group	Frequency	%
Yes	8	40
No	12	60
Total	20	100

Less than half of the participants would recommend diasporic life.

VI. Results from the interviews

The interviews demonstrated that people have mixed feelings over the impact of diaspora on gender and identity on migrants. Some people migrated due to negative economic impact while some cited socio-cultural factors, for example some migrated due to different reasons like political persecution, seeking greener pastures or educational advancement. Participants were more worried about the future lifestyles of their children and this worry seemed to have much effect to males than females. Females seemed to easily accept most negative developments as they arise whilst men found it harder to accept without resistance. The rationale for being in diaspora affected most participants' notions. Females said that due to economic hardships, they would rather suffer the negative consequences than being deprived of a better standard of living whilst men were of the opposite opinion.

'My wife says let's just work for a few more years because if you don't give in, you'll end up having to go to back home and wallow in poverty. (Participant X, UK).

a) What impact does being a diaspora have on foreigners

Men, as fathers are more affected as their exercise of authority is profoundly challenged in foreign soil.

Racialisation and marginalisation are also influential in these diasporic experiences.

These practices are mediated through a long history of racist discourses, practices and representations, which are highly gendered.

Common African Values like collectivism, extended families and communal relationships are challenged by Western values of individualism.

Traditional African-Zimbabwean Parenting is unsettled by different social and cultural environments

These altered parenting styles have been said to be a cause of identity confusion, mental instability, altered gender roles.

b) What is your view of diaspora impact in terms of gender?

Men expend energies directed to homeland practices in an effort to secure some of their previous social standing as community leaders and respectable men. In contrast, women orient more to community building and homemaking in the local context as they

work to negotiate any challenges their families face in foreign soil. However, men are losing the war as these inherited practices are faced with extinction as the diasporic family cannot escape the global fluidity of acculturation

Men are further burdened with challenges of trying to model families within the philosophy or context of African gender, sex and identity whilst children born in the diaspora face a myriad of challenges trying to meet the desired or accepted status. In most cases, they adopt, reluctantly, compulsory heterogeneity. These polarized relations brings with it identity confusion, mental instability, altered gender roles and to some extent self-destructive behaviours like prostitution, drugs and substance abuse, mutilation and suicide

Drawing on fieldwork with migrants from Anglophone and Francophone West Africa and the Horn of Africa living in Lusaka and Kampala, Bakewell, and Binaisa (2016) noted that different layers of 'origin' and 'destination' factors interact to reinforce or undermine diasporic identifications in Africa's urban landscapes. If this is the case in the African environment, what implications does it have on Africans in the foreign diaspora? This means there is a likelihood of more pronounced Gender and Identity transformations. This paper explores whether their movements gives rise to the formation of diasporic connections that sustain and reproduce identifications with the place and people of origin, over distance and through generations. The homeland where mobility is embedded in socioeconomic relations that embrace transnational linkages may perpetuate connections.

VII. Conclusions

This paper has explored multi-generational shifts in identities and community building practices among the Zimbabwean diasporas. Major highlights are centred on gendered, racialised, and space-based constructions of African philosophy. Just like other migrants from diverse African countries, Zimbabwean diasporas are constructing pan-African networks, social solidarity and identities. Men expend energies more directed to the homeland in an effort to secure some of their previous social standing as community leaders and respectable men. In contrast, women orient more to community building and homemaking in the local context as they work to negotiate any challenges their families face in foreign soil. However, men are losing the war as these inherited practices are faced with extinction, as the diasporic family cannot escape the global fluidity of acculturation.

VIII. Recommendations

In light of these, robust research on a larger scale, to have much reliable and accurate results, is recommended. There is also need for Collaborative researches with those in the diaspora and other nations with different cultures. Additionally, Governments, in particular, Zimbabwe should establish Zimbabwean culture centres in countries with most Zimbabwean diaspora to preserve our philosophies. There is also a need curb the diaspora push and pull factors. Since the impact is already in place, provision of multicultural counseling to the affected is highly recommended.

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