THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN FAMILY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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1.0   Introduction

Widespread variations in technology, education, politics, religion and culture and macro-economic issues, among others, cannot conceal the common opportunities and challenges that have affected African families in the last few decades. The family as a unit of production, consumption, reproduction, and accumulation has been profoundly impacted upon by factors largely characterised by the economic downturns. These downturns have helped in shaping the context in which families make decisions (Shimkin et al., 1978; Barnes 1993). Hence, it is critical to examine socio-political and economic contexts for academics to understand changes in African family structures and behaviour. There is widely documented literature pointing to considerable socioeconomic changes and how they continue to alter the structure of the family – in most cases away from traditional patterns to modern ones, largely initiated by the expansion of education, health care, employment, and migration.

Technological changes both produce opportunities and constraints for many African families. African families are set in political and socio-economic circumstances that are characterized by long-standing domestic dynamics including both economic vulnerability and poverty. The impact of different religions and cultures has also brought changes in the values, and norms which traditionally defined roles of members in the African family. Throughout the 1990s, current scourge of HIV and AIDS pandemic has put additional pressures on the sustainability of families and households.

Globalization has also had mixed outcomes for African families in terms of access to modern technologies, education, health facilities. While enhancing the chances of families to seize the opportunities for participation in larger economic exchanges, these demands have at the same time heightened families' vulnerability to these forces as well as pointing towards westernisation (Sudarkasa, 1996; Weinrich, 1982). Consequently, the state of the traditional cultural practices and needs is confronted by competing strains of social regeneration and economic constraints. This document generally reviews and discusses both local and international literature on issues related to traditional families. Specifically, the study looks at the changes that have occurred to traditional African family in Zimbabwe.

1.1   What is the family?

The family is a social group characterized by <u>common residence</u>, <u>economic cooperation</u> and <u>reproduction</u>[1] (Murdock, 1949). Murdock further stresses that "it includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually co-habiting adults" (pp 326).To this assertion, Murdock adds that the family is not universal but varies from society to society.

However, Murdock's definition of the family is somewhat reductionist in that it conceptualizes the family as an entity characterized only by <u>common residence</u>, <u>economic cooperation</u> and <u>reproduction</u> yet there is more to this in the structure and composition of the family. Moreover, by implication, he emphasizes procreation as one of the main elements that make up a family. In contrast, the concept of a 'family' in modern day sociological understanding need not include marriage, at least not in the sense in which it has always been understood (Mbae, 2005). For instance, single motherhood cannot be excluded in the consideration of family. In some cases marriage may never have taken place or intended. Due to the influence of globalisation, new types of families now exist. For instance, single parenthood is now common in most urbanised areas. It is therefore evident that the term family no longer means the same to all people. The exact definition may vary from time to time and from culture to culture. How society defines family as a primary group and the functions it is expected to perform are dynamic.

The concept of the African traditional family is premised on expansive kinship network. Traditionally, family organisation was based on descent groups. These groups were exogamous and were related by a series of marriage exchanges[2]. In Zimbabwe, the Ndebele and the Shona follow a patrilineal (decent through males) kinship and practice virilocality, that is, wives relocating to their husbands' homes and become part of their

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[1] Emphasis added.

[2] In line with this tradition, most of Zimbabwean society is heavily patriarchal, placing emphasis on men as those responsible for perpetuating the lineage *(dzinza)* in the African family system.

husbands' families[3]. Under the patrilineal system, the lines of descent and authority are traced through fathers, a man and his brothers; their children and their sons are counted as members of the same family due to common descent (Nzenza-Shand, 1997; Nyathi, 2005). Under this system men own and control the land and other means of production. On the other hand, some minority subgroups like the Tonga are matrilocal and matrilineal. A man moves in with his wife's family on marriage. Inheritance of land and other possessions pass through the woman, including chieftaincy titles which pass from a dead chief to his sister's son (Nyathi, 2005; Weinrich, 1977; Colson, 1962)). However, with the development of private property due to globalisation forces, the integrity of these groups based on ancestry is withering away.

1.2   Nuclear and Extended Families

The traditional family organizations are founded on collective relationships. Thus when the term "family" is used, it does not usually refer to the nuclear or extended family based on the husband-wife relationship but to the extended family based on ancestry. Houston (1979) concurs with the above view and further argues that the family was a central unit of social organization; that men and women had defined roles that gave them authority within the family and society. The economy of the village was built on the family farm and off-farm production activities, which involved all members working together. In traditional patriarchal societies, most men married multiple wives. Having multiple wives provided enough labour, which ensured food self-sufficiency especially in drought years. The traditional value of hospitality and social cohesion was manifest in the collective efforts of the family. In this respect, the extended family is thus fundamental in monogamous families. Social relations of kinship that existed in African families were cultural rather than biological. As a result, although family relations are based on building relationships, the social side of kinship is much more important.

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[3] See Gombe, 1998 and Nyathi, 2005

In an extended family, material co-operation is expected between members. This collective action, it is envisaged, brings about positive reciprocity[4] which is important in maintaining equilibrium in the institution. Sullivan and Thompson (1988) observe that the kin lived together and shared the land which was held by the family as a whole- "where people live together on the land, they are usually bound together by close relationships" (Bourdillon 1993). This extended kin network family was prevalent in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies (Aldous, 1965).

Before colonialism the extended family could be relied on for support and that a loss could be incurred by the decline of the extended family (Bourdillon, 1993: Nyathi, 2005; Weinrich, 1982). For instance, Gombe (1998) observes that the "*vatete*" or aunt was instrumental for the well being of the niece and the nephew by providing both moral support and social needs. The traditional family maintained strong ties between members who were there for each other in times of need. Even marriage between two spouses involved several family members from both sides. The extended family had an interest on the bride who was viewed as a provider of labour through the children she bore (Nyathi, 2005). Collective action was also evident in the traditional family when a couple failed to have children. Collective efforts were pooled and arrangements made to circumvent the problem privately through negotiations by having the husband's brother impregnate the woman (Gombe, 1998).

However, the notion of solidarity and collective action in the extended family appears somewhat too optimistic. Literature seems to support the common rhetoric that the extended family is panacea for curing individualism and a guarantee for positive reciprocity. Seemingly, the extended family guaranteed a worthwhile degree of trust, reciprocity and harmony especially amongst most Zimbabwean farming communities.

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[4] This was made possible as a substantial amount of trust existed in the African community guaranteeing members to *give back* their trust to others. This community based ethos was deeply anchored in the tradition of giving and receiving, which spread the benefits and shrink the burdens of members in communities (Gombe, 1998).

1.3   Approaches to understanding the family

This section presents two perspectives to understanding the family. Emile Durkeim, Talcott Parsons, and Murdock spearheaded the functionalist perspective. On the other hand, the Marxian perspective is based on the theories of Karl Marx.

1.3.1   A Functionalist perspective

The analysis of the family from a functionalist perspective involves the following three main questions:

- What are the functions of the family?
- What are the functional relationships between the family and other parts of the social system?
- What are the functions performed by an institution or part of society for the individual? (Haralambos 1980).

Answers to these questions deal with contributions made by the family to the maintenance of the social system. There is also the assumption that there is a degree of integration and harmony in the social system for society to function effectively. In addition, the nature of functions of the family determines the welfare of its individual members. It is implied that the family is considered in terms of the degree to which it meets functional prerequisites. However, this analysis appears to be too optimistic and deterministic in the sense that it envisions a perfect view of the African family. Laing (1970) presents a radical alternative to the functionalist picture of the 'happy family'. He argues that problems in the family also create problems for the society as well. He strongly defends the thesis that no family is immune to such problems. Laing is concerned with the interactions in the family and contends that the existence of misunderstanding or disputes may disturb the smooth existence of the 'happy family'. This is consistent with Cooper (1972) who sees the family as an institution that prescribes certain of expected behaviour which individuals have to follow. However, this may be at variance with what individual preferences.

1.3.2 A Marxian Perspective

While Functionalists extol the institution of the family, Marxians tend to relate the family with class struggles and capitalism and are therefore sceptic about the notion of harmony and integration in the institution. From this perspective the family is viewed as an organised unit which produces one of the basic commodities of capitalism and labour. Labour is produced cheaply since capitalists do not have to pay for the production of children or their upkeep (Benston 1972). For instance, a wife is not paid for producing and rearing children. The fact that her husband must work for the upkeep of his family means that he cannot withdraw his labour with a wife and children to support. In addition, in her role as housewife, the woman attends to her husband's needs, hence keeping him in a good running order to perform his role as a wage labourer. Ansely (1971) views the emotional support provided by the wife as a safety-valve for the frustration produced in the husband by the capitalist system. In short, the Marxian perspective envisions the family as an authoritarian unit dominated by the husband in particular and adults in general.

However, there is a tendency by Marxians to talk about 'the family' in capitalist society without regard to possible variations in family life between social classes and over time. In his criticism of both Functionalist and Marxian perspectives, Morgan (1975: 65) notes that both 'pre-suppose a traditional model of the nuclear family where there is a married couple with children, where the husband is the breadwinner and where the wife stays at home to deal with the housework'. The major weakness in these perspectives is that they tend to present an ideal family in capitalist societies. The tenets do not apply to the African traditional family. The family will have specific and perhaps unique features in any particular society. Thus traditionally African family units exhibited typical characteristics. In modern society, however, the family has lost its pivotal social role. Other, more specialised institutions have taken over its erstwhile functions. Accordingly due to globalisation, the family has become smaller, feebler, and more internally differentiated. The old ties of ancestry or descent, which regulated communal property relationships, are now less important, while the individual conjugal bond has become relatively more significant.

1.4   Structure and Composition of the Traditional African Family

The traditional African Family is a very broad concept, which has interesting variations across the continent. These variations are caused by differences in ethnic customs but many similarities can be drawn in various countries on the continent. In Zimbabwe, like in many other African countries, marriage is a major determinant of the family system. Social anthropologists recognize that men and women must come together and have children if society is to continue (Beattie 1964). In the traditional African family there are variations in the make up of the family based on the type of marriage in each case.

