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The Major Influences of the Boundless-Extended Family System on the Professional Experiences of Black Zimbabwean Women Leaders in Higher Education

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Abstract

The article examines the major influences of the black Zimbabwean boundless- extended family system on the professional trajectories of women leaders working within the higher education system of Zimbabwe. The study is based on in-depth interviews conducted with thirty female leaders who shared information about their major family responsibilities. Using an analytical framework that facilitates a critical analysis of the evidence, the paper discusses the persisting significance of the interdependent systems of social stratification, namely race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class in the private and public spheres of the female leaders. In an effort to preserve the nuances, essence, and voices, as well as to give them the prominence they deserve, the paper includes excerpts from the participants' responses. The paper suggests private and micro (familial and cultural) and public and macro (institutional and systemic) ways of alleviating some of the major challenges that the boundless- extended family system places on the professional advancement of women leaders.

General Introduction

The purpose of this article is to discuss some of the influences of the extended family on the professional experiences of black women leaders working within the higher education sector of Zimbabwe, a southern African nation. The article is based on information provided in interviews conducted with thirty female Zimbabwean higher education leaders who revealed their major extended family responsibilities and how those domestic experiences interact with their public professional experiences. The paper examines these women's familial and professional experiences within the context of the interrelated, socially constructed classification systems of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class as they operate in Zimbabwe. The paper concludes by suggesting collaborative ways of alleviating burdens imposed by extended family responsibilities to improve the professional experiences of the women leaders.

Contexualization

The black women leaders in the study live and work within the shared unique contexts of Zimbabwe; therefore, their extended family experiences are analyzed within the appropriate Zimbabwean power hierarchies based on race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation and class. Feminists of African, Asian, and other Third World descent advocate the study of the complex and multiple intersections of the social systems of stratification mentioned above to critically examine any social situation (Gaidzanwa 1997; Mikell 1997; Hill Collins 1991; Harrison 2001; hooks 1984). Reacting to the tendency of early white, middle class and western feminists, especially those in the first wave of feminism, to universalize and essentialize women and their experiences, non-western feminists, womanists of color, (Alice Walker 1983) and Third World feminists highlight the diversity of women's experiences regarding the ways they are influenced by the intersections of their specific social and power differential systems. In other words, they insist that gender hierarchies be analyzed in conjunction with other systems of stratifications based on race, nationality, sexual orientation, and class. Similar analytical frameworks are also called for and used by many critical social scientists and feminist scholars (i.e. Harrison 2000; Weber 2001; Nicholson 1997; Tong 1998; Sleeter and Grant 1999; West and Fenstermaker 1995).

One major goal of such critical feminist scholars (including global, African, Third-World, black feminists and womanists) is to examine the lives of women in a more holistic fashion, which takes into consideration the diverse influences and differential factors that shape their experiences, (Anderson and Collins 1992; Harrison 2001; Weber 2001; hooks 1984; West and Fenstermaker 1995). Weber (2001, 19) states: "Every social situation is affected by society-wide historical patterns of [nationality] race, class, gender, and sexuality that are not necessarily apparent to the participants and are experienced differently depending upon the [specific social stratification characteristics] of the people involved."

This paper analyzes the impact of the extended family responsibilities on the work lives of the women leaders within the contexts of the systems of social stratification prevalent in Zimbabwe. The analysis examines how multiple systems of oppression and exploitation simultaneously operate to disadvantage, discriminate, disempower, suppress, prejudice, exploit, and oppress women. Bonvillain (2001, 11) writes, "The notion of **stratification** refers

to unequal access to social prestige and power available to and assumed by certain members of a society. It may be linked to unequal access to resources, goods, and political power."

The power and privilege embedded within the systems of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class are temporal in that the categories gain or lose their meanings and influence in relation to historical epochs (West and Fenstermaker 1995; Weber 2001; Harrison 2001). In their quest for control of, limited access to, and distribution of the socially valued resources, dominant groups continually redefine the systems in ways that best privilege them. Resources that may increase or decrease any group's advantage and privilege include, but are not limited to, access to powerful decision making positions, viable choices, quality time, freedom, capital, and valuable material possessions (Anderson and Collins 1992; Weber 2001). Further, the interlocking classification systems operate simultaneously at, and are embedded in, hierarchical social structural (macro/institutional and societal) and social psychological (micro/family/individual) levels (Weber 2001). For example, women might experience gender discrimination that is rooted in the policies of the workplace (the macro level) or in familial roles (the micro level). It should be noted that while the systems generally interact to influence people's experiences, one or two, e.g. race and/or gender, might be salient at any one time.

Women working within the higher education sector of patriarchal societies, such as Zimbabwe, often have to negotiate their experiences within power hierarchies that favor men and disadvantage women (Gaidzanwa 1997; Mafukidwa 2008; Mikell 1997). The participants reported encountering several institutional and familial challenges in the course of executing work duties (Chitiga 2003). Many of the institutional hurdles were consistent with those identified in other international studies (Chitiga 2001). Some of the major common problems faced by women in leadership positions are associated with the infamous notion of the glass ceiling. The latter refers to the idea that women face increasing barriers and disadvantages as they climb up the leadership ladder; the higher the echelons, the more difficult it is both to reach and to succeed in those positions (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman 2004).

A review of literature on experiences of women leaders in higher education reveals that on a global level, women face several problems, such as discrimination and unequal pay, associated with gender discrimination (Gaidzanwa 1997; Getecha and Chipika 1995; Murray 1994; Williams 1997). Another common problem is the lack of a critical mass of female leaders, which is perpetuated by the 'glass ceiling' that exists in the field of higher educational management (Chitiga 2001). Women leaders also experience general insubordination, resentment, and hostility from their co-workers in the male-dominated workplaces in which they work. Women from diverse socio-economic and cultural settings face discrimination and prejudice perpetrated by both men and women, in both the private and the public sectors (Beauvoir 1989).

The Zimbabwean female leaders experience institutional obstacles that included: gender discrimination, unrealistic expectations from supervisors, lack of a critical mass of women, lack of mentors and role models, male resentment, female resentment, work overloads, and lack of or complicated career advancement opportunities (Chitiga 2001). Nevertheless, the participants accounted experiencing unique challenges in the private sphere, most of which were related to the obligations imposed by the extended family kinship system as it operates in most Zimbabwean settings.

Sources of Information

The article is based on interview data gathered as part of a larger ongoing study of women leaders working in the higher education sector of Zimbabwe. The thirty women, whose information is used in this paper, occupied leadership positions that enabled them to practice visionary, inclusionary, and change-oriented leadership, and were considered dynamic by their peers and by top-ranking, veteran leaders working within the Zimbabwean Ministry of Higher Education. Chitiga (2003, 126) writes: "By virtue of living and working in Zimbabwe, a post colonial developing nation in the Southern African region, the women leaders in the study face challenges that are unique to the social, cultural, political and economic situations prevalent in Zimbabwe." This paper analyzes the influences of the extended family on the professional experiences of these women leaders, and how those experiences are shaped by the women's race, nationality, class, gender and sexual orientation.

The evidence for this study was gathered using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, a method supported by feminist ethnography because it promotes the notion of giving voice and agency to the participants (Reinharz1992; Fonow and Cook 1991; Nielsen 1990). This discussion draws on the women's responses to questions pertaining to their family responsibilities in interviews aimed at learning about their professional experiences. The paper attempts to determine how the women's extended family responsibilities affect their career trajectories.

Zimbabwe is a nation of approximately eleven million, three hundred and fifty thousand people, 98% of whom are African (specifically, Shona 82%, Ndebele 14%, other 2%). One percent of the Zimbabweans are Asian

and people of mixed descent, and one percent is white. Zimbabwe is a former British colonial country (Rhodesia, 1890-1980) located in southern Africa, northeast of Botswana, north of the Republic of South Africa, southeast of Zambia, and west of Mozambique. The nation gained independence (1980) after a long liberation struggle against the white minority regime and retained English as the official language, with Shona and Ndebele as the major indigenous languages. Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society, where men occupy an overwhelming majority of powerful positions in both the private and public sectors. The country has had one Premier, Robert Mugabe, for over twenty-eight years. An example of the dominance is clearly illustrated in the unequal distribution of top government positions in the country, where women occupy only 10% of the seats in parliament, (NationMaster.com 2008). In the past decade, Zimbabwe has experienced numerous political, economic and civic challenges, which have led to a reconstitution of the power structure as indicated by the power-sharing agreement (September 15, 2008) signed by leaders of the three key political parties. The agreement recognizes and plans to address the disproportionate power distribution that has excluded women from meaningfully participating in the democratic and economic institutions of Zimbabwe.

