

Cross-border Women Traders and Hegemonic Masculinities in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT Female cross-border traders contribute considerably to conjugal family income in Zimbabwe. This contribution has been unprecedentedly markedly salient since 2000 when the country's economic fortunes were on a downward spiral. With this contribution in intra-household income, the anticipation has been that their socio-politico-economic standing in the connubial family would be enhanced relative to that of their husbands. In spite of this contribution, a hegemonic masculine conceptualization of cross-border female trade has situated it within a gung-ho economic method of livelihood strategy. Monetary proceeds from cross-border trading activities have often precipitated conflicting relations between husbands and wives as the former struggle to reassert their threatened hegemonic masculinities. Symbolic violence has increased as men in matrimonial relations attempt to override the wives' manifest economic muscles. Against this background, this research, through interview and observation, interrogates the assumption that the vulnerability of married women is compounded by their low levels of financial contribution to household income relative to that of their husbands. The researcher argues that deeply entrenched androcentric ideological values have muted these women's conspicuous financial endowments, resulting in multifaceted husband-wife power asymmetries.