A few broad distinctions have been documented as characterizing marriage in traditional African family systems. First, marriage may be monogamous - one husband and one wife (Beattie, 1964; Bourdillon, 1993; Nyathi, 2005). It may also be polygamous and this type of marriage can take two forms, that is, it can be either polygynous or polyandrous. The former refers to a marital union where one husband has two or more wives and the latter to where one wife has two or more husbands (Beattie, 1964). Apart from the fact that these forms of marriage have been widely documented, as highlighted above, polyandry is rare in African culture.

There has been a general consensus by anthropologists and other scientific observers of human communities that the world is "a man's world" (Beattie, 1964). It is therefore not surprising that polyandry is much less usual. A man's status was bound up with the number of wives, children and other dependants that he had. In a traditional polygynous family, a man would therefore marry a number of wives who would live and work together in the fields to produce food and enhance the family's wealth. Polygyny was widely practiced in Africa and it formed the backbone of the traditional African family (Mair, 1953). Most studies document that women were important in the sphere of agricultural production and noted that almost most men desired to have additional wives. For most indigenous African tribal groupings, a polygynous family was the "ideal family organization from the man's point of view" (Winter 1955:   24). This has been a consistent characteristic of female farming communities where a man with more than one wife can cultivate more land than a man with only one wife. Hence the institution of

polygyny was a significant component in the economic development of families especially in farm and off-farm production activities.

1.5   Roles of members within the African family

In traditional African societies man and women had well defined roles and obligations that were specified and exclusive to their respective genders. The division of labour was such that the domestic spheres on the one hand, belonged to the woman and her authority was unchallenged: the public domain, on the other hand, belonged to the man and neither arena was regarded as superior to the other (Bourdillon, 1993). Accordingly, this patriarchal traditional has continued unchanged in both the Ndebele and Shona culture.

In the traditional African family, a woman's security was heavily dependant on the goodwill of her husband and her family in patrilineal systems (Roberts 1977). For Shona culture, wives' relatives are respected more than the husbands'. Besides bearing children, women also provided men with ideas even in the public sphere, although they could not speak out in public. This shifted, when she went back to her original lineage, where she would assume the role of aunt (*tete*) in decision-making. She could thus provide advice, openly criticise and preside over family disputes; especially family court sessions (*dare remusha*)[5]. Thus women's roles shifted depending on the setting and location.

In patriarchal families, males dominate in the regulation of political and economic decision making whereas women and children are subordinate. Female family members' sphere of influence was dependant on social customs. Usually at family courts, female members could only participate as witnesses in disputes. If her husband dies, then the women's situation becomes precarious (Gombe, 1989). She can be inherited by her husband's brother or relative, automatically becoming subordinate to his wife/wives, further worsening her predicament. The husband's wealth was distributed among his brothers and relatives even though she stayed on with the kin and continued to work in the fields. She usually did not have a chance to decide on whether to be inherited or not.

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[5] See Gombe, 1998

She could not, under those circumstances, opt to remain single after the death of her husband (Gombe 1998).

Traditionally, the husband retained the right to claim custody of the children and when he died the sons took care of their mother. In addition, in the event of a divorce, the husband also retained the right to claim a refund of marriage payments. In most cases, the husband initiated the divorce proceedings (Nyathi, 2005). By implication, the woman obtained security through bearing children who would later take care of her if her husband died. Ironically however, this security was only valid for as long as the husband was alive and for as long as she remained married to him. If they divorced, then she could inherit part of the property. For instance, in Shona culture, she could take *mombe yeumai* as it was her property. She also could take the children with her until they were mature. In the case that her original husband died, the man who was heir to the widow had the additional family responsibility of adopting the widow's family, children included. He would call the children "his own" and make no distinction between them and his own children. The above stated roles are normally determined by whether individuals are in nuclear or extended families.

2.0 Major Challenges to the African Traditional Family

Social change in Africa, as everywhere else, is multifaceted and an ongoing reality. The influences of the Western money economy, industrialization, migration, urbanization among others, have certainly transformed the African traditional family from what it was fifty to hundred years ago (Shorter, 1975). By 1935, for example, anthropologists such as Mair and Richards were already noticing change in marriage and family patterns (Tembo, 1998). Patrilineality, matrilineality and the practice of polygyny are three of the major distinguishing variations of the African traditional extended family which have been significantly altered in the face of challenges. The whole is increasingly seen as a global village; hence the traditional values and traditions are changing. The following sections focus on the major challenges to the African Traditional Family.

2.1   Religion

Religion beliefs mediate the way people interact with a given society and with outsiders. Religion refers to beliefs and practices relating to unseen things[6]. A people's religion is defined as all non-biological action and behaviour of men and women in a society[7]. Religion continues to play an important role in the lives of most Zimbabweans. African Traditional Religions, Christianity, Islamic, Hinduism, Bahai faith and other migrant religions have millions of adherents[8]. In terms of ideologies, these different religions have their own notions of feminity and masculinity and also define codes and doctrines for their adherents. In the process, changes the traditional value systems have been witnessed throughout Zimbabwe.

In many instances, due to the influence of religion, indigenous patriarchal values have been borrowed from churches. Consequently, the advent of numerous religions has been instrumental in shaping families' ideology towards gender and other family functions. Religion defines how people view their lived-in-worlds. Religious traditions vary, reflecting their association with civilization and social status, restriction to attitude and behaviour, effects of globalization and the debate surrounding issues of tradition, modernization and post modernity. Thus there are alternative uses of the term. Owomoyela (2002) posits a comprehensive meaning of 'culture' as embodying such important aspects as religion, worldview, literature, media, art, housing, architecture, cuisine, traditional dress, gender, marriage, family, lifestyles, social customs, music and dance. Religious traditions and belief patterns can be transmitted through various mechanisms across generations. These include oral tradition, kinship rites and family property distribution, print culture and educational institutions. Religious customs are not static but are dynamic phenomena.

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[6] Owomoyela, O. 2002. Culture and Customs of Africa: Culture and Customs of Zimbabwe. London: Greenwood Press.

[7] Ikenga-Metuh, E. and O. Olowa, 1990. Nigerian Cultural Heritage, South Onitsha: Imico Publishing Company. For a fuller discussion on culture see Snynott, A., 1993, The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society, Routledge, London.

[8] In terms of religion, although Christianity is the main religion in Zimbabwe there are minorities like the Asians who adhere mainly to either Islam or Hinduism and there are Jewish and Greek Orthodox communities in the main urban centres.

In most parts of contemporary Africa, certain cultures and religious customs can be particular to a certain group of people. Cross-cultural assimilation has also been a factor of man's development since the Stone Age, thus links can be established between different tribal groups. For instance, the link between styles of art in cultures of the present day Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa[9]. Research documents the very conspicuous feature of African societies, which is their receptiveness and non-exclusiveness which tend to accommodate all -- strangers, visitors and guest[10]. Hence one cannot deny contemporary cultural African expressions links brought by globalisation where Western values have had an enormous impact on the lives of Africans and have changed certain values, traditions and customs in the African traditional family.

Two main ethnic groups populate Zimbabwe: the Shona (79%) and the Ndebele (16%). Both the Shona and the Ndebele are patriarchal, patrilocal and polygynous societies with power being in the hands of elder men within the family unit[11]. The dominant Shona comprises of subgroups: Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore and Manyika with variations in their customs and practices. The impact that globalisation, Western lifestyle and prejudices have had on culture, traditional thought and religious habits appears evident in Zimbabwe.

Christianity is the main religion in Zimbabwe, commanding an allegiance of approximately 40 – 50 percent of the population. Islamic, Bahai Faith, Hinduism and African traditional religion are also practiced in different parts of the country. These different religions have both shaped the stability of the African traditional family values, systems and practices. For instance, the rise of Independent African Churches has impacted heavily on mainstream Christianity and injected new aspects of the African traditional religion, the social mannerisms and world-view. This has brought practical aspects of the gospels into their religious movements. Consequently, this brought about an African theology with a new appreciation of the African personality and its cultural

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[9] Ellert, H., 1984 The Material Culture of Zimbabwe, Harare: London
[10] Clarke J. H. 1991 Africa at the Crossroads: Notes on an African World Revolution, Trenton: Africa World
[11] McFadden, P. 1999 Reflections on Gender Issues in Africa, Harare: SAPES Books.

and religious customs. African Independent churches (AICs) have rejected the paternalism shown in areas such as sharing, simplicity and compassion[12]. They have also rejected the monopolistic attitude of mainline churches. Instead, they aimed to create a fraternal spiritual understanding geared towards arousing a sense of identity amongst the followers whilst fulfilling immediate needs of the communities[13]. The advent of these different religions impacted on traditional role family members in family functions and organisation have been altered significantly.

For much of Zimbabwe, the dominant Shona religion is monotheistic: the people believe in a Supreme Being, who, like the Christian God, created and sustains the universe. Both Shona and Ndebele maintain primary contacts for humans in the spirit world are *vadzimu* (Shona) or *amadlozi* (Ndebele). These are 'spirit elders' - the spirits of the departed members of the family unit who are present within the living community, caring for their descendents and sharing their experiences, although they remain invisible[14]. These spirit elders were part of the African traditional family and were believed to wield immense power and influence, thus they have left indelible marks on religious practices of the African traditional family. Spirit elders continued looking after the territories they once ruled when they were still alive. They had 'spirit realms' and cared for their lands by providing rain and ensuring soil fertility, droughts, giving advice in instances of other social problems[15]. However, due to the coming in of incompatible religions, this has changed or redefined roles in the African family. For example, with the coming of Christianity, these beliefs have altered African theological orientation such that these "spirit elders" are no longer recognised. Similarly, other religions like Bahai faith, Muslim and Hinduism mushroomed throughout Zimbabwe, and these have altered traditional beliefs, values and systems. In the process, roles of both men and women in society have been altered (Bourdillon, 1995).