Additionally, the nation has experienced immense health-related hardships amidst the political chaos. The World Health Organization reports the average life expectancy for Zimbabweans to be about thirty-six years, as of 2004. The major cause of the drop in life expectancy is the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, which causes approximately forty-one percent of the deaths in Zimbabwe. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is exacerbated by the acute breakdown in the healthcare system, the increase in instances of deaths related to neonatal causes, pneumonia, and tuberculosis (http://www.afro.who.int/home/countries/fact_sheets/zimbabwe.pdf). The acute poverty rates prevailing in the country, which hinder the majority from attaining the health and nutritional care they need, have contributed to the country's negative growth rate (–.787% as of 2008 CIA estimates). The nation has experienced dire economic challenges, especially in the past ten years, which have been characterized by serious failures in governance and unproductive international relations. The World Bank characterizes Zimbabwe as a low- income, developing country. The inflation rate is estimated to be around fifty million percent–the highest in the world (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/zimbabwe-inflation). The decline in economic stability is so rapid that by October 16, 2008, the BBC observed, "At 231,000,000%, Zimbabwe has the world's highest rate of annual inflation, while some two million people need food aid. " (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7672864.stm). This rapidly worsening economic crisis is leading more people to sink into poverty, thus increasing the burdens carried by the few who are gainfully employed, including women leaders. Given the absence of a viable governmental social welfare or social security system in Zimbabwe, extended family becomes the primary source of economic, social and other support.

Literature from both local and international studies shows that patriarchal hierarchies of power generally disadvantage women and favor men, especially within the same race and class. (Mafukidzwa 2008; Gaidzanwa 1997; Weber 2001, Hill Collins 1998; hooks 1984). The women in the study are all black Zimbabweans who share a national culture, but are complex and heterogeneous. Therefore, the paper neither takes an essentialist view nor claims that the women are identical in regard to other socio-economic factors (Fraser 1997; Narayan 1997; Spivak with Rooney 1997). For the purposes of this discussion, the higher education leaders are characterized as belonging to the broad middle class group in the diverse nation of Zimbabwe, albeit to different degrees. For example, college presidents might rank toward the upper end of the scale, while lecturers-in-charge might occupy the lower end. The majority of the women owned at least one house and a car each or per family unit, and earned incomes that were higher than the working class majority. They possessed higher education qualifications, the least of which was a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. This is higher than most of the people in Zimbabwe, although the literacy rate is 82.4% (The World Bank 2007) By virtue of their professional positions, the women leaders enjoyed certain economic and social privileges that were considerably more than most women in the nation**.**

Further, the women leaders in the study occupied a position of some kind of 'go-between' or 'middle-woman' between the working class and the upper class. In higher education, those supervised by the women leaders (e.g., faculty, clerical and technical support staff) often rely on the women leaders to convey their concerns to the upper management (e.g., the pro-vice chancellors and the Ministry of Higher Education officials). Similarly, those in upper management use the middle class women to pass on their demands to the people they supervise, albeit to different degrees, depending on the collegial nature of the institutions involved. In return for their services, the middle class receive higher wages and more benefits and prestige from the upper class that controls the overall distribution of valued resources (Weber 2001). This classification is also supported by Higginbotham and Weber (1992 in Anderson and Collins 1998, 163) in their article on social mobility, wherein they defined middle class participants "by virtue of their employment in either a professional, managerial, and administrative occupations [that] capture many of the supervisory and ideologically based positions whose function is to control workers lives."

Similarly, the Zimbabwean women leaders in this study are indeed a class in the middle; they fall between the working class and the elite.

The women interviewed perceive themselves as heterosexual, based on their own characterizations of their marital statuses. It should be noted that the most people in Zimbabwe do not publicly engage in homosexual discourses; the president of the country publicly condemns black homosexual orientation, in particular. Similarly, some people are embarrassed to disclose that they are divorced or single, because of the stigma associated with unmarried women. Notwithstanding, three of the thirty women reported being divorced, three said they were single, and the rest were married at the time of the interviews. Their ages ranged from thirty to fifty-six years. All the women, except four, reported having at least two children. Two women, one single and one divorced, had only one child each; one single woman reported having no children; and one married woman did not disclose her 'motherhood' status on her resume. Most women and some men in Zimbabwe include the number of their children, marital status, spousal information and age on their curriculum vitae. Employers still use such information in making their hiring decisions.

Eleven of the women interviewed occupied largely top managerial posts, while the rest had positions that combined academic and administrative duties. There were seven academic department chairs of large departments in universities and polytechnics, thirteen heads of academic departments in universities, polytechnics and teacher's colleges, four accomplished professors, four university administrators, two upper level Ministry of Education administrators, and two university council members. In terms of educational levels, all the women held at least two post secondary qualifications. Half of them had at least one qualification in education or teaching *per se*; ten of them had already attained doctoral qualifications, fifteen had master's degrees, four had baccalaureate degrees, and one had the appropriate technical diplomas for her field.

Contextual Overview

Zimbabwe is a patriarchal nation managed by mostly African, black, middle-class, heterosexual male nationalists who participated in the national liberation war for independence from the British colonial agents. Blood et al (1998) argue that "Patriarchy is not just a power structure 'out there'; it is mainly enforced by our own acceptance of its character ideals for our lives" (182). The Zimbabwean network of "good old boys" operates from a dual cultural point of view; while born and raised in colonial Zimbabwe, most of the political leaders were educated in the West or in the former Eastern Bloc. The black nationalists switch back and forth between some version of western and traditional Zimbabwean cultural frameworks as and when it best benefits them. In her discussion of the cultural conflicts faced by women in post-colonial nations, Narayan (1996, 404) writes: "Third World feminist criticisms of practices and ways that are harmful and oppressive to women can easily be dismissed as symptoms of their antinationalist cultural disloyalty, as forms of "cultural inauthenticity" rooted in their adoption of "Western" ways and values." For example, when black Zimbabwean women try to assert their human rights, they are often labeled "too westernized" and are accused of "aping" whites both by their male counterparts and by fellow women colleagues.

Women are expected to embody feminine characteristics, which include those stated by Blood et al (1998, 182): "cooperativeness, emotionality, patience, passivity, nurturance, and sexual appeal." This notion is similar to that found in some male-dominated circles in United States of America of labeling assertive women as "lesbian" and/or "bitches." Therefore, numerous traditional cultural references and practices, which are currently used to "keep black women in their (subordinate) place," are often called upon in the numerous black male-dominated contexts of Zimbabwe.

Most of the Zimbabwean women leaders mentioned encountering similar problems to those faced by women administrators in the United States and elsewhere in the literature. Nevertheless, almost all of the participants identified the culturally expected female role of looking after their extended families as a major responsibility. The black Zimbabwean extended family is not limited to siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, grandparents, grandchildren and current in-laws. Instead, the Zimbabwean extended family network may extend to former in-laws, in-laws of other relatives, relatives of in-laws, close neighbors, church members, close work-mates, and friends (*madzisahwira*) of both the individual and her/his spouse as well as the friends of the parents. Moreover, the Zimbabwean extended family system is so inclusive that it seems boundless. However, this boundless extended family seems to have a somewhat systematic approach through which relatives are admitted into the network. Especially among the Shona, close associations such as church-family, neighborhood-family, or friendship-family seem inadequate; Zimbabweans seem to feel the need to legitimatize theses "relationships" via some totem connections, regardless of how distant the connections might be. Tong (1998, 152), in her discussion of patriarchy, defines the totem as "the symbol of the father." Therefore, the boundless extended family network

usually extends to other acquaintances who share the same totem (*mutupo*) with the immediate family members, blood relatives, and/or with other members of the existing extended family.

Admittance into the extended family network comes with rights and obligations, albeit to varying degrees, depending on the closeness of the association. While blood relatives (the typical immediate and extended family) have automatic rights and responsibilities, members of the boundless extended family acquire those rights and responsibilities gradually, as fuelled by the frequency and strength of their interactions with the original point of contact and other members of the concerned family. For instance, let us assume that Taurai is the initiator of the relationship while Murambiwa, a new neighbor whose totem is the same as that of Taurai's aunt Jane, is the newly incorporated member of Taurai's boundless extended family. Therefore, if Jane loses a relative, whom Taurai never met, Taurai would be expected to attend the funeral, regardless of the distance she has to travel. Depending on the closeness of the association, Murambiwa would also feel somewhat obligated to help Taurai with travel expenses or to accompany her to the funeral of their joint relative's relative. Similarly, if any member of such a large extended family network is ill, especially in the case of those who are terminally ill, Taurai and Murambiwa would be expected, albeit to different degrees, to visit her/him in the hospital or at home. As Bourdillon (1998, 24) states, among the Shona, "[t]he relationship between individuals is treated as a relationship between two clans." The boundless extended family has deep roots in the Zimbabwean culture and is an integral part of everyday activities, even for the modern and educated people as those who participated in this study.

