

**Empowerment or Reconstituted Subordination?  
Dynamics of Gender Identities in the Lives of Professional  
African Migrant Women in South Africa**

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines the ways in which the migration of African professional women from Cameroon, Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Congo into South Africa in pursuit of empowerment opportunities is affecting power relations in the family and the implications of their new social and economic responsibilities on their gender identities. Using a qualitative approach, we examine the incongruities in these women's lives as they walk the tightrope of balancing between exercising their autonomy buttressed by their professional qualifications and economic independence, on the one hand, and the requirement to submit to traditional gender roles that are grounded in the ancient precedents of patriarchal domination and religion. This article argues for confronting ideological, socio-cultural as well as the material basis of African women's subordination to men and aspiring for their empowerment that encompasses both the economic as well as the socio-cultural realms.