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[12] Sundkler, B. 1963. What is at Stake in the African Independent Churches? Edinburgh House, Boston. see also Daneel, M., 1970 Zionism and Faith Healing in Rhodesia: Aspects of Independent Churches, Mouton, Paris
[13] ibid
[14] Bourdillon, M. F. C. 1995 The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona with Special Reference to their Religion. Mambo Press: Gweru
[15] See Lan, D. 1985. Guns and Rain. Guerillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe, Los Angeles: University of California press

2.1.1 Social and religious customs in marriage

There is evidence from South Africa to show that where early missionaries had been successful in eliminating payment of bride wealth at marriage, there have been negative consequences (Beattie, 1964; Tembo, 1998; Nyathi, 2005). Bride wealth (*Lobola/lobolo, ukulobola*) or *roora* is an arrangement by which the bride' s family group receives livestock, other goods and (more recently) cash or opportunities to earn cash as a compensation for the loss of their daughter's productivity.[16] The payment represents an alternative to the matrilocal *kugarira* system of marriage in which the man is incorporated into the woman's family. The man would literally be "working" for the woman's family till the in-laws allow him to take his wife after a certain period (Gombe, 1998). In certain Shona groups 'forced marriages' where the prospective groom might join the bride's family even before the birth of his future bride was also practiced. In such cases, the marriage is arranged without the bride's consent. It also sometimes happens that the spirit of a dead person *(ngozi)* might demand a bride from an offending family, thus arrangements are made to send a girl for the atonement of the deceased's family (Gombe, 1998; Owomoyela, 2002).

Due to forces of globalisation, some African family practices have changed or co-exist or rather modified. Notable is the structure and composition of the traditional African family which have fallen victim to European cultural bias and Christian values (Tembo, 1998; Beattie, 1964; Weinrich, 1982; Barnes and Tin, 1992; Phimister, 1988; Mate, 2002). The gradual decline of polygyny in many parts of Africa has been documented as largely a consequence of Catholic Church missionary influence. Most traditional value systems which governed marriages in African societies have succumbed to the superior European monogamous marriage values legitimated by Christianity. For instance the practice of *kugarira* seems to be fading away in most of Zimbabwe.[17] Whether families adopt monogamous or polygamous marriages depends on the socio-economic context (Boserup, 1972).

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[16] Cheney, P. 1990 The Land and People of Zimbabwe, New York: JB Lippincott
[17] See Gombe, 1998

In Zimbabwe, cases have been presented where missionaries contributed to the decline of polygyny. In the predominantly Roman Catholic area of Chishawasha in Mashonaland East for example, missionaries settled in the area around 1890. Missionary ideology subsequently had an influence on the indigenous people, *VaShawasha*, who complied with the new teachings brought by the Roman Catholic Church. Such internalised oppression is insidious and makes people victims of compliance. Thus most *VaShawasha* had to accept the order and systems of the powerful missionaries. This internalised oppression, it is further argued, becomes, something of a vicious circle because once people comply with these external influences, it becomes difficult to challenge them.

Consequently, polygyny was condemned and those people who were found practicing it were chased away from their indigenous home. The resident chief in the area, Chief Chinamora had to leave Chishawasha as it was customary for chiefs to have many wives. Even today Chief Chinamora permanently resides in Domboshawa where he is headquartered (Mubaya, 2005). A notable exception however, is the practice among some Independent African Churches such as Apostolic Faith Missions, Zionists among others, where the practice of polygyny is still rampant (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

However, monogamous values legitimated by Christianity are mutually incompatible with the traditional value of hospitality in a rural setting (Beattie 1964, Weinrich 1982). Although polygyny is still common in many parts of the world, modern society's attitudes to it have increasingly become ambivalent. Although polygyny is slowly waning and emerging in new forms, it is appropriate to certain kinds of social systems.

In pre-independent Zimbabwe, this has been a vital safety net for most women, who because of the colonial government's leniency towards women, freely moved to mines and towns, without having to produce passes (Jeater, 1964; Barnes, 1992). In traditional African societies men and women had well-defined roles and obligations that were specified and exclusive to their respective genders. The division of labour was such that the domestic spheres on the one hand, belonged to the woman and her authority was unchallenged: the public domain, on the other hand, belonged to the man and neither arena was regarded as superior to the other. However times and habits are changing. The colonialists' presence in Africa caused profound changes in the way the people live. The

colonialists did not simply settle in Africa to take advantage of the opportunities it offered for a good life, they also converted Africans to European ways. Their new developments disrupted traditional African life (Owomoyela, 2000). For example, during the colonial era women could move freely without pass laws. This acted as a vital safety net for most women, who because of the colonial government's leniency towards women, freely moved to mines and towns, without having to produce passes (Jeater, 1964; Barnes, 1992).

Yet another aspect of the traditional family culture that has been altered significantly by missionary influence is that of widow inheritance. According to tradition, when a man dies, his brother or relative inherits both his wife and children (Bourdillon, 1993). The situation is different, as married Christians are not allowed to inherit another wife. By implication, the woman may be left destitute and unable to fend for her children, which was the original intention of the African traditional culture.

For matrilineal and matrilocal groups like the Tonga, a man moves in with his wife's family on marriage. If he subsequently marries another wife, he moves in with the new wife for a while and thereafter divides his time between the wives' homes. Inheritance of land and other possessions pass through the woman including chieftaincy titles, which pass from a dead chief to his sister's son. These practices seem to be changing as people have been influenced by religion which does not recognise these practices. Bourdillon (1993) in this respect states that people readily accept the tradition that serves their own interests.

The Church has also usurped the traditional role of aunts (*tete*) and uncles (*sekuru*). Where their role was once to moralise the youth in their families, pastors and church elders have now become the role models of Christian families. Youths who had an opportunity to learn from the elders of the extended family on various facets of African tradition and beliefs now have less contact with their extended families and practices[18]. Moreover, the Church now presides over family functions such as birth ceremonies, weddings, and funerals further alienating traditional family values. In a similar vein,

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[18] Masasire, A 1996 'Kinship and Marriage', in Mutswairo S et al. Introduction to Shona Culture, Eiffel Flats: Juta Zimbabwe

traditional values regarding some forms of music and dance, body marks appear to be fast disappearing.

The coming in of different religious beliefs has changed once important cultural practices. Dance and music was an important component of the socialisation process especially during planting, harvesting and post-harvest ceremonies[19]. The introduction of new entertainment modes has a negative impact on the organisation of these once important dances. What we witness is the trend in most rural areas to abandon these practices. Due to the modernisation process, traditional dance is no longer recognised as young people are influenced by western culture and values hence family networks surrounding the dance have broken down completely.

In addition to regularly grooming their bodies, both Shona and Ndebele groups also follow the practice of permanently scarring themselves, or less permanently decorating their bodies for specific purposes[20]. Scarification might signify a person's belonging to a particular lineage or social class, as for example the Ndebele practice of ear piercing. A similar Shona practice that identifies and incorporates group members is the facial/body scarification called *nyora,* which indicated the ethnic group to which the bearer belongs. Some eastern and north-eastern Shona people pierced their lips and plug the holes with nails, wire or other materials, a practice referred to as *phuri* or *ringindi,* while others (like the Tonga) similarly pierce and plug their noses. Most of these African traditional values have changed due to the introduction of different religions which consider these practices an abomination.

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[19] Welch (2000) documents as many as ten different dances in Zimbabwe society. The most widespread is the *mbira* which is danced to *mbira* music during *mapira*. It is believed to have originated among Korekore of northern and western Mashonaland and to have spread from there to the central region of the country. Like the *mbira*, the *denhe* is a Korekore dance that has the religious purpose of inducing possession and is associated with planting and harvesting. The *shangara* belongs to Mashonaland and has a religious function, while the *mbakumba* is danced by the Masvingo of southern Zimbabwe after the harvest and for entertainment. Other dances include the *chinyobera, ngungu*, the Ndebele *isitchikitsha, amabhiza* and the *ingquza*.

[20] Mbiti, J. S. 1969 African Religion and Philosophy, London: Heinemann

2.2   Urbanization

There has been a well-documented trend towards nuclear family in Africa which has been interpreted as a response to the processes of urbanization and migration and the influence of education (Roberts 1977; Weinrich 1982; Barnes 1993). Availability of employment in urban centres led to large-scale migration of both men and women. In addition, the gradual extension of schools encouraged families to send boys and girls away from home to receive education in boarding schools. It can be noted that this urbanization process, although instrumental to the expansion of cities and trade, had a detrimental effect on the unity of the family. It had implications for collective ties of the extended family, which as a result became fragmented. This process saw the gradual emergence of the nuclear family, altering the traditional extended family system.

Men in most African societies moved to towns to seek employment and left women to fend for themselves and their children with little access to cash. Roberts (1977) asserts that this migration process has left women to shoulder the responsibility of doing chores that were initially regarded as men's sphere, further straining women in rural areas. Where the family grew subsistence crops, they have had to resort to more diverse activities that have compromised their chances for food security. The family diet has deteriorated and nutritional problems arisen. 'There just isn't enough food produced on the family plot anymore' or 'enough food to feed so many people'- resulting in a shift from the traditional extended family system to the nuclear family.

The indigenous African who moves to paid employment in an urban area cannot, as his country cousins still can, provide food and shelter for himself and his elementary family (Beattie, 1964). Urbanisation has created new social classes of family members who are now time bound and resource-rich. This has created new obligations for family members. Firstly, there is the implicit obligation to sustain his needy relatives in the rural areas. Secondly and particularly important, is the obligation to meet the costs of rent, food and shelter for himself and his elementary family. This has helped sever the links between the urban and rural population for the extended family. In essence, the situation in Zimbabwe

is worse for the urban employee who has to grapple with the ever-escalating costs of food and rent charges (Mhloyi, 1994). It therefore can be deduced that group cohesion found in the African family has been jeopardized and individualism has taken its place (Bourdillon, 1993). This development of individualistic values which were anathema in traditional times, has led to the break up of the large traditional domestic family units.