Even though most of the people who live in urban areas also have extended family networks, most of these members are somewhat related to them, either through close/remote blood ties or marriage(s). The situation is more complex for people with rural ties, especially for those who live in rural areas, where, traditionally people of the same and related clans used to live in close proximity. The boundless extended family actually gets broader in close-knit rural areas, where it includes many with no traceable blood or clan ties such as relatives of neighbors, friends, and same-totem relations. Tsitsi Dangarambwa's (1989) portrayal of the extended family in *Nervous Conditions* provides a good overview of the workings of a typical, albeit not very extensive extended Zimbabwean family. Bourdillon (1998, 24) discuses the role played by the Shona clans and sub-clans in kinship. He write, "When two people with no traceable kinship ties meet, they may adopt rules of behaviour towards each other based on any relationship they know exists between other members of their respective clans. Thus, if a Shona woman meets an elderly stranger and discovers that a young man from her clan has married a young girl from his, she can address him as 'father-in-law.'" (See Appendix 1 for a graphic representation of an extended family network chart.)

The concept of the extended family is consistent with the African ethic of collectivism, which Maphosa (1998) posits as the emergence of the importance of the group over the individual. Collectivism is a central tenet in the development of effective African communities, (Nkomo 1998; Adjibolosoo 1998; Chombo 1998; Maphosa 1998). Connectivity and collectivism are central tenets of the traditional Shona culture, as illustrated in the typical greeting exchange among them. In discussing the importance of affirming other people's humanity, Mugo (2003) uses the Shona greeting as an illustration. "The initiator of greetings among the Shona people in Zimbabwe asks, "How are you?" The one being greeted answers, "I am only well, if you are well" (2003, 2). In other words, one's wellness depends on the wellbeing of the others. Therefore, it is not surprising that members of the extended family feel obligated to support and assist fellow members despite their own personal or immediate family needs.

Another important piece of contextual background phenomenon that directly affects the women leaders in the study pertains to the prevalence of illnesses and deaths from HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. There are at least seven hundred known HIV/AIDS-related deaths per week in the country (World Health Organization 2006). It has become the norm for almost every black Zimbabwean to have at least one relative suffering from HIV/AIDS-related illnesses at any one time. In other words, most people have to pass through the hospital on their way to/from work, visit the hospital during their lunch time, visit an ill relative at a home, or attend a funeral about twice a week, on average. Consequently, it is not prudent to understate or minimize the role played by the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the women leaders in the present study.

Moreover, in black Zimbabwean culture, relatives come together to comfort each other in times of trouble. Therefore, funerals have been known to be good places to meet relations one might not have known about. Women are considered the traditional nurturers and caregivers. (See Gaidzanwa 1997; Beauvoir 1989; Mikell 1997.) Expectations to perform such 'feminine' gender roles are especially higher for married women, who, as daughters-in-law, should not only attend funerals, they should be very actively involved at funerals and at hospital visits. This could be due, in part, to what most feminists refer to as the exchange of women by men.

With particular reference to the African context, Toungara (1997) writes about the way traditional marriages were and still are arranged by elder male members of the extended patriarchal and patrilineal family where traditional marriages involved adult male members of the extended patriarchal and patrilineal family. These

male relatives executed a systematic transfer of women, from their natal families into their marital ones, in exchange for bride-prices that benefitted men more than women. The groom's family shared the burden of paying for the bride-price, in exchange for the future services offered by the bride, who was expected to provide social – not sexual – services to the boundless extended family. Additionally the bride-price also served to purchase the reproductive potential of the bride; it also compensated the bride's family for the loss of labor, and potential income. In other words, the women's families sell their "rights" to benefiting from the brides when they receive the negotiated bride-price. This practice persists in Zimbabwe. According to Nyathi (2001), in Zimbabwe, "marriage is not between two individuals but between two families. Each family consist[s] of many relatives, who [have] a role to play in the marriage contract. Further, each family [is] a constituent part of a larger family embracing the living dead" (2001, 109). The intricate involvement of the family makes marriage a more socially and economically inclusive unit that places more burdens on women than men. The payment of bride-price by the husbands' families unfairly obligates married women to their marital families, making marriage a hierarchical power structure that disadvantages women, while simultaneously privileging men.

Traditionally, extended families were sustained by the collective familial production, whereby kinship groups worked together and shared economic wealth (see, for example, Nkomo 1998 and Mikell 1997 for related discussions.) With the advent of the Western nuclear type of family, some families are beginning to move away from kinship dependence. However, given the current health problems discussed above, and the absence of any functional, national social security or welfare system, many relatives find themselves having financially support their kin in Zimbabwe. Therefore, because of their professional and economic statuses, relative to those of most in the clan, middle class women are expected to be major financial providers for the extended family.

Women are particularly more engaged in economically, domestically, socially, and emotionally taking care of orphaned children as well as the deceased's other surviving dependents. For example, if a woman's brother dies, it is her duty, as the (employed) sister, to look after the deceased's wife and children. She must also take over looking after the parents, whom the deceased brother, as the employed and married son, was traditionally supposed to have been looking after financially. Similarly, it is the duty of the daughter-in-law to look after her in-laws, especially sick or aged ones, socially and physically. Such family members require medical attention and financial upkeep. Such obligations are met with surprisingly little opposition, probably due to the effectiveness of gender socialization processes in Zimbabwe. Even if their children could afford it, most medical insurance companies do not accept their applications due to their ages, pre-existing medical conditions, and their medical histories. Additionally, the government does not provide targeted financial support for the old or the unemployed.

The above scenario characterizes the general state of the extended family's impact on gainfully employed women. The women leaders in this study are no exception to these gender role expectations, especially the married ones. Because of dual positions in both their maiden families and their married families, married women are burdened by gender roles and expectations. The persistence of the significance of race in women's private and public lives ensures that twenty-first century black women leaders in Zimbabwe are not only continuously confronting the challenges brought about by the male-dominated, Western-patterned work places, but those caused by their affiliation to the black racial group.

Results

In an effort to excavate some of the major challenges faced by women leaders in the higher education sector of Zimbabwe, the leaders were asked what their biggest family responsibilities were and what they perceived as their major career-related problems. The women leaders cited extended family responsibilities, looking after ill family members, looking after young and elderly family members, and husband-related responsibilities as constituting their major challenges. In sharing some of their major responsibilities, they also discussed the impact of the extended family on their professional work.

In the feminist spirit of giving voice to the participants, the section below presents an excerpt from the interview data regarding the women's responses about their family responsibilities. The only editing that has been done is technical, in an effort to be fair to the participants. The substance of the responses has remained intact, and their vocabulary choices have largely been left untouched. The only changes made to some of their vocabulary concern some terms that are typical of Zimbabwean English that I replaced with American equivalents, for American audiences. For example, the term "Vice Chancellor" is used more frequently in Zimbabwe than in the US, where the term "President" is more commonly used for the chief executive officer of a university.

Additionally, some of the nouns that easily identify the respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms. For example, some of the women leaders mentioned the names of their supervisors or subordinates, in both complimentary and non-complimentary contexts. Such proper nouns and those of organizations have been omitted in this report, in an effort to retain the intended anonymity of the respondents. This effort was made so that I could

protect my generous participants who trusted me with their personal and private information, thereby helping to maintain our mutual trust. Because victimization is a reality in work places, I avoided disclosing the names or positions of those who were not given complimentary comments in the study.

The Women's Voices

Many of the women mentioned the challenges they face in trying to juggle the multifarious traditional gender roles of caregiver, mother, wife, daughter/sister in law, and simply as the female relative, while simultaneously playing the multiple roles of female professional leadership. Their comments generally related to issues of reproduction, heterosexuality, the private/public sphere dichotomy, and the exchange of women among males.

Sarudzai: Extended Motherhood

Sarudzai, a married woman and mother of two who is a top administrative program director in a university, mentioned some of the reproductive and child rearing roles embedded in Zimbabwean motherhood, one that expects middle class females to "adopt" children of family members who cannot afford to send their children to good schools. Additionally, given the abnormally high death rates of child bearing women and men, surviving relatives have to step in. She responded:

> My biggest family responsibilities are to bring up my children, nieces, nephews and young cousins, so that they can look after themselves, look after older members of the family, and become useful citizens of this country. Besides transporting them back and forth—to and fro all those different school—related activities, I have to take them to hospitals, rural homes, townships as well as to other relatives' homes when a close relation of ours is sick.

Sarudzai's experiences of all-embracing extended motherhood roles, including those of being the extended family's soccer-mum, were elaborated on by other female leaders.

Kundai: Nanny and Nurse, Nurturer and Caregiver

Kundai was the highest ranking woman administrator in Zimbabwe's Ministry of Education, and she also expounded on roles related to being a traditional married woman. Discussing the challenges of simultaneously meeting the never-ending demands of traditional indigenous husbands and in-laws, Kundai said:

> My biggest family responsibility is playing nanny and nurse. I am always caring for sick and even fit people at home. You know, men are helpless people; they have no common sense. It is very hard to look after them, whether they are ill or well. Having a husband actually gives you more stress than not having one. You would think that he would be able to help you out with managing the children and his parents and relatives, but no. He actually expects you to look after him, too; and don't think he does not expect you to cater to his relatives in addition!