With reference to the above argument on the dilution of social relations between family members, Bourdillon (1993) observes that rampant individualism and the weakening of kinship ties can be cancerous and inevitably spread to rural areas, particularly where members of the extended family in towns visit their country relatives after a long absence. Materialism and individualism have thus become synonymous with urban life. The townsfolk are likely to be hesitant in sharing their wealth with the large extended family. They are in most cases likely to adopt an expensive style of life similar to that of the West that distances them from the ordinary rural folk. Bourdillon further stresses that "ties at a distance" develop and these differ from the close relationships that existed on the extended family. It is important to note that there are however certain cases where there are still close relations between people in the country with their town relatives. Some even visit each other more frequently.

2.3   Education

Western education has also disrupted the traditional African family unit (Beattie, 1964; Roberts, 1977; Tembo, 1988; Sullivan and Thompson, 1988). The growth of education has increased the number of people leaving rural areas for education, creating a void in the family. Moreover, scholars tend to paint a gloomy picture on the aspect of education as a challenge to the maintenance of social stability in the family. Many Africans have left traditional villages to be educated in cities at universities. Some have also been educated in other countries in East and West Africa, while others have been educated in the West. During the Cold War there was a large number of Africans who were educated in the East - and the former USSR. Being educated in these diverse communities and then returning home has brought more cultural diversity and changes to the African family. In

some urban families, English has become the dominant language at homes. The African family has adopted cultures, dress, and language from the countries that influenced their education. The Western educational system thus seems to challenge the value and belief system[21].

2.4   Migration

Migration and occupational mobility[22] form significant components of the livelihoods systems of most families. Migration has negatively impacted on both town and rural folks. It has come about through the availability of employment for both men and women especially in towns, mines and farming areas (Roberts, 1977). The discovery of diamonds, gold and other minerals in Southern Africa also led to large-scale migration for potential workers. Furthermore, the development of a network of roads, greater availability of means of transport and the building of railways lines encouraged movement of people. The result was that most family members dispersed and lived far away from each other, reducing the chances of providing support for each other as characteristic of the traditional family structure which was in this respect attenuated.

With most of Zimbabwe's urban population reaching close to 50%, migration to cities continues to deepen the rural-urban ties, in particular strengthening the dependence of rural households on remittances of migrants. The impact of urban migration on African families still reflects the abiding tensions between the imperatives of economic survival and social dislocations. For the most part, urban migration is seen as a rational response to poor employment opportunities and land hunger in rural areas. This has loosened the traditional social control mechanisms that regulated social reciprocities and responsibilities (Gombe, 1998). As a result, new family structures have emerged to capture the straddling populations between urban and rural environments. For instance, the emergence of unions of polygyny without regular cohabitation, have added additional

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[21] Verhelst, T. 1990. No Life Without Roots: Culture and Development, London: Zed Books
[22] Migration involves the more or less permanent movement of individuals or groups across symbolic or political boundaries into new residential areas and communities (Marshall 1994). Mobility refers to the movement of an individual or group of individuals, which must centre on the place of residence, which provides a permanent reference point or base. Usually people engaged in mobility will either return to or continuously relate to the reference point in one way or the other. Both forms of movement affect the structure and roles that these members play in their families of origin (see White and Woods, 1985).

pressures on the economic and social responsibilities for women and children. While the durability of marriages in the traditional structures was strengthened by the control maintained by kinship ties, new migration patterns have increased the prospects of divorces, separation and the possibility of multiple partners[23].

In most cases urban migration allows males to have wives in rural areas and other wives or sexual partners in urban settings. Since housing conditions of urban areas prohibit several wives to live together, 'matricentric' households have emerged whereby an increasing number of households consist of a wife and children visited frequently by the husband[24]. Although these unions represent adapted versions of polygyny, they contribute to family break-ups and the upsurge of female-headed households. Solidarity between spouses is thus weakened by separation due to migration and occupational mobility[25].

In Zimbabwe, even in colonial times "pass laws" also had notable impacts on the stability of traditional family units. The colonial political economy was obsessed with the mobility of indigenous people. Movement of the people was severely monitored, as black people could not occupy white "spaces"[26]. Furthermore, with pass laws, men could not move into white-designated areas yet women did not have any restrictions[27]. Women therefore exercised a manifold mobility with negative effects on the family traditional structure. Women began moving around to visit men in their workplaces in towns and mines. Consequently, a high level of immorality emerged and this was greatly attributed to the fact that women were considered to have become "defiant and obstinate". A high incidence of divorce was also registered and women were now seen as a symbol of venereal disease (Barnes 1992). This phenomenon was at variance with the traditional notions of morality and stability.

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[23] Meckers, D and A. Calves, 1997. 'Main Girlfriends, Girlfriends, Marriage and Money: The Social Context of HIV Risk Behaviour in Sub-Saharan Africa', Health and Transition, Vol 1, No. 1 pp361-75.

[24] The practice of informal cohabitation (*kubika mapoto*) now seems to be common in urban areas. At times these marriages are derisively called "small houses", denoting they will be relationships outside the formal marriage union.

[25] This is also common in the Kariba fishery where artisanal fishermen migrate and leave traditional families in search of better catchers in different parts of the fishery (see, Malasha, 2003).

[26] Phimister, I. 1988. An economic and social history of Zimbabwe, 1890-1948: capital accumulation and class struggle, London: Longman

[27] See Barnes, T. 1992

Implications for the livelihood strategies and coping mechanisms among rural folks have been adversely affected by outbound migration. The extent to which families rely on remittances from younger people working in urban areas has been a subject of scrutiny (Kinsey, 1999; Maxwell and Ashely, 2001). Due to the economic downturn since 1997 in Zimbabwe there has been increased domestic, regional and international migration. The introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the late 1990s adversely affected the integrity, unity, values and traditions of the African family. From 2000, the stagnation in the overall growth of the economy shows a continuing deterioration in the levels of poverty[28]. This has forced many rural people to migrate to farms and urban areas in search of employment as farm and non-farm income activities responded negatively to economic downturn in the late 1990s.

Globalisation has fostered new forms of migration. International migration has weakened family ties especially where some members especially spouses migrate to Europe, the Middle East, and Americas and even in the Southern African region in search of better employment opportunities. There has been an increase in global Diasporas over the years due to Zimbabwe's economic and political crisis[29]. Like rural-urban migration, international migration is a double edged sword to families, furnishing potential economic benefits through remittances, but also breaking the bonds of amity that sustain families[30]. The extent to which families rely on remittances from members working outside the country has also been a subject of debate.

In most of Zimbabwe, labour migration has had a corrosive effect on kinship ties. The out-migration of men to towns and mines has forced many women to undertake the rearing of children alone. Many households now lack the stabilising influence of a father and are thus incapable of providing the support network that is the foundation of family stability. For instance, occupational mobility through cross border trade has weakened family stability as men and women shuttle between countries (Mukamuri, Kuvengurwa

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[28] According to the Zimbabwe Human Development Report 2003 (ZHDR) rural and urban poverty has risen from 74% in 1995 to 80% in 2000.

[29] The new global Diasporas comprise economic refugees, political refugees, asylum seekers, brain drainers, transnational commercial sex workers, all of whom have left the country. These present a special category of problems and challenges to African family they acquire new lifestyles and cultures (see Giddens, 1990).

[30] Adepoju, A 2000 "Recent Trends in International Migration in Sub-Saharan African", International Social Science Journal Vol 50, No. 2 pp 383-94

and Konjakonja, 2003). Another recent development that has had a serious impact on the family unit is the fast track resettlement programme in both urban and rural settings in Zimbabwe. The fast track land reform exercise has shifted the roles and functions of family members or units. This is particularly the case where families move from their traditional homes to newly resettlement farms (Kinsey, 1998; Maxwell, Urey and Ashely, 2001). In the process, kinship ties have been weakened as family members now live in distant places from each other. This has also led to a breakdown in the family support systems, as closer family members traditionally relied on each other for social support as another form of household accumulation of wealth. New social relations have emerged in these new resettlement areas as people of different origins, social status, and clan now live together bringing a new dimension to the rural community.

Similarly and more recently, the impact of Operation *Murambatsvina*/Restore Order disrupted many families and communities. The Operation drastically impacted on the livelihood options of most urban and rural families who relied on remittances from their relatives working in the urban areas. Operation Murambatsvina led to destitution and displacement of some vulnerable groups from family units whose coping mechanisms where curtailed in the period of demolitions of illegal structures throughout Zimbabwe (Muchena, 2005). This has been particularly felt where women and children have left for rural areas, leaving their husbands more mobile and in urban areas. This has inevitably increased the burden of caregivers for HIV/AIDS patients displaced from their houses leading to further deterioration of the public health and welfare of the family (IOM, 2005; Kanyenze and Sibanda, 2005). However, it also somewhat led to family reunification for some members after long periods of absence in rural areas (Muchena, 2005). Where families have moved back to their rural areas, this has not only been instrumental in re-uniting families but has also generated new tensions and problems in a context where resources are in short supply[31].

2.5   Technology

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[31] Action Aid, An in-depth Study on the Impact of Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order in Zimbabwe, Action Aid International, November 2005

Technological advancement has removed numerous factors that nurtured the "bonding factor" for the traditional African family in Zimbabwe. From the industrialization of the modern era, families have started spending less time together as a unit. This has redefined roles of family members. Globalisation has seen advances in communication and transport technologies effectively creating a "world without walls" and offered many of these options to the traditional African family[32].