The national HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is responsible for many deaths and sicknesses affecting almost every family, was a common theme among the conversations. Many never mentioned epidemic by name – out of respect for the suffering – especially given the still prevailing stigma associated with HIV/AIDS sufferers. Additionally, the service-providing role of many married women who care not only for their husbands and immediate family members, but also for the husband's relatives, was a common theme in many of the women's statements.

Tambu: A Good Wife: Heterosexuality and Related Expectations

Tambu, a vice president for academic affairs whose children are adults, discussed the pressures she faces from the extended family, which expects a "good wife" to join her husband working in a neighboring country. Discussing traditional patriarchal expectations of a heterosexual wife, Tambu said:

> I am also lucky that my husband lives outside the country; that gives me more time to do my work properly, with undivided attention. However, my in-laws and even my own relatives and friends, but especially those from my husband's side, have been giving me plenty of pressure to resign and join my husband. They say that my husband needs a wife to take care of him and to support him so that he can succeed in his work, especially in a foreign country. But it is hard for me to give up such a wonderful career and become a housewife. I am not resolved about this family versus work conflict, yet.

Extended family expectations and demands in this patriarchal society, where societal institutions and functions are organized around the needs and habits of males, seem to disadvantage those women who break into the traditionally male roles of leadership in the public sphere. Some of the demands seem to be geared toward putting and keeping heterosexual women in the traditional role of supporting their husbands at the expense of their own career advancement.

Kundai: A good daughter and daughter-in-law.

While we might be able to rationalize such expectations from the husband's relatives in terms of the advantages they gain from the unequal partnership, it is more difficult to understand why the women's families would support such oppressive and subordinating roles for their daughters. Probably it is because they are socialized to stay within the established cultural gender power relations. These unequal power relations are, in part, perpetuated by the customary marriage system prevalent in Zimbabwe. Kundai, a married woman, discussed some of the challenges that arise from this system of patriarchal exchange of women, a system that requires married women to serve the in-laws and the rest of the husband's extended family. Describing her typical weekends, she said:

> During weekends, instead of relaxing or catching up on some of my reading and research, I find myself ferrying one relative from my house to another relative's house. They all expect me to take them to the hospital to see all the relatives who are sick; and, these days - as you know- there is always someone sick [from HIV/AIDS-related illnesses] at each of the [three largest Harare] hospitals. As the daughter-in-law, you know that my husband's whole family expects me to organize and run the show for them. My husband becomes totally useless and is never there to carry out some of the family responsibilities.

The double oppression brought about by the traditional marriage transaction makes it imperative for the women's maiden families to support the in-laws even if their support prejudices their own daughter.

Bvumai: Service provider.

The lack of support from husbands in executing family responsibilities places a heavy burden on female professionals who neither have time to relax or catch up on their reading nor time to do some of the work that they inevitably have to carry home. Professional female leaders who are married do not have enough control over one of their most precious resources – time. Addressing the same topic, Bvumai, a senior level administrator in the head office of the department of education, talked about the multiple burdens that professional married women face while trying to balance family and professional demands. She said:

> My biggest family responsibilities are looking after the children and my elderly in-laws. My husband is the oldest child in the family; therefore, we have to look after everybody else. As you know, his family responsibilities all fall on me. Being the eldest daughter-in-law, I have become the *de facto* mother of the whole of his big family, the extended family, on my part. Therefore, my biggest problem is really to manage the home and family environments while leaving time to perform my [equally demanding] professional duties.

Taurai: Nurturer

Along the same lines, Taurai, a senior professor and program coordinator, talked about the traditional feminine roles of nurturer, care giver, and mother, and how they manifest themselves within the context of the extended family. This single mother of one said:

> I guess my biggest family responsibilities include childcare and helping to educate my nieces and nephews. I am also the one who takes care of my parents. I come from a large extended family network, and I have to look after several of my relatives. For example, since you have been in my house this evening, I have received several telephone calls related to two of my cousins who are seriously ill in hospital. They are both so ill that it is just a matter of time before something (death) happens. We are just waiting. My aunt is actually staying with them at the hospital. I also take care of and comfort my friends, you know. If something happens to them, I have to be there to help. My friend's children are like my own. Some of them actually prefer to come to me (aunt Taurai) with their problems than to go to their parents!

In addition to the typical extended family, Taurai's kinship network includes her close friends, *(madzisahwira*) whom she assists in resolving both marital and child-related problems. She has to juggle all these kinship responsibilities while performing her professorial duties, which include research, writing, service and teaching. Undoubtedly, the biggest extended family burden for professional women relates to the time consuming nature of the family responsibilities.

Yevedzo: Boundless extended family hostess

Yevedzo, the most seasoned administrator who is a very influential board member of a major Zimbabwean university, discussed some of her feminine roles of nurturer and care giver within her own extended family network. Her story illuminates some of the experiences of professional women as they negotiate the conflicting demands of both the private and public spheres, particularly in relation to constantly providing room and board to the extended family. Relaxing in her armchair, Yevedzo said:

> I come from a large family of nine children, two parents, and numerous nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles and cousins. Therefore, although I have just the one child, my house is always full of family members. I take in most of my elderly family members when they are ill, because I just know it is my duty to do that. Besides, most of my family members live overseas, as you know. So, I find myself ferrying them from one doctor to another and so forth. Moreover, as you know when one person is ill, many relatives from the rural homes as well as others from out-of-town come to see and to tend to the sick person. Naturally, they would like to live at the house where the sick person is staying, or, where they can get easy transportation to the hospital. Therefore, at times, I might have about fifteen people staying in my house. As well, the guests always need to be ferried from one place to another. Besides hospital visitations, they always have several other relatives to see in different residential areas. If I do not take them to see their other sick relatives, those relations will visit my house, too!

The extended family members are entitled to expect personal services, such as transportation to wherever they want to go, from their middle class female relations. This is in line with the traditional family obligations and connectedness wherein family members should help each other. Nevertheless, because most of the rural and proletarian relatives have never worked in upper level professional jobs, they are not always sympathetic to the needs of professional relatives; moreover, women are expected to perform supportive roles that supposedly give them more flexibility at work. Alternatively, when they know that somebody is a "manager," their picture of the corresponding work demands is even more skewed.

Yevedzo talked about related conflicts between the demands of the extended family and that of the uncongenial colonial-based work place. She continued:

> Sometimes I get urgent telephone calls at work, from relatives calling me from the bus station to can pick them up! Because most of them reside in the rural areas, and have never worked outside of their homes, they are not quite familiar with the demands of the corporate type of work. In fact, some of them think that because I am a top manager, I can miss work anytime, hop in the car, go run my personal errands, and go back to work—with no consequences!

Chiedza: Boundless extended family employer

Still on the subject of rather unusual challenges faced by women leaders, Chiedza, a married woman who is an associate vice president, discussed the unusual impact of the extended family on her middle class status and professionalism. Referring to the issue of being pressured to practice nepotism, Chiedza said:

> In my job, I could say my biggest problem is to say no to relatives and kinship- based friends who refer their children or friends to me for work. Although I feel terrible about not being always able to help them, I just have to be professional and appoint the most qualified persons. Even when the most qualified is one of my distant relatives, I make sure that they get a fair entry level salary, because I do not want to disadvantage anybody else.

Nepotism is shunned more in Zimbabwe than it is in other countries where both nepotism and "cronyism" are more common at high levels in various institutions. Therefore, the pressures from extended family members who are not well aware of the potential problems such employment patterns may cause weigh heavily on female professionals. They do not want to seem unhelpful to their kin; yet, at the same time, they have to remain faithful to their professional ethics.