Various forms of technology have a bearing on the family tradition and value systems. Globalisation has seen vast amounts of information passing from one society to another, either through electronic or print media. With the advent of internet, the world has increasingly become a global village[33]. In fact, technological advancement has become a way of life and the order of progress (Ocholla-Ayaya 1997). With the prevalence of nuclear families in modern day Zimbabwe, strong sentiments for individualism have started being felt. Families have been affected by modernity and focus more on economic life as opposed to the social life that mediated relationships between members. In most of Zimbabwe, information communication technologies (ICTs) have opened many opportunities and challenges never imagined before[34]. While some technologies have eased problems for the traditional African family, some have obliterated the belief and traditions, which hitherto mediated relationships between families. Thus some African traditional families have been averse to these technologies.

The African family has been exposed to various technological advancements. Globalisation has a homogenising effect and its basic mission has been inviting traditional African families to partake of the 'standardised, routinised, streamlined and global' consumer culture (Golding, 1994: 7). The effect of McDonalds, Coca-Cola, and CNN and satellite entertainment television such as DSTV on the African traditional family has been overwhelming. In this way, versions of Western cultures have been

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[32] Golding, P. and P. Harris, P. (eds), 1997 Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Globalisation, Communication and the New International Order, London, Sage.

[33] The aphorism of the world having become a global village is such that factors commonly adduced for the interconnectedness, diffusion and convergence of structures, trends and processes have started influencing most African families particularly in the developing world. This is consistent with Giddens' (1990: 64), definition of globalisation as involving 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaping by events occurring miles away and vice versa"

[34] Mkandawire, T., 2002 'Globalisation, Equity and Social Development', African Sociological Review, Vol. 6 (1): 115-137

forced onto local peoples as the best thing to be followed without equivocation or reservation (Golding, 1994). Globalisation has thus introduced hegemonic modes of social life and organisation of Western origin which reduce African traditional systems[35]. Family members now spend less time with each other, at times watching television and the traditional process of socialisation of family members has been weakened. For example, children and even adults may now view the western lifestyles as the ideal thing yet this is in sharp contrast with the traditional way of life[36].

Due to globalisation, websites and websites have sprung up to celebrate cultural diversity representing various groups. Although connectivity in rural Zimbabwe is lowest compared to urban areas, the cultural values of sociality, interconnectedness, independence and conviviality make it possible for others to access the internet and its opportunities without necessarily being connected personally. In many situations, it suffices for a single individual to be connected for whole groups and communities to benefit. The individual in question acts as a communication node linking other individuals and communities in myriad ways (Olorunnisola 2000). Similarly, latest communication technologies like the cell phone, which is now used in many townships and rural settlements has been used creatively by some urban dwellers to stay in touch with rural relatives. This has helped maintain healthy communication with their ancestors and rural people (cf. Thoka, 2001). However, this has tended to increase physical distance between family members, who now prefer to call each other by cellphones or send electronic messages. Thus, the kinship ties of extended family units are disintegrating and slowly eating away the glue that held families. Family members may not frequently visit each other that they used to when they lived in compounds (Bourdillon, 1993).

Traditionally, families relied on the elderly for knowledge, as these were regarded as repositories of knowledge. This knowledge was acquired over years though observation, experimentation and was passed by tradition from one generation to the other. The traditional African family relied extensively on the wisdom of these elders in matters

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[35] See Giddens, 1990

[36] It can be argued that marriages unions like gay/lesbian families have resulted as Western culture is adopted by urban dwellers. This radicalism in assimilating Western values regarding marriage have witnessed criticism from politicians and religious leaders alike who strongly condone such practices

regarding food production, processing and handling, and construction among other things. Modern technology has rendered some of the traditional practices obsolete. Traditional African families are now appropriating new technologies to save time and also enhance productivity. Globalisation has removed technological barriers. In this way even rural folks are able to harness from multiple influences a village modernity that qualifies them as 'global' even if 'remotely' so (Giddens, 1990).

Improvements in agricultural technology have also lessened the occurrence of some family functions like work parties (*nhimbe*). Mechanised farm implements like tractors now means a family can till their land without relying on pooled labour. Similarly, information technologies have also enhanced the way and frequency family members communicate. For instance, the use of telephones, cellphones and the internet has enhanced many people's ability to transmit messages faster. In the process, the role of certain individuals, like *nhume* in society has been usurped. The traditional framework on which family members relied regarding family planning decisions has shifted to these technological advancements. As a result, this has had a bearing on family size preferences.

2.6   Culture

Culture is a way of life. Culture has been decisive in shaping people's ideology. Culture defines how people view their lived-in-worlds. Culture is not static; hence Zimbabwean culture must be seen in the context of dynamic and constantly evolving cultural values and norms that define the contemporary Zimbabwean society. While certain cultural beliefs and practices can be particular to certain groups of people, links can also be established between different groups. For instance, the Bantu migrating groups brought with them to Southern Africa different cultures.

Variations in culture thus reflect its association with civilization and social status, restriction to attitude and behaviour, effects of globalization and the debate surrounding issues of tradition, modernization and post modernity. Thus there are alternative uses of

the term. Owomoyela (2002) posits a comprehensive meaning of 'culture' as embodying such important aspects as religion, worldview, literature, media, art, housing, architecture, cuisine, traditional dress, gender, marriage, family, lifestyles, social customs, music and dance. Culture can be transmitted through various mechanisms across generations. These include oral tradition, kinship rites and family property distribution, print culture and educational institutions. Culture and religious customs are not static but are dynamic phenomena.

With the advent of colonialism, Western values have had an enormous impact on the lives of Zimbabweans. Colonial pressures forced transformations in many aspects of life. Christian missionary prejudices also imposed certain restrictions and modifications on African aspects like dress, music and dance. Even in post-independent Zimbabwe the impact that Western lifestyle and prejudices have had on traditional thought and habits is evident in Zimbabwean society. This section focuses on some cultural variables that have transformed over time.

2.6.1   Fertility Rates

One variable of the traditional African family that has changed over years is fertility behaviour, which in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, is determined by biological and social factors. Several factors have contributed to sustain relatively high levels of fertility in most of sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF 2003). These factors include high levels of infant and child mortality, early and universal marriage, early child bearing as well as child bearing within much of the reproductive life span. Other factors include low use of contraception and high social value placed on child bearing in most societies in Zimbabwe. Similarly, the French, Swedish, Norwegian, are now placing high social value on child bearing because of the demands of an aging population, low labour force, and high incidences of immigrants.

Traditionally, for many patrilineal communal groupings in Zimbabwe, the fear of extinction encouraged high procreation with the hope that some of the births would survive to carry on the lineage (Bourdillon, 1993; Shimkin et al, 1978; Colson, 1962;

Weinrich, 1977, 1976; Jeater, 1964). The high value traditionally placed on marriage ensured not only its universality but also its occurrence early in life with the consequence that child bearing started early and in most cases continued until late into the productivity span. Polygyny sometimes promoted competition for child bearing among co-wives and also contributed to sustaining high fertility.

However, this has changed with the coming in of health and education programmes, particularly in post-independent Zimbabwe. Use of modern contraception was traditionally unacceptable as it violated the natural process of procreation. The traditional long period of breast-feeding and postpartum abstinence guaranteed adequate spacing between children (Jeater, 1964). Total fertility rate has declined significantly and this is attributed to vigorous family planning programmes and the impact of HIV/AIDS (Zimbabwe Human Development Report, 2003; Barnett and Whiteside 2002). This is particularly the case for most families in Zimbabwe as modern family patterns are learnt from radio programmes, newspapers, the television and other modes of communication brought about by advancement in technology[37].

There is evidence to show that there have been changes in these socio-cultural factors over time (Giddens, 1990). Age at marriage appears to have increased, though minimally; it is still relatively low in rural settings and higher in urban settings (Mate 2003). Use of modern contraception has increased use of condoms in the wake of HIV and AIDS and improved education (especially of women). This appears to have gradually eroded some of the traditional values placed on child bearing. Where nuclear households have solidified, there have equally been significant shifts from high to low fertility rates in African families. Although demographers long attributed the prevalence of high fertility rates in Africa to the resistance of indigenous socio-cultural systems to external forces, the rapid expansion of educational opportunities and availability of contraceptive methods have also contributed to the emerging perception foisted by the West that large families are an economic burden.

Significant internal differences exist between urban and rural settings and among tribal communal groups in Zimbabwe. The slow rates of economic growth and the mismatch

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[37] See section on technology

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between educational outcomes and labour opportunities have compelled smaller family sizes (Mate 2002). In most urban areas, factors such as wage labour, the monetized economy and cost of living, have altered the value of children. In addition, while family networks previously mediated the negative effects of large families, resource constraints and economic decline have contributed to the reduction of family sizes and denuded the institutional structures of the extended family. It is evident that family participation in social support structures has deteriorated significantly.

2.6.2 Polygyny

A critical continuity in African family patterns relates to the persistence of polygynous practices. The much-anticipated decline in polygynous households is still far from a social reality in most African countries. In rural areas, polygyny survives largely because of the imperatives established by the sexual division of labour that marks the sphere of agriculture (Colson, 1965; Weinrich, 1982). Multiple wives, and by extension, many children, were valued because they traditionally provided essential labour services in rural agricultural production.

In most African urban areas, polygyny, once fairly common, is becoming rare, particularly among the younger generations. Comparative studies from Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania show that monogamous households have taken a greater hold on society (Roberts, 1977; Mbae, 2005; Sudarkasa, 1996). For example, among the Igbo of Nigeria, polygyny seems to be a declining form of marriage as the strength of the conjugal relationship predominates over other family and community relationships. Young Igbo couples tend to have fewer children than their parents as knowledge and use of modern contraceptives has expanded (Sudarkasa, 1996).

More importantly, increasing education, urban migration, and employment have created new courtship patterns that emphasize individual as opposed to societal choice. These patterns, in turn, provide women with relative equality and leverage in the arena of sexuality and mate selection. These changes, however, have neither reduced the importance society places on fertility and parenthood nor altered the continuing importance of kinship networks in Zimbabwe's landscape (Bourdillon, 1993).

Consequently, while fertility rates have declined across generations and women have gained more decisional latitude in the family, the enduring importance of kinship rooted in African social structures continues to impose significant constraints on women's individual autonomy and choice.

2.6.3 Single-Parenthood and Cohabitation

Another factor that seems to be undermining kinship-based family structures is the prevalence of single parenthood, particularly among young urban males and females. As increasing numbers of women have joined the labour force, single and female-headed households have become a discernible pattern on the Zimbabwean social landscape (Ocholla-Ayaya, 1997). Although some societies continue to frown upon women over 30 (known in Shona as *tsikombi*) who are still single and accuse them of prolonging single-hood, this new trend reflects attempts to adapt to secular changes in educational status, employment and occupational mobility and westernisation.

Thus, one consequence of the legacy of "Westernisation" is the high number of single-parent families, resulting largely from pregnancy outside marriage and from divorce. As a large proportion of the nation's children grow up in single-parent households. Where there are female-headed households, children may receive financial support[38]. There have been links established between illegitimacy and poverty, inadequate childcare, and psychological difficulties[39]. Coping with the circumstances of family disruption has entailed single-parent families among lower-income groups taking their children to live with relatives, in particular, the children's grandparents. In most rural settings in Zimbabwe, this has strengthened the roles of African grandparents in bringing up their grandchildren. This has also reinforced the customary practices of multi-generation households where mutual support between generations guarantees the well being of a person born into African families throughout their life cycle.

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[38] Meckers, D and A. Calves, 1997. 'Main Girlfriends, Girlfriends, Marriage and Money: The Social Context of HIV Risk Behaviour in Sub-Saharan Africa', Health and Transition, Vol 1, No. 1 pp361-75.
[39] Appadurai, A 1996 Modernity at Large: Dimensions of Globalisation, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Due to economic hardships being faced in urban areas, the impact of HIV and AIDS on breadwinners, care of most children has been taken over by the elderly. The proportion of unified families and children living in multi-generational households has increased (Mate, 2003). The fact that most single parent families are in towns has also entailed an upsurge in multi-generation households and the ethos of the African extended family appears to be intact even in urban settings (UNICEF 2003; Mate 2002). Most surveys of rural women in Zimbabwe indicate that most of them felt empowered when they took responsibility for important family decisions including the education of grandchildren (Sims 1981; Mate 2003).

2.6.4 Fosterage

While there may be evidence to show that the multi-generation African family is not on the decline, economic downturns and increased urban poverty have undermined the institution of fosterage that for long sustained the ties between rural and urban households. Fosterage constitutes part of the trend where the welfare of rural dwellers depends on their solidarity ties with urban kin families (Sudarkasa, 1996; Sims, 1981). A key component of this practice is the channelling of remittances from urban workers to rural areas through educational support. By conferring parental responsibilities to their urban relatives, fosterage guaranteed the mobility of children from rural families. Over the years, the fosterage of children had important demographic and economic consequences. It subsidized high fertility among rural and poor families and gave poor families the means of defraying child-rearing costs. In addition, when poor and large families transferred the guardianship of their children to smaller and wealthier families, fosterage mitigated inequalities in resource endowment among children.

Recent research, however, shows that the prolonged economic reversal witnessed throughout Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, has weakened fosterage networks, jeopardizing the welfare of rural families and the strength of rural-urban relationships (Nyathi 2005). In most communal groupings in Zimbabwe, there seems to be a net decline in rural-to-urban fosterage rates during the years of its economic decline. This decline foretells a more generalized weakening of rural-urban relationships.

As the economy has deteriorated, the real income of most urban households has severely been reduced and urban unemployment has been pushed to unprecedented heights. This has made it impossible for urban families to support foster children (UNICEF, 2003; UNAIDS, 2000). Although these changes have created more disincentives for large families in both rural and urban areas, the decline of fosterage raises concerns about the economic mobility prospects for children from rural families, especially in a climate of increased competition for limited formal-sector employment. People are generally no longer willing to commit themselves to fend for children that are not their own (Bourdillon, 1993).

However, amongst most traditional groupings, the practice of fosterage was also complemented by an "encasing of motherhood" where a woman failed to conceive (Jeater 1964). In the African traditional culture, *giving birth to children* is only one of a number of culturally accepted norms by which women become mothers. They may have children who are "adopted", "assumed" or "assigned" (Weinrich, 1982; Sudarkasa, 1996; Barnes, 1993; Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983). In indigenous societies, a barren woman often assumed responsibility for the care and upbringing of one or more children of their relatives. Or, without asking for a child, they might have children "given" or "assigned" to them (Weinrich, 1982).

Women could be assigned or "given" children who are not "theirs" in an exclusive sense, but to whom they relate "as a mother." Women who have not given birth, or those whose children are no longer living with them might be "given" (or "assigned") a child who will remain in their care for an unspecified period of time in return for the usual affection and assistance parents receive from their children when they are growing up (Amadiume, 1987). This practice is slowly disappearing as family ties are waning away in both urban and rural communities as urbanisation has taken rot. It was taboo in Shona or Ndebele culture for households to be childless which seems to be the norm today. Culture is an integral component to the continuity of the African traditional family as it poses opportunities on the interface between the world views of science, religion and development.

3.0   Participation of the Family in local and National Economy

Family participation in local and national economy can be best understood in the context of cultural values and norms that define the contemporary Zimbabwean society. Although not prescriptive, cultural values and norms invariably assign different roles for men and women. This role differentiation has implications on the activities to which family members (men and women) apply their time, effort and energy in economic development.

Participation of family members in Zimbabwe in the local economy is centred on exploitation of resources. The livelihood options for rural families that centre more on agriculture, livestock production and marketing, natural resources exploitation, and formal work outside the wards. Due to the increasing population in rural areas there is competition over access to sources for making an income amongst families and communities. This seems to threaten the extended family concept.

In rural Zimbabwe, disparities are still evident in all spheres of economic activity where the low status of women with respect to access, control and ownership of economic resources and positions in decision -making processes undermine their contribution to local wealth creation. These gender biases have implications to the rural development process, given that 52% of the Zimbabwean population comprises of women and 33, 9% of families are headed by females[40]. Due to cultural beliefs and practices women have been persistently excluded from access to many of the resources that facilitate economic independence – especially immovable property except indirectly through their dependence on men. For instance some research, found that the patriarchal operation of access and occupation rights in communal lands, where the customary process of land allocation base occupation in patrilineal constructs, ensure that women have little stake in such areas except in a derivative fashion[41]. However, another sphere that woman seem to be participating more is local income generation though gardening, poultry keeping, garment making and crafts. Developing micro-financing schemes for these projects would greatly enhance the women's contribution in the rural economy.

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[40] Zimbabwe Human Development Report, 2005

[41] Ncube, W. and J. Stewart 1997 Paradigms of Exclusion: Women's Access to Resources. Harare: Women's Law in Southern Africa Research Trust (WLSA).

In resettlement areas, there is now security of tenure which seems to enhance families' contribution to the development. This has enhanced African families' economic capital as secure land ownership continues to be the most important form of collateral for credit and a requirement for participation in co-operative organizations, both income-generating and producer oriented (Ncube and Stewart, 1997). Development programmes that addresses "the voices of the poor", it is envisaged bring opportunities were both social and economic capital can be enhanced for the traditionally marginalised families in most developing countries (Narayan et al. 1999).

In Zimbabwe, economic downturn has directly impacted family cohesion, compounded by the destructive influences that urbanization and industrialization have had on the family. In the wake of Zimbabwe's economic challenges, there have also been enormous consequences and a downward spiral of family disintegration (Muchena, 2005). The breakdown in the symbiotic and mutually beneficial exchanges between rural and urban communities is equally matched by radical changes within rural households. This results from the collapse of the traditional African family economy in which husbands were the chief breadwinners.

The economy has gradually been making way for wage earning family households whereby both husband and wife have to strive to earn income primarily in the agricultural sector. However, within this framework, there exists competition over economic opportunities in both urban and rural areas, creating conflicts. The economic options available to different family members have tended to create conflicts, pitting urban family members against locals, neighbor against neighbor, kinsman against kinsman, and husbands against wives. Much of the tension over access to economic resources reflects the changing income fortunes of families as many people live on the economic edge. The transition to wage-earning households has occurred without corresponding shifts in power relations between the sexes, producing tensions that further destabilize the family (Barnes 1992).

In Zimbabwe, the varying options of livelihood engagements demonstrate the momentous changes in household economic structures as control over resources has shifted gradually

away from men to women (Mukamuri et al., 2003). With rampant informal unemployment and dwindling resources, men's central roles as breadwinners have been redefined, making it impossible for most men to fulfil these roles. Increasing poverty in Zimbabwe has led many locals to engage in cross border trading, and most of them are women (Mukamuri et al. 2003). As a consequence, men have felt a loss of power and unable to provide for their families. This has created social tensions and increased domestic violence within African families.

Furthermore, in documented cases, men have tended to be suspicious of their spouses who travel across borders to trade and this has resulted in marital stress (Mukamuri et al. 2003). Apart from engaging in cross border trading, women have also taken up the role of breadwinner through communal garden enterprising. These gardens, normally located in the wetlands of the cited rural areas, have gone a long way in subsidizing household income (Mubaya 2005). It becomes imperative that rural development practitioners address questions of access, ownership, control of resources and training of families in micro-enterprises. Equitable access empowers both men and women by affording them opportunities to make decisions that have implication on general economic development.