Raviro: The demands of the boundless extended family extend beyond geographical boundaries

Raviro, a mid-level administrator, gave us a good breakdown of how she has to distribute her monthly income among her extended family members still living in Zimbabwe. A tenured professor at her home university, she has had to convert her originally two-year sabbatical allowance into an indefinite leave of absence to allow her to work at a university in neighboring South Africa. Her husband has also done the same; so have many academics from Zimbabwean universities. Raviro was first interviewed in 1999 and was re-interviewed as one of the follow-up participants in 2003, 2005, and 2007. This is her partial financial breakdown:

> The economic situation in Zimbabwe is so bad that my husband and I have no choice but to remit money every month to several family members back home. On both sides of the family, we have several siblings who are still working in Zimbabwe and can hardly afford to buy a weekly supply of food using their meager salaries. Mind you, these are not uneducated people; they each have at least one college degree, In fact, my sister-in-law, as you know, is a Departments Chair at the University of Zimbabwe. She is among the most highly paid professionals in the country; yet, she cannot even afford her daily bus fare to work, let alone maintain a functional car! Of course now she is desperately seeking a job in the diaspora community. Therefore, we realize that it is our duty to support them, as we cannot delegate that duty to anyone else. So, we decided to send each of the siblings a stable stipend each month; of course, we have had to adjust the amounts upward every so often because of the incredible current inflation rates. At the moment, we send each of them five hundred rand [about US $85 at that time] per month. I have two siblings and my husband has three at home. He also has nieces and nephews whom we send about half of that amount each,per month. In fact we decided to adopt one of our nieces and bring her to study at my university because we realized sending her to local Zimbabwean universities was a waste of time and would only cause her multiple other problems. Anyway, besides the siblings and their children, we obviously have to send money to our parents! Two years ago, we both had two parents each; we sent each couple two hundred dollars. Unfortunately, both our fathers have since passed away. Nevertheless, we simply decided to continue with the tradition of sending the same amount to our mothers. They have already suffered such a big loss; we really did not want them to feel an added financial disadvantage! [Expressed in good humor]

The Zimbabweans in the diaspora have been pivotal to the survival of the nation, despite the almost totally broken-down economic and political state that has existed especially in the past five years. The government, national, and international organizations have recognized double sword nature of the brain-drain, which deprives the nation of the educated and skilled labor-force, yet at the same time provides life- and nation-saving economic benefits, (Chetsanga 2008). The recent power-sharing agreement that the leaders of Zimbabwe signed on September, 15, 2008, recognizes the centrality of the economic implications of the diaspora community in the development of the New Zimbabwe, (http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/sep16a_2008.html).

After giving me the detailed breakdown of 'immediate' family responsibilities, Raviro went on to tell me about what she called 'other' family members and relatives. In this category, she included blood and marriage relatives such outside hers or her husband's direct blood siblings and parents. The latter group is referred to as the 'immediate' family.

> Of course these immediate family members are the ones we have to support on a regular monthly basis – without fail. But, every month, we rotate the support we give to other family members and relatives. For instance, we obviously prioritize those who are in mostneed and those who do not have children in the Diaspora. Every month, there are a few relatives who are very sick and need money for dialysis, chemo, drugs, hospitalization, and even just doctor's visits. We have to send money to them for such things. And, almost every fortnight, someone in the close family circle dies; we have to send money for to cover the funeral expenses, transportation of relatives and other mourners as well expenses for feeding all the people who attend the funeral. That is almost a sure occurrence, especially because of the dreaded disease that is ravaging Zimbabwe.

In response to my probing of how they manage to look after all these extended family members in addition to their immediate family circle members, Raviro said:

> One way we have found really helps lower our family expenses is to unofficially 'adopt' a young relative and bring them here to go to school, work for us or work for some of our friends. That way, we know we can focus on one child from an aunt's family for example. We will not be really

> expected to contribute to too much else if we have relieved them of the burden of one child! Or, better still, if the 'adopted' child is earning a living wage, then we impress upon her or him that a certain amount of money be sent back home every month. If possible, I supervise the remittance myself just to make sure. This is especially easy if the young relative works for me or for someone I know.

After hearing this breakdown and trying to make quick calculations in US dollars, I was tempted to ask if Raviro and her husband were the only well-to-do siblings in their respective families. With a seriousness that showed genuine conviction about her feelings toward her family obligations, as well as the deeply entrenched belief in collectivism, she said:

> Irrespective of how much our own kids might need for this and that, or how much we might want to buy a luxury car, we have to meet our responsibilities first and foremost. Looking after our family members is a duty that cannot be delegated to anyone else. No matter how many affording family members we have; we must do our full part. We have to act as if we were the only ones who have to look after them; our consciences are clear if we send them enough money every month to take care of their basic needs. We cannot transfer the responsibility to anyone else! Especially with parents, imagine if they had given us half hearted support as we were growing up! Remember they gave birth to one child at a time! Even I, who has twins, understands that each child comes out separately—as a full person! There are no short cuts to bearing and raising children. Why should there be short cuts to looking after our parents and family members? No doubt, we do share some of the big project responsibilities with other siblings in Europe and the US. If we have to buy our parents a car or something like that, we might get together and ask for contributions. Or, if we have to prepare for a memorial service for a relative, we might need all people involved so that each person can make their rightful contribution, for instance. Otherwise, regular maintenance funds are totally up to each person's discretion depending on what each person feels he / she wishes to and can contribute.

The willingness to self-sacrifice and to place a higher value on the needs of the collective over the individual ones was one of the more striking themes witnessed throughout the interviews. Raviro concluded this part of the conversation by emphasizing that she knows how much a lot of people depend on her being able to continue to earn a good salary to afford to take care of her obligations.

> You know, sometimes when I face all that frustration and exploitation at work, I feel like I really cannot take this anymore; but, right then, arrive a phone call or an email from some family member asking for help or informing me of some situation at home! That is a wake-up call that gets me out of the nostalgia of the good old days when I worked at the local university in my home country and was treated with much more respect and reverence Yes, I have to continue with the struggle because too many people are banking on me to help them sustain basic life!

Overall, the female leaders in the study discussed some of the challenges posed by their membership to the extended black family system of Zimbabwe. These challenges largely stem from traditional black cultural expectations of feminine gender roles and heterosexual wife and daughter/sister-in-law duties. In addition to the common traditional female roles, the women also discussed the impact of the extended family on their already stretched financial situations. Further, they also mentioned the challenges of negotiating the conflicts between their family duties and their work obligations. Finally, the women leaders also discussed the difficulties they faced as a result of the social pressure to practice nepotism, which they received from the extended family.

Discussion

The participants discussed some of the family responsibilities that affect their professional work. Their characterizations indicate that the socially constructed systems of race, nationality, class, gender, and sexual orientation intersect, in unique patterns, to shape their experiences station. The women leaders' experiences are likely to be quite different from those of women leaders in other social and geographical locations. The section below provides a discussion of how black Zimbabwean extended family experiences exemplified in the previous section affect the participants' professional work~~s~~ lives.

It is important to note that the interpretations and analyses made in this section, although informed by the evidence gathered from the women leaders, are the author's. None of the women in the study resentfully or seriously 'complained' that they were being burdened by the extended family; they did not say that they felt it was unfair for them to care for their relatives. .In fact, the way they discussed the issue seemed to suggest that they considered it their duty to look after their extended family members, and that it was just an inherent part of their

lives to do so. This could be one manifestation of the Zimbabwean philosophy of humaneness, (*Ubuntu/* (*Unhu)* whose expectation is that people are all connected and should treat each other as well as they would treat their own close family members, and that a community is more functional if all members are doing well. Moreover, during the interview conversations, the author hardly took note of the prevalence of the references to the extended family as an important part of the respondents' lives. It was after completing the inventory of all the issues raised by the participants that it became apparent that all the women had mentioned something related to their extended families being a part of their major responsibilities. Therefore, the interpretations are based on analyses of their voices, the literature, as well as by the author's insider knowledge as a black Zimbabwean woman educator of middle class status.

Zimbabwe has a colonial legacy of racism. Gutrel (2001, 3) characterizes racism in the United States as a "bizarre social invention, a public fiction masquerading as physical fact. Everyone is carefully […] scrutinized and then classified according to the imprecise dictates of certain visual cues (namely skin color)." In Zimbabwe, black people form the numerical majority and have the political power. Until recently, however, as is the case in many former British colonies in Africa, (internal corruption and mismanagement notwithstanding) real economic power rests with multi-national companies. Power was distributed primarily on the basis of race, which was based on the "restrictive binaries of racial blackness or whiteness. Race and color are, indeed, politically and socially constructed," (Chitiga 2002, 4). Nevertheless, the economic and political situations have plummeted in the past ten years, bringing the country almost to a halt, mainly due to mismanagement and corruption among the nationalist leaders. The former group dictates the distribution of society's valued resources, making certain that the hierarchical power differentials favor members of the elite classes while disadvantaging over ninety percent of the population. Therefore, in many ways, while the power hierarchies of the colonial era stratified people mainly the basis of race, the post-colonial era discriminates against the poorer classes, and those without close familial-/tribal-ties, or cronies in top government or business positions.

Further, the historical underrepresentation of blacks, and particularly black females, in leadership positions of various sectors of society, is a legacy of European colonialism as well as of patriarchal indigenous cultures. Consequently, black Zimbabwean women have been largely kept in inferior positions, both in the public and domestic spheres, based on the power hierarchies imposed upon them. Furthermore, within the Black Zimbabwean culture, women are generally expected to assume subordinate roles to men. These expectations might vary from one ethnic group to another. It is worth noting that the systems of race, ethnicity, and culture are intricately related and overlap in many ways in their influences of the lives of women in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the discussion in this section should be understood within the context of intersecting contextual factors.