3.1   HIV/AIDS and the family institution in the Zimbabwean Economy

The impact of HIV and AIDS has caused major changes on the structure, family size preference and composition of the family (Baylies, 2000). The productive age group has been most affected, as heads of households, the labour force and leaders in society. HIV infections cluster in families in which both parents are often HIV-positive, placing enormous strains on the capacity of families to cope with the psychological and economic consequences of the illness (UNAIDS 2002). Consequently, there has been a progressive disintegration of families, as they become ineffective social and economic units.

As HIV and AIDS devastate the traditional support systems for older persons, the latter are forced to take on the burdens of child care under conditions of increasing personal impoverishment (Mate, 2003). It has been documented that not just risk perception but

also cost and welfare considerations mediate the way HIV influences ideas about the number of children one chooses to have (Baylies, 2000). There are a number of other factors that militate against large families and these include personal circumstances, gendered power relations and availability of means of protection against infection. The incidence of family planning methods advocated for by pressure groups can often impede family size preferences being acted upon and reproductive rights being upheld. Property grabbing incidences have increased due to the impact of HIV and AIDS creating tension and conflicts in families. Most cases involve children, widows and it becomes important to address widows' and orphans'[42] inheritance rights in the context of HIV and AIDS.

The HIV and AIDS pandemic has resulted in a particularly heavy toll on young women. A host of factors account for the higher prevalence among women and these include economic dependence, limited autonomy and bargaining power. HIV and AIDS are also creating unprecedented social welfare challenges as it has already orphaned millions of children (UNICEF 2003).

The cumulative effect of the epidemic on determinants of social welfare includes sickness and death caused by HIV and AIDS. It also causes a decline in individual and household productivity leading to food insecurity, family disintegration and weakening of the traditional family system for orphan care. The increasing number of orphans presents an especially heavy economic burden to the family. In the past, the extended family cared for orphans but this seems to be disappearing as the African family is faced with many economic challenges leaving it with very few resources. This has negatively impacted on the quality of care-giving, education, nutrition and socialization of the poor children with parents who are bed-ridden or dead.

In addition, the family also faces the economic burdens of health care and funeral costs, as well as the loss of income when the breadwinner becomes ill. The HIV and AIDS epidemic often pushes women whose husbands have died of AIDS and their families below the poverty threshold, directly threatening the survival and well-being of their families (Mate, 2002). Female-headed-households affected by AIDS become entrenched

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[42] An AIDS orphan is defined as a child who is under the age of 15 who has lost a mother or both parents due to HIV and AIDS (Mate, 2002).

in poverty. In addition to the loss of labour and cash income, women have fewer legal rights than men and are often less literate. They have less access to support services, credits and inputs. The result is a marked increase in poverty among most families.

This feminization of poverty, a key characteristic of the socio-economic impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic, has far reaching consequences particularly for youths (Barker and Knaul 2000; Amadiume 1987). Given the prevalence of the disease, this has created child-headed households, elderly marked increase in poverty among young women and their dependants is likely to have a profound impact on this region as a whole, particularly on food security. This is because women are mainly responsible for food production (Baylies, 2000).

3.2   Status of HIV/AIDS Orphans

In the wake of HIV and AIDS, there has been a massive increase in the number of orphans unparalleled in human history. The long-term legacy of HIV and AIDS is the growth in the number of orphans who lose one or both parents, or caregivers. The HIV/AIDS prevalence rates have been particularly high in areas close to towns, growth points and mines and also resettlement areas (Mate, 2002). The impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic on orphans depends on a number of factors, including the socio-economic status of their families, the size of the family and their age.

Losing parents to AIDS means the structure and organization of the traditional family has been severely hit. Children have now assumed new roles and responsibilities within the nuclear as well as the extended family. Traditional roles, duties and responsibilities of family members become blurred, as AIDS places additional economic demands and pressures on orphans, particularly economic uncertainty, stigmatization and emotional insecurity (Barnett and Whiteside, 2002). Children whose parents die of AIDS in towns are usually taken back to the rural areas. They have to adapt to loss of parent(s) as well as to new life in the rural areas. The security and stability of their family life is disrupted and there is no social safety net or mechanism to help children through this transition period. Education ceases, thereby increasing risk behaviour among the older orphans

especially girls. If both parents have died, the orphans may or may not be shared among relatives.

The disintegration of the family often means the children may not grow up in a family and will not receive attention and guidance from relatives. Grandparents might find it difficult to look after, discipline and control young adults. In extreme cases, some orphans have run away from home or from the extended family home to escape the poverty that AIDS-afflicted and affected families are subjected to (Bollinger, 1999). This has serious implications on the livelihood options available for the family in both urban and rural settings. The institution of family has thus been grappling with the challenges caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other problems associated with the economic decline.

Loss of access to labour in the land may result in declining agricultural productivity that in combination with loss of cash income often leads to deterioration of the quality of household diet and reduction in the number of meals. HIV and AIDS have thus had a negative impact on rural economy. Sick persons are sent to rural homes and this has a negative impact on the productivity of rural households and this limit the active time women spend working for the households (Mate, 2003; Mate, 2002). This is further exacerbated where the caregivers[43] are subjected to a number of terminally ill patients in the rural home. At times witchcraft accusations have emerged, further creating tensions within the family unit.

It is also reported that young men and women are getting married, or raise families without being officially married, at increasingly younger ages (ZHDR, 2003). One of the reasons cited for this is the rising cost of living and the economic value of women. The bride price, which the groom has to pay for the bride, has become expensive. Early marriage means early realization of economic value of a daughter and parents who are struggling to raise many children may choose to marry their adolescent daughters earlier than they would have in different circumstances (Bollinger, 1989; Gombe, 1998). The

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[43] There have been positive attitudes towards the rural sector poor especially women who have stood in most cases providing care for most HIV/AIDS patients in line with African tradition. Using existing structures and systems is important and opens possibilities for using women as stepping stones towards home based care programmes (*see* Mate 2003).

reason for the crisis within the family is largely attributed to new economic pressures caused by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Furthermore, other factors such as displacement of people, break-up of families, death, and poverty all contribute to the erosion of traditional courtship, marriage, and erosion of the social fabric as a whole.

4.0   Family participation in national politics

Throughout Zimbabwe, the power relations that shape social, political, economic and cultural life prevent some members of the family (particularly women) from participating fully in all areas of their lives, whether it's in the home, or in the public arena (Barnes, 1999). While there have been dedicated efforts to challenge this status quo, this has allowed more women to reach positions of power in recent years, but women continue to be under-represented in all areas of decision-making. Most family members, especially the youth and women, still face significant barriers to their full and equal participation in the structures and institutions that govern their lives (Masunungure, 2004; Chung, 2006). Thus the participation of both men and women in local and national politics deserves scrutiny.

Family participation in local and national politics refers to women's ability to participate equally with men, at all levels, and in all aspects of public and political life and decision-making. It extends to other arenas, such as family life, cultural and social affairs and the political economy. So, whether it's deciding how the household income is spent or determining how the country is run, there is documented evidence to show that women have the right to an equal say in all matters that have an impact on their lives (Moore, 1991).

In Zimbabwe's political landscape, the family's participation in public life and decision-making depends on several factors, including:

- An awareness of their rights and how to claim them
- Access to information about laws, policies and the institutions and structures which govern their lives

- Confidence, self-esteem and the skills to challenge and confront existing power structures
- Support networks and positive role models
- An enabling environment, meaning a political, legal, economic and cultural climate that allows women to engage in decision-making processes in a sustainable and effective way (Hartmut and Marie-Helene, 1995).

For example, in most traditional settings in Zimbabwe, some family members have not been able to participate actively in politics due to illiteracy and limited access to education. Participation of family members in local and national politics has been heavily skewed towards men. Women's participation is very limited. This problem is further worsened by discriminatory cultural and social attitudes and negative stereotypes perpetuated in the family and in public life where such arenas are seen as "men's world" as opposed to family's world (Barnes, 1992). Cultural traditions for both Ndebele and Shona people reinforce male superiority and women subordination where man are viewed as the active agents in the public sphere while women's location is in the 'care economy' and in the informal sector.[44]

Thus, active participation has been further curtailed by their increasing burden of women's responsibilities in the home. In most of Zimbabwe, women have been subjected to intimidation, harassment and violence and thus participation of women in both local and national politics has been heavily skewed towards men.

For both the Shona and Ndebele cultures, women's activities outside the home - employment, community work, or political activity are generally viewed as potential invitations to infidelity (Gombe, 1998). In local community governance spheres, for instance, cultural tradition suggests that women work close to their husbands' workplaces so that men could monitor their wives behaviour (Gombe, 1998). To this end, the willingness of men to allow women to engage in party politics is limited. The fear that economic or political power might contribute to women's sexual license is particularly

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[44] Goromonzi, W 2002. "Municipal Development Partnership – Eastern and Southern Africa", in Paradza, G. and Matova, G. (eds) A Partnership Enabling Local Government Capacity, 'Mainstreaming Gender in Local Government: Experiences from Eastern and Southern Africa,' IDRC Workshop Canada, 2002.

strong among urban men, perhaps because they are more likely than rural men to see their wives beginning to move beyond traditional gender roles (Mhloyi, 1994; Ocholla-Ayaya, 1997).

While in some areas, people may take a conservative position on women's narrowly defined roles, the fact that some women are questioning and even defying stereotypical expectations suggests inherent tension and possibly a category of "transitional women" willing to challenge an old normative structure (Alexander and Raftopoulous, 2005). Women at times either avoid direct confrontation with husbands or challenge the status quo; they circumvent gender norms in indirect ways. One example is the woman who trades secretly with her neighbour in order to have her own spending money at home while another example is the urban woman who clandestinely engages in community activities while making sure to arrive home before her husband returns from work (Mhloyi, 1994). As a result, participation of women in local or national politics is strategic and opportunistic (Chung, 2006). Thus women appear to be slowly assuming key positions especially in the local political arena where they take up positions of chairlady, treasurer among others, in ward or council elections.