As black, African, and Zimbabwean women, the participants participate in kinship systems that place very high value on collectivism and the extended family. Maphosa (1998) discusses the importance of collectivism and kinship alliances in shaping African societies. Given their socialization in extended family systems and the societal expectations, the participants find it almost the norm to look after their sick and well relatives. For example, they would be generally expected to value a mother-in-law's request to be picked up from the bus station higher than a colleague's request for an ordinary meeting. Similarly, they would also be expected to entertain their guest relatives in the evenings, instead of locking themselves away in their home offices or bedrooms to complete a work project. Therefore, extended family responsibilities of black Zimbabwean women can and do infringe on the women leaders' professional time.

The political, social, economic and cultural environments in which people live contribute toward shaping their daily and aggregate experiences. Narayan (1996, 405) proposes: "that the scope of feminist struggles needs to include not only contestations of *particular practices and institutions* detrimental to women, but additionally to include challenges to the *larger pictures* of Nation, National History, and Cultural Traditions that serve to sustain and justify these practices and institutions." The national, historical and cultural circumstances of Zimbabwe have a large bearing on the familial and professional experiences of the women leaders in the study. One significant national challenge currently facing Zimbabwe is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Several families, institutions, business organizations, and governmental agencies have lost people to the dreaded pandemic.

Therefore, because of temporal, national factors, the women leaders in the study find themselves faced with the unique challenges in their endeavors to help family and kin who are affected by HIV/AIDS. Such practices take away from the women's personal time, and finances.. Additionally, these extended family responsibilities also have significant consequences on their professional responsibilities, schedules, performance, availability, and trajectories. ([Zimbabwe] Poverty Reduction Forum). Some of these effects are not necessarily unique to Zimbabwean women; however, they differ mostly in the prevalence and frequency of the extended family demands as well as the cultural expectations that obligate women to cooperate. The situation is exacerbated by the severe economic challenges that Zimbabwe is currently facing, where over 70% of the population is unemployed, (aneki.com 2008). Those that are

employed earn very little, and their wages are not guaranteed, as the employers, including the universities, often find themselves unable to pay their employees due to the chaotic financial situation.

Further, unpredictable weather patterns, which are characterized by droughts and floods, have rendered subsistence farming a very undependable means of livelihood. In such cases, the impoverished families have no alternatives but to look to their traditional ways of family survival and network systems, which involve dependence on the extended family. Therefore, those gainfully employed relatives, especially the middle class, are generally culturally compelled to fend for the extended family and to share the resources they might have, albeit limited and already stretched. The women leaders in the study represent such middle class relatives; thus, their nationality, culture, and historical backgrounds intersect to shape their experiences.

"Cultural constructs of gender are conveyed through beliefs and practices that prevail in diverse social domains," (Bonvillain 2001, 231.) The different sex-gender systems that prevail in most patriarchal states, including Zimbabwe, allocate different family, social, work, and other roles to women and men (see, for example, Tong 1998 and Nicholson 1997 for detailed discussions on how the sex-gender system oppress women). In Zimbabwe, women are generally expected to be the primary care givers both in the home~~s~~ (as mothers, sisters, grandmothers and wives), and in the public sphere (as nurses, human resource managers, flight attendants, and teachers). As Tong (1998, 95) observes, "women are continuously working, both in the home and at the workplace, yet, they remain subordinate to men, both economically, due to unequal pay, as well as socially, due to unequal gender power distribution. Most of the women leaders in the study were similarly subordinate to their husbands and to their male supervisors."

The experiences reported by the women leaders in the study indicate that their pivotal roles in the extended family network are shaped by their female gender. For example, as daughters-in-law, they are expected to take care of their in-laws whenever they need assistance, even if it means the participants have to forfeit a professional work engagement. This is typically not the case for men, who have the prerogative to say 'no' to similar requests from their own parents and in-laws. Women are expected to be helpful, nurturing, cooperative and self-neglecting. As Beauvoir (1989, 696) observed, independent women are "torn between [their] professional interests and their [personal lives]" and "find it difficult to strike a balance [without] a price of concessions, sacrifices, [and] acrobatics, which require [them] to be in a constant state of tension." Indeed, the enormous familial and societal demands unfairly placed on women indicate the pervasiveness of sexual inequality, gender discrimination, and male dominance in Zimbabwe (see also Hartmann 1997; Tong 1998; Williams 1997; and Nicholson 1997 for similar discussions of women's inequality in families in other cultures.)

In addition to their marital gender roles, several of the women leaders reported that they play central roles in the lives of their nieces and nephews, and in the lives of their friends' children. Similarly, as daughters, they are obliged to tend to their sick parents and, as mothers, they have to transport their children to and from school and to the doctor's. As sisters, they are obligated to look after their deceased brothers' and sisters' children. As aunts, it is their duty to socialize and groom their nieces and nephews. As women relatives, they are expected to attend, cook and be actively involved at funerals. These gender roles are similar to what Massey, Hahn and Sekulić (1995, 360) found in their study of women in Socialist Yugoslavia. They found that women in the paid labor force perform an unpaid "second shift" when they get home only to find themselves faced with various domestic tasks to perform. These and related responsibilities can and do take up some of their professional work time, thus limiting them from maximizing their work and private time.

Intricately related to their gender roles are their roles as heterosexual women, especially those with spouses in the same culture. Sex-gender roles place many burdens on heterosexual married women in the Zimbabwean context. Married women are expected to cater to their immediate families, i.e. their husbands and children, and to the demands of the in-laws, in addition to their own non-marital relatives. Given the workings of the boundless extended family in Zimbabwe, the "in-law group" encompasses not only the blood relatives of the husbands, but also the totem and other fictive kin. Secondly, because of the traditional marriage system that requires the groom's family to 'pay' a bride-price token to the bride's family, the expectations of the in-laws to receive support and assistance from the married woman are even greater. The demands of the in-law groups are culturally superior to those of the woman's own natal family, and even to any other demands that a woman might have. For instance, if a mother-in-law asks her daughter-in-law to give her a ride, the daughter -in-law is expected to drop whatever she is doing in order to serve her mother-in-law. If she fails to react appropriately, she might be labeled uncooperative, not subservient enough, and/or disrespectful, regardless of her reasons for not honoring the request. The in-laws opinions of the married woman bear great influence on how the husband interacts with the wife, both in a positive and negative sense. Therefore, if she is asked to drop her aunt-in-law at the vegetable market, for instance, she is not expected to ordinarily put her professional duties first, if she wants a favorable relationship with her husband and his

family. For married women, the in-laws can provide both the support they need to enjoy harmonious marriages on the one hand, and the challenges that might lead to break-ups of marriages on the other.

The expectations placed on women and men in heterosexual marriages are quite different, yet they are consistent with the inequalities found in many other domestic and public arenas. The unfair cultural obligations placed on women prejudice them while simultaneously privileging their male counterparts. For example, while wives are obligated to cater to the needs of the in-laws, husbands do not have such strict obligations. They have a choice to oblige or not, and they do not face the same negative social or emotional consequences that wives might if they make the same choices. Such differences are characteristic of the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society, which privileges and advantages males over females. In support of the patriarchy is the traditional practice of bride-price. As discussed earlier, prevailing, traditional marriage practice demands that groom's family pay the bride-price as a token of both appreciation and compensation. However, some men and their families perceive this practice as signifying a commodity exchange between payers, i.e. males on the husband's side, on the one hand, and the payment recipients—the wife's male relatives—on the other (see Rubin 1997). This exchange somehow gives the husbands and their families the 'license' to treat their wives as possessions that should serve them completely. The husbands' families may feel they are entitled to receiving (non-sexual) favors and other benefits from their female in-law, while the latter generally feel they are obligated to fulfill the social needs and expectations of their husbands' families. Therefore, women who do not conduct themselves accordingly have to be prepared to suffer any negative consequences, including divorce, abuse, shunning, reprimand, and lack of acceptance.

In addition, their traditional roles in child rearing and child bearing make the women responsible for the health, well-being, education, and other daily needs of their children and those of some of their relatives, too. Discussing sexual orientation and the familial division of labor, Chodorow (1997, 195) wrote:

> It produces socially gendered women and men enter into asymmetrical heterosexual relationships; it produces men who react to, fear, and act superior to women, and who put most their energies into the non-familial work world and do not parent. Finally, it produces women who turn their energies toward nurturing and caring for children—in turn reproducing the sexual and familial division of labor in which women mother.

Chodorow's statement captures what women in this study shared with the researcher. For example, Kundai said, "men are helpless people. . . My husband is never there to carry out some of the family responsibilities." Similarly, Bvumai said that all her husband's family responsibilities fall on her as the wife and daughter-in-law. The unfair division of labor was reported by most of the women in the study.

A majority of the women have to drop and pick up their children at school, at the doctor's, and at places for extra-mural activities. As mothers, they are expected to be the primary caregivers of their children and husbands; thus, they are expected to prioritize their families at the expense of their jobs. On the other hand, their husbands are likely to be free from childcare duties; thus, they can excel at work without worrying about family demands. Although most middle--class women have domestic help, they remain the central caregivers for their families.

As members of the middle class, the women leaders are expected to play a variety of important roles in their extended families. By virtue of being in influential work positions, some of their relatives expect them to provide or facilitate the employment of other needy extended family members. For instance, some of the women leaders who hold more managerial-type positions reported being asked to employ several relatives and friends. Such expectations put the women in a double bind, where they are doomed if they honor the requests and doomed if they do not. It is possible that if a leader employs her relative, the relative might fail to perform satisfactorily and then the leader might be forced to fire the employee. In most cases, the fired employee will not paint a good picture of the woman leader to the extended family, thereby causing ill feelings for the former among the relatives.

Another outcome of her employment of a relative might be that her professional colleagues may accuse her of nepotism, even if the relative is the most qualified among the particular job applicants. On the other hand, should the woman manager decline to employ the relative, she would then be accused of being selfish or uncooperative. Furthermore, she could also be accused of being unwilling to help other family members to "prosper," thus subscribing to the "pull relatives down" syndrome. Therefore, being in middle management positions that are viewed by extended families as "influential" can bring extra pressure on the women leaders.

Additionally, being in the general middle class type of profession increases the economic problems that the women leaders have. It is likely that the women in the study are among the few highly paid people in the extended family network. Due to the cultural collectivism and community orientation, the female leaders might be expected to contribute significantly toward meeting the medical bills, funeral expenses, and other extended family financial obligations. Such financial responsibilities can cause the women to have extra economic hardships, which could be worsened by the generally inadequate salaries that such women are paid.

The financial needs of the extended family present economic problems that stretch the already mediocre to low salaries that the women leaders earn, thus adding another layer of burden on them. Many of the participants reported taking up extra income-generating activities in an attempt to supplement their incomes so that they may cover the financial needs of their immediate families and those of their extended families. Especially given the economic crisis that has prevailed in Zimbabwe in the past decade, more women leaders are turning to gardening, chicken farming, informal trading in imported goods, knitting, and large-scale farm activities. Adding such involving income-generating projects to their already full schedules can only exacerbate the challenges that middle-class women face as they continue to thrive to fulfill their extended family obligations.

Because of the incredible socio-economic burdens that have plagued Zimbabwe in the past decade, where many have lost sources of income, yet faced astronomical inflation and an unprecedented economic depression there has been a huge flight of the professional class from Zimbabwe into many countries, especially the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the neighboring countries. (See Chetsanga 2008; Shinder 1998.) Some of the women leaders interviewed have taken extended sabbatical leave from their home universities to go and work in neighboring South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique. The higher education diaspora family has grown exponentially in the past five years, and follow-up interviews with participants indicate that one of the major effects of the economic crunch in Zimbabwe has been to increase the burdens imposed by extended family responsibilities. Raviro's story, for example, illustrates the persistent burdens of the boundless extended family, regardless of the geographical location of the female leader. Her story reflects the experiences of many others in similar situations; they remit significant amounts of their income to Zimbabwe to assist those kin who have remained in the ailing nation, irrespective of how much self-deprivation that causes to the 'diasporian.' Raviro's experiences, especially the self-sacrifices that she seems to take for granted and without complaints, illustrate how deeply entrenched the Zimbabwean philosophy of connectedness and collectivism seems to be among those socialized in the culture. The needs of the immediate family, especially the superficial ones that young children might have, are often secondary to those of the larger family. For example, if Raviro had a choice between purchasing some expensive toys, shoes, or supplementary education materials for her own children on the one hand, and providing school fees for a member of the extended family on the other, the latter would take precedence over the former.

The extended kinship system places economic demands in addition to the time impositions it puts on the women leaders, both in the private and public spheres. These constraints place serious burdens on the women's professional trajectories as they often find themselves torn between catering to the numerous demands of their extended family members and performing those activities that will catapult their career success and advancement. For instance, in order to fulfill the scholarly demands of academia, they have to conduct research, make presentations, and produce publications in addition to providing quality teaching and advising to their students and performing the administrative tasks inherent in leading their respective departments.

As a result of the catastrophic economic situation in Zimbabwe, most of the women leaders also reported low salaries as one of their major problems. Therefore, the added "burden" of providing financial support to the boundless extended family stretches their budgets even further. This can have a negative impact on their professional trajectories as the women leaders are compelled to concentrate on extra income-generating activities that may interfere with their professional responsibilities. Moreover, in addition to the time-related demands of the boundless extended family, pursuing other sources of income is likely to take the women leaders away from their work even more. Consequently, increased absenteeism, uncompleted tasks, unmet deadlines, and lack of total dedication to work may have negative influences on their professional advancement. (See Maphosa 2007)

Conclusions

The boundless extended family system of Zimbabwe affects the professional experiences of black women leaders in the higher education sector of Zimbabwe. The discussion has illustrated the intricacy of the women's dual positions in the boundless extended family network and in the professional arena. Hence, women leaders face challenges in both the culturally governed private arena and the more western-based public spheres; they are continuously negotiating compromises to resolve the conflicting demands and expectations of the two. Especially given the deteriorating economic situation in Zimbabwe, many of them have no choice but to stay in the workplace.

When women's lives are considered holistically, their professional, family, and private lives can be examined simultaneously, given that their lives are not experienced as separate, disjointed, fragmented or independent from each other. Private and public aspects of their lives are interdependent; women's lives operate more or less like an ecological system, which requires delicate balances to maintain the effective and efficient functioning of the whole system. A combination of personal, nuclear family, boundless extended family, as well as societal, national, and economic factors interact to influence the women's professional experiences. The intersections of their (black, African) race , their (Zimbabwean) nationality, their (female) gender, their

(predominantly hetero-) sexual orientation, and their (middle) class professional and economic statuses work simultaneously to shape the experiences of women leaders in the higher education sector of Zimbabwe. The research provides evidence to show that almost three decades after the country attained political independence, the significance of the interdependent social systems of control and stratification persists.

In order to improve the professional experiences of women leaders, it is essential to address a variety of work-related influential factors. Cultural factors are an essential part of the professional environments in which the women work. Therefore, institutions of higher education ought to enhance efforts to increase awareness and sensitivity to the challenges faced by women; the interplay between the private and public spheres in women's lives; and the support required to maximize women's potential and performance.

Effective communication between women and men can be a crucial component of the problem solving gamut that women leaders may employ. One plausible cause of the misunderstanding of and lack of appreciation for women's challenges is a lack of consciousness of institutionalized gender discrimination policies and practices as well as of culturally entrenched and 'naturalized' gender inequities prevalent in Zimbabwe. Therefore, as trail blazers, women leaders are obligated to clear as many obstacles to success as possible, for aspiring female leaders. Moreover, by virtue of their top positions, women leaders have more access to influential men who can implement the needed changes if they are convinced of the benefits such changes can bring to their institutions and to their female colleagues.

This recommendation is in line with what the high-ranking officials in the Ministry of Education stated to the author in personal communication. For instance, Dr. Michael Mambo, the permanent secretary in the Ministry, said that women ought to share their problems with men so that more men can realize some of the discrimination and unfairness that they inflict on women. He emphasized that women should initiate such conversations with men and include them in their search for solutions (1999). In the negotiations with their male counterparts, it should be understood that many of the challenges women face emanate from the patriarchal system, which privileges males and disadvantages females. Most inequalities are not caused by individual men; they are embedded in the sex-gender stratification system that discriminates against women. Therefore, negotiations with men could be productive is blame is not allotted to individuals. Given the interdependence of colleagues in the workplace, it is more beneficial for all to maximize the potential of both men and women leaders. Black feminist writers also call for the inclusion of men in resolving the systemic challenges that women face in both the public and private spheres (See Hooks 1984; Collins 1990, 1998).

Given the importance of higher education in the development of the nation, higher education institutional structures ought to encourage and support the entry and retention of women in leadership positions (Chitiga 2003) by ensuring that the environments are sensitive to the extraneous cultural demands that women face. Helpful initiatives include, but a re not limited to the provision and extension of opportunities for flexi-schedules, whereby employees may make up any lost times outside the regular work day, as well as work from home. Institutions operate within the contexts of the community and national cultures; therefore, they should not ignore the contextual constraints affecting their employees. Because of the pervasive effects of HIV/AIDS in the workplace, where almost everyone is personally affected, either through ill family members or personal illness, institutions ought to widen their social and health related benefits and responsibilities so that they assist employees in their HIV/AIDS-related struggles. Zimbabwean institutions of higher education ought to follow the examples in many private sector organizations, (e.g. Stuttafords, Nissan Clover Leaf and Crowne Plaza) where HIV/AIDS-related benefits have become fully institutionalized. Alleviating such burdens on employees simultaneously benefits the institutions as rates of absenteeism, deaths, and health-related low productivity also tend to decrease. (See Poverty Reduction Forum 2003).