It appears that globalization heralds a change in attitudes and values the family institution places on participation in local and national politics, even where the temptation is high to maintain the status quo. This is evidenced by the high incidence of women empowerment programmes, which have seen an increasing awareness on women and their participation in both the economic and political sphere (Alexander and Raftopoulous, 2005).

The emergence of opposition politics in Zimbabwe heralded a new era in the overt and covert participation of family members, especially in rural Zimbabwe. Family members may have different party affiliations. For example, open participation in opposition movements has proven to be immensely difficult largely because of the oppressive nature of most post-colonial state. Open participation in politics is further curtailed by the extremely difficult structural conditions under which opposition forces have to mobilise and reproduce their support especially in rural areas which have been literally considered as strongholds of the ruling party (Chung, 2006; Masunungure, 2004). However, most family members vote in most of the elections held in Zimbabwe thus far, starting from

local council elections, parliamentary, presidential and senatorial elections (ZEC, 2005). In such circumstances, where the terrain of political contestation is characterised by dissent, one way of trying to unravel the extent of family participation would be to stop and critically review the state and activities of the civic and opposition movement, and closely examine the balance of political forces determining the operating environment of such forces. Willingness to actively and openly participate in decision making structures for both local and national party structures appears to be one such yardstick to measure the participation of family in the political arena.

4.1   Family participation in local politics

One area where the family has been consistently active is local politics. This is so because this sphere does not necessary transcend the political parties' sphere. Family participation here does not depend on the whims and aspirations of political leaders located outside their areas (Harold-Barry, 2004). Traditional structures of governance have thus been active at the local level. According to Ranger (1995) traditional leadership had the function of administering the judicial system. This involved problem solving for any disputes that arose in the family.   The father had authority to mediate on any problems or disputes in the family (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). In the same vein, chiefs and headmen (s*adunhu*), kraal heads (*sabhuku*) presided over and mediated on disputes involving family members in the villages. There is a hierarchical referral system, where the chief would eventually mediate on difficult family issues (Bourdillon 1993). The dispute mediation framework varies for nuclear and extended families. Usually, the male household head (*samusha*) and the aunt (*tete)* mediated most disputes within the family. The *tete* was crucial in resolving marriage disputes. It was the role of the senior nephew (*muzukuru*) to take part in the dispute resolution process. The village head (*sabhuku*) usually mediated over disputes involving different families. Where parties fail to reach consensus, the matter was passed on the headman (*sadunhu*) for further arbitration. The chief decided over very difficult cases, and this was seen as the highest court in traditional customs[45]. Bourdillon (1993) further contends that although the chief had great authority in conflict resolution, at times his power over decision-making was

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[45] See Gombe, J. M Tsika DzavaShona, College Press: Harare pp 51-60.

limited. There is clear indication in this case to show that the chiefs' power was somewhat limited.

However, this differs significantly with the Ndebele whose chief wielded much power over his subjects. The Ndebele chief had regiments upon which he could call to enforce his decisions and to punish any who did not obey him. In practical terms however, subjects continued to acknowledge the authority of the traditional chiefs (Nyathi, 2005). Traditionally, the chief had to be wealthy, in order to succeed in commanding respect and reverence from his subjects (Nyathi, 2005; Gombe, 1989; Bourdillon, 1993). It is further emphasized that chiefs strengthen their power through magic or witchcraft to enlist respect. It is argued that some chiefs even committed incest to strengthen their power (Bourdillon, 1993).

In relation to divorce, both spouses in African cultures had to be present at the court (*dare*). The deliberations at the court sometimes made the two parties reconsider their decision. Other family members from each side would be also present at the court. This is because marriage in the traditional African custom goes beyond a contract between two spouses. It involves several families on both sides and the knot is tied by their spiritual families (Nyathi, 2005).

The force of community opinion was enough to settle disputes between the two conflicting parties. Family and community views tended to put pressure on individuals who could conform for fear of being ostracized. This is consistent with Murdock's (1949) functionalist view that stresses the invaluable role played by society in shaping the views of individuals. In this case, the family in particular and society at large maintain the stability of the marriage institution.

Traditionally, a woman is under the authority of her husband and must seek his permission for all activities (Nyathi, 2005). Nevertheless, the new legal system upset this notion and women could now try themselves in new courts. Moreover, their rights were now recognized significantly (Roberts, 1977). The Magistrates Court unlike the native courts as before could now settle family disputes. Also, the Department of Social Welfare had a role in dispute settlement. Consequently, women could now live separately from

their families and husbands (Barnes, 1992). They could also claim maintenance from husbands while living alone. It can thus be concluded that the proliferation of the new legal system went a long way in disrupting stability and stagnancy in the old order in the traditional African family system.

New types of marriage like cohabitation (*kubika mapoto*) and "small houses" emerge especially in urban areas. For example, couples now file legal divorce. The extent to which the extended family currently mediates in marriage disputes is a subject to debate. There is an increasing tendency for spouses to separate or divorce without consulting other members of the extended family. Thus globalisation, especially economic independence and consciousness about human rights has brought opportunities and challenges to the African family. Women now have power to opt to remain single and not necessarily accountable to any man. In addition, husbands' right to sue for compensation for loss of domestic, sexual and procreative services has diminished (Roberts, 1977). It may thus be deduced that although the new legal system has presided over family disputes in favour of women, it has uprooted sacred family and marriage customs that were the norm in the traditional culture. Where the native court would mediate to pacify both spouses into reaching a consensus, the new legal court system now allows parties to opt out of marriage.

4.3   Social networks in the traditional African family

Urbanisation has negatively affected traditional norms largely viewed as central in fostering togetherness. Gombe (1998) cites social networks such as reciprocal work parties- *'nhimbe'*, *'jakwara'* and rainmaking ceremonies-*'mukwerera'*. Hypothetically social networks allow families to meet and work together, as well as assist each other in activities such as maize shelling, planting or harvesting of crops. Participation of families in these reciprocal work parties is through social contract and based on mutual trust. Reciprocity is required to ensure continuity of the party cycle. Traditional leaders are instrumental in gathering people for the social activity. Gombe (1998) further highlights that though the main objective of these social activities is to assist each other in reducing the workload, they are also enjoyed as a form of entertainment. The only social activity

that requires a sombre atmosphere was the rainmaking ceremony (*mukwerera*), which is intended to appease the spirits into providing rains for the people (Schoffeleers, 1978). These formed a vibrant form of labour wherein members could, based on mutual trust and positive reciprocity, engage in farm labour for each other especially during planting and harvesting of the fields (Gombe, 1998; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

Despite the above social networks that enhance social ties for the extended families in the rural areas, a development of individualistic values has led to the break up of the traditional large domestic units (Thoka, 2001; Mkandawire, 2002). For example, the above stated traditional reciprocal work parties, once a characteristic of the rural family units, are slowly fading out as a result of the disintegration of ties in these units. Thus family based networks, occupation based groups of mutual help, rotating schemes and other associations to which the traditional family belonged are no longer sources of transfers in cash or kind in the event of calamity of failure by some members of the family to provide for their welfare (Tetteh, 1999; Narayan et al., 1999).

The ties that existed in rural and urban areas are no longer based on reciprocity and mutual trust. This situation curtails systems of social organisation, which is a fundamental precondition for building enough social capital for rural development. Beattie (1964) cites a breakdown in the autocratic patriarchal family structure. The extended family system is no longer intact. Where it exists, it is premised on weak relationships amongst families. At times, stronger networks only exist between two families united in a marriage family. For instance, sons are no longer as obedient as they used to be and they no longer build their homes in or near their father's compounds as in the past. Many of them now assert their independence and go off on their own, to start a nuclear family (Bourdillon, 1993). Even in the rural areas there is a new economic order in which a husband and wife must work together to build up a household. They therefore feel that they have an obligation to each other and not with their kin, perpetuating individualistic tendencies that have characterized the modern family. Though befitting of a modern economic dispensation, the nuclear family is somewhat self-centred in that it disregards pre-existing norms that governed traditional societies.

Building on current existing forms of social networks is crucial for rural development and entrepreneurship. The opportunities offered by information communication technologies (ICTs) could be used together with social and political networks that exist in rural areas, to build co-operatives, community development trusts, and associations[46]. Thus rural forms of social organisation could be modernised. For instance, due to the importance of agriculture in rural development, creating micro-enterprises centred on reciprocal parties (*nhimbe*) and scaling those up would be crucial for enhancing rural economic development.

5.0   Conclusion

Changes in the structure of African families still reflect the enduring tensions between traditional and modern values and structures. Although there have been widespread accounts of families abandoning key traditional practices in favour of modern ones, the major trend remains the creation of systems of marriage and family organization that draw on both traditional and modern norms. The dominant feature of African families, as one observer notes, is its ability to "make new things out of old," and to draw forth new solutions from the traditional resources of family institutions (Mbae, 2005). The family of today is not more or less perfect than that of the old: it is different, because the circumstances are different. It is more complex, because the environment in which exists is more complex.

Most families have not completely assumed values of a modern generation family but borrow extensively from the global culture, including the use of technology, religion and culture, urbanisation, HIV and AIDS. Similarly, the political economy governing family participation in development should capture these changes and build on opportunities offered by globalisation. Therefore, values, beliefs and customs for the African traditional family are slowly withering away, and that its moral, disciplinary and organisational functions have been taken over by institutions. Globalisation forces have seen the African traditional family moving towards modernity. There have been gradual transformations

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[46] Thoka, M. D., 2001, "Cellphones, Ancestors and Rural/Urban Connections. Report of Research Conducted in Monwabisi Park in November 2000", Paper presented at Joint Conference of AASAA and SASCA, UNISA South Africa, 9-11 April 2001.

of African marriage and family organizations away from corporate kinship and extended families toward nuclear households. This shift stems, in part, from the breakdown of collective, kinship-oriented systems of production and reproduction. These changes present numerous challenges and opportunities for the African traditional family.

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