Targeted professional development drives that focus on gender-sensitivity in the workplace are also likely to yield positive results for both the institutions and female employees. One such effort could focus on increasing awareness of subtle, but effective gender discrimination practices among male and female employees. Some of the gender-insensitive policies and practices found at the workplace are perpetuated by ignorance and the cultural backgrounds of the men and women who practice them. For example, if a female leader has to absent herself from meetings and other important work activities due to extended family-related demands, she may be viewed as not serious enough about her profession or as lacking the special skills needed for productive prioritization and/or successful separation of professional and personal spheres. Women's domestic obligations are often trivialized, ridiculed, and dismissed as extraneous. Such perceptions do not work favorably for women in performance evaluations. (Ironically, men who engage in familial responsibilities that might take up their work time are usually praised for being sensitive and good family men.) Therefore, without targeted educational drives, it may be easy for male supervisors and colleagues to label such criticisms of their female supervisees and colleagues, even if, ironically, their wives might be caught in very similar predicaments as the women leaders in the study. Worse, still,

other women might fail to recognize the prejudices, leaving the women leaders isolated in their protests, if they themselves understand the unfair evaluation measures in place. The measures are unfair because, while seemingly uniform, they do not take into consideration the contextual factors disadvantaging women over their male counterparts.

Especially for women, the public sphere is significantly influenced by the private one. Familial obligations usually impact on the women's execution of professional responsibilities.

Therefore, in addition to implementing changes in the public arena, Zimbabweans should also make changes in the domestic sphere. For example, on the home front, those live-in and frequent-visitor relatives ought to become more considerate of the time constraints and professional demands that women leaders face. Many women leaders mentioned that their private time is often taken up by activities involving tending to and providing hospitality services to members of the boundless extended family. More time will be freed up if physically-able family members share appropriate domestic duties with the female leaders. Similarly, the younger members of the women's relatives-in-law should cease expecting and demanding domestic services from the women leaders; instead, they should be encouraged to become considerate enough to participate fully in household chores and in providing nurturing and caring services to family members. Additionally, these younger in-laws can add simple courtesies, such as treating their sisters-in-law with new-found respect; this, in turn, can greatly enhance the emotional well-being of the women leaders.

Moreover, husbands can and should play a central role in liberating their wives of some of the extended family duties. Massey, et al. (1995, 376) observed that:

> a more equitable distribution of work in the home depends not only on the efforts of women to change their situation but also on the actions and attitudes of the men with whom they live. This would call for a new effort to educate men to improve the power of women's agency.

The genuine involvement of men in breaking the unfair patriarchal sex-gender practices has also been called for by feminists who emphasize the advantages of culturally mediated, collective, and public participation over individual female autonomy (hooks 1984 and Hill Collins 1990, 1998). For example, husbands could assist the liberation efforts of their wives by advising their parents, siblings and relatives to refrain from unnecessarily burdening their wives. If husbands take the time to explain the importance of their wives' careers to key members of the extended family network, they may assist them in decreasing their cultural expectations of the working daughter/sister-in-law. Furthermore, by showing great respect and support for their wives' autonomous use of their professional and private times, husbands could model the required behavior to demanding relatives, who may, in turn, considerably reduce their demands on the women leaders. Similarly, husbands can embrace fairer ways of sharing extended family responsibilities with their wives in more equitable ways. Given the dominant patriarchal culture prevailing in the domestic sphere in Zimbabwe, where women are considered commodities due to the marriage customs, it is not uncommon for many husbands' families to feel they have a right to demand social services from their daughters- or sisters-in law. Because families traditionally contribute toward paying a bride-price required to formalize the marriage between their male relative and the daughter-/sister-/ niece-/ cousin-in law, married women often feel hindered to communicate their frustrations regarding unfavorable behaviors exhibited by members of their husbands' families. Additionally, gaining and maintaining the favors and support of the husbands' families are crucial tenets to the maintenance of reasonably good marriages.

Massey, et al. (1995) conclude that due to their structural and patriarchal advantages, men have more power to exercise their values and make choices than women; therefore, they can more easily change the status quo if they are convinced of the benefits thereof. Men are in a privileged position to work toward the creation of less hierarchical gender relations, thus, it seems beneficial to meaningfully involve them in dialogue addressing gender equality. In addition to enlightening men about the issues affecting women, women should raise the consciousness of fellow women, in an effort to reduce those destructive intra-gender behaviors that sometimes produce equally negative consequences on the professional experiences of women leaders. Similarly, sharing information and engaging in more collective social action may increase and solidify their professional and social gains. Finally, by devising innovative ways to address the negative influences resulting from the interplay of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class, women leaders will be able to eliminate some of the barriers to successful professional advancement.

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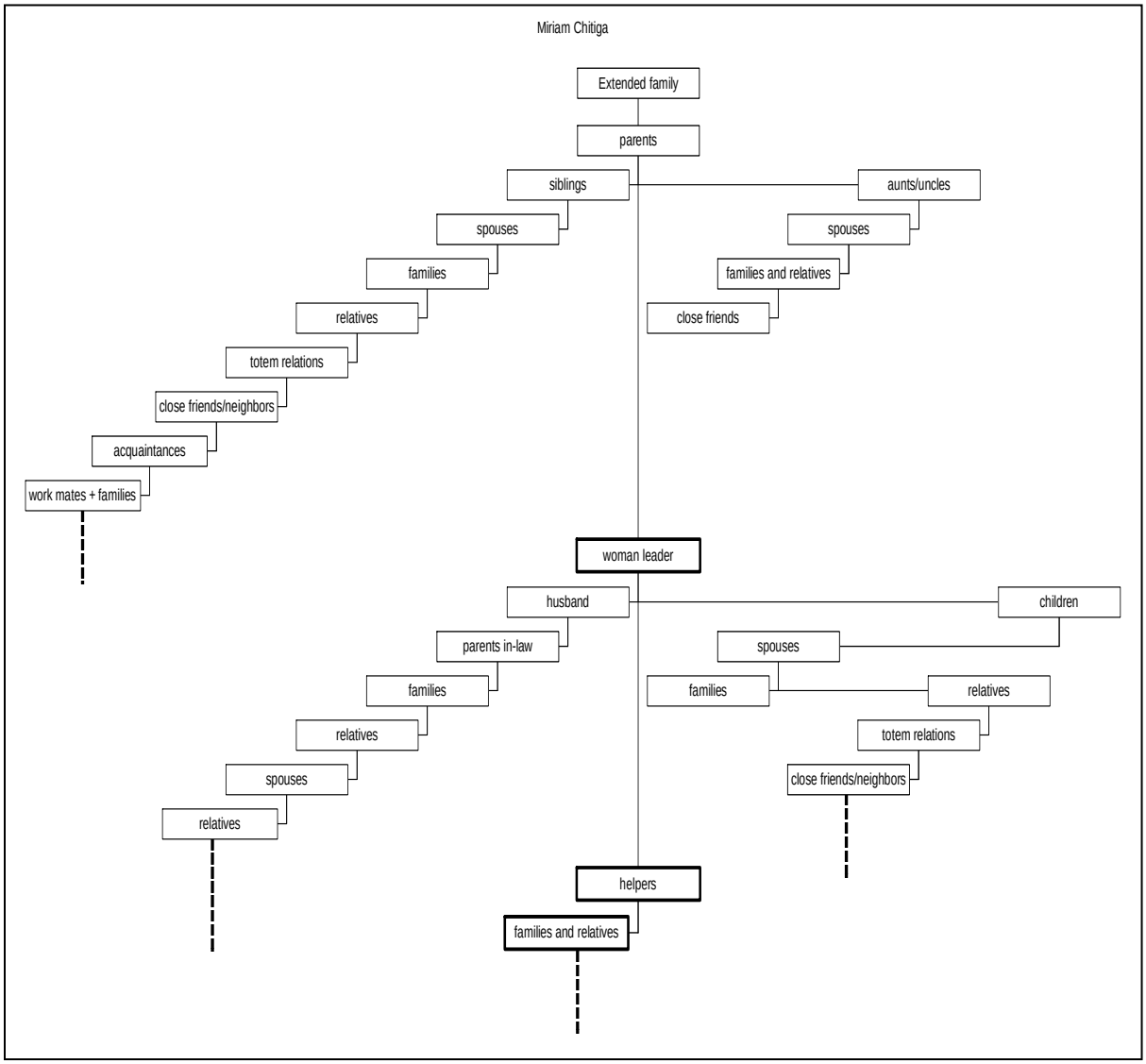
Appendix 1

The Black Zimbabwean Extended Family Chart