Migration Trajectories and Experiences of Zimbabwean Immigrants in the Limpopo Province of South Africa: Impediments and Possibilities

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Abstract

Drawing from fieldwork research in Limpopo, South Africa, this paper explored the complexities that surrounded the Zimbabwean emigration to South Africa since the late 1990's through a series of migration waves and flows. It surveyed the context in which migrants left Zimbabwe and the reasons that drove them into exile and their experiences in South Africa. The paper builds on the narratives from the in-depth interviews and explores in detail the reasons the migrants cited as occasioning their exit. Migration waves from Zimbabwe were driven in part by the political and socio-economic implosion in the country and other complex factors. Zimbabwean emigration into South Africa is highly informalized and perilous. This paper sheds light on the timing of migration episodes and delineates the gender, education, and the skills base of this migrant community. The study of migration is a fiercely contested terrain with a plethora of academic lines of inquiry e.g. voluntary and involuntary migration, skilled and non-skilled migration.

Various studies have demonstrated the utility of transnationalism as a theoretical framework for explaining migration because it provides for participation of prior migrants in perpetuating the migration process once begun. The structural links that exist between Zimbabwe and South Africa due to factors such as cultural ties, proximity, colonialism, national liberation, and trade cannot be underestimated. South Africa views Zimbabwean immigrants as mobile economic migrants hence its policy towards Zimbabwean immigrants leans more towards deportation than documentation. With the November 2017 coup in Zimbabwe, most Zimbabweans in South Africa have been skeptical of returning home as they see the same people who propped up the Mugabe regime taking over power. This study provides an important lens into understanding borderland and frontier migrations in Southern Africa.

Introduction

This paper interrogated the migration experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in the Limpopo Province of South Africa (SA) based on five month fieldwork research. It seeks to tease out from the research participants the reasons for moving to SA, the informal nature of emigration, the migrants' perceptions about their stay and the challenges and impediments they face in their adopted country. Pseudonyms were used for those participants who did not want their identity disclosed. Data collection methods included face-to-face in-depth interviews, participant observation, literature review and documentary analysis. This study was grounded on the participants' stories and narratives about their experiences moving from Zimbabwe into SA, the challenges they faced and how they have navigated their stay across the south of the Limpopo River. The opportunities and prospects that the migrants encountered are also explored in depth in terms of interpreting the different types of Zimbabwean migrants in the Limpopo Province of SA.

The in-depth interviews enabled us to explore the personal and collective experiences of the migrants and the nature of their transnational relationships with those at home and how this shaped not only their transnational practices, but also their way of living in SA and the relationships that they have with fellow Zimbabwean migrants. This allowed us to unpack and interpret the different and multiple individual and collective meanings of being Zimbabwean in SA across a number of variables such as age, education, gender, immigration status, religion and social networks. Our selection of qualitative research as the medium of generating data was predicated on the need to seek out in-depth information from the study participants about their lived experiences, perceptions, viewpoints and feelings of their lives in SA (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Informalised and perilous migration into South Africa

Zimbabwean migration to South Africa (SA) during the period under study was highly informalized as a result of border control and restrictive laws of the South African border authorities. There was a high prevalence use of informal crossing points from Zimbabwe into SA. Prior to the mass exodus of 2008, migration was dominated by economic migrants, most of whom entered the country legally. However, the economic collapse and political violence that was directed at opposition party supporters during the 2008 elections saw a significant number of migrants seeking asylum in SA on the basis of persecution by President Mugabe's ZANU PF government. As many Zimbabweans migrated to SA, the South African government required Zimbabwean immigrants inside the country to report to the Musina Border Post after every 90 days to have their passports stamped so as to remain legal. To circumvent this border control by South African authorities, new Zimbabwean migrants into SA started using illegal entry points even when they had passports.

The informal movements of Zimbabweans into SA are fraught with manifold menaces for the migrants. The hazards are multiple and varied. They range from the natural to the human. Indeed tales from the migrants suggest a litany of these dangers that they had to grapple with as they traversed their way into SA. During the fieldwork, we saw first-hand the dangers and treacherous routes that the migrants had to contend with. The Limpopo River forms a formidable barrier between Zimbabwe and SA. This, however, has not proved to be a sufficient enough deterrent for desperate Zimbabweans trying to seek a new life in SA. Migrants have to contend not only with the raging tide of the river but with crocodiles. There were reports about people being swept by the swollen river, being pulled under the river by crocodiles and never to be seen again. Other respondents told of people being deliberately left to be washed away by the river following misunderstandings over money with the *maguma-guma*. The following quotes are informative:

> ...I was waist deep in water on the Zimbabwean side of the river, and by the time when I was in the middle, it was up to my neck. I was afraid and silently, I was saying my prayers. I was holding firmly to the guy in front of me and behind me the other woman was doing the same. We had to hold on to each other in a straight line with the guide in front another in the middle, and one at the end. Suddenly there was a piecing scream and because it was dark I could not see who it was, the guides told us that two people had been swept away when we had crossed. (Interview with Charles, Polokwane, March 2015) I am not doing it again...never ever. The current was too strong and it swept me and the person I was holding on to and the one who was behind me, holding on to me. I was thinking that I was going to die and how I am still alive, only God knows. I was on the verge of dying with thirsty and hunger when I stumbled onto a farm. (Interview with Noah, Seshegho, SA, April 2015)

As if the danger posed by the river was not enough, migrants also reported having to be constantly on the lookout for marauding animals, especially lions in the Gonarezhou and Kruger national parks. Interviewees spoke of being attacked by prides of lions during the dangerous trek into SA. One interviewee told of the attacks by a pride of lions in which six of his colleagues perished. Others told of deaths of other migrants caused by snakebites, as the game parks are infested with dangerous and venomous snakes as the case of Noah demonstrates,

> We entered SA through Chikwarakwara and crossed the flooded river with a canoe. There were some guys who knew the way. Two days after we crossed the Limpopo, we were suddenly attacked by a pride of lions. I ran like I never before, I had to because you could hear cries, those cries are still with me now, cries of people that I knew being eaten by lions. It was painful and scary; I survived by climbing a tree where I stayed for a further two days. I am alive by the grace of God. I later saw park rangers who were in the company of one of the people that we were with. (Interview with Noah, Musina, June 2015)

It is clear from the above account that the flooded Limpopo River was not the only foe to contend with but the wild animals such as lions. That Noah lived to tell his tale can be ascribed to the efficiency of the South African National Park Game Rangers who responded quickly to the distress call of his friend who had escaped.

For some, the journey to SA has left indelible physical, emotional and psychological imprints inflicted by wild animals, the Limpopo River and human smugglers who have arrogated the space between Limpopo and Musina to themselves. Human smuggling which is rife between Zimbabwe and SA has been taken over by criminals, commonly referred to as *Maguma-guma*. *Maguma-guma* is a Shona term for gangs of people who patronize the Beitbridge Border post engaging in criminal activities ranging from petty theft to facilitating the illegal crossing of goods and people through the border post and also through informal channels. Some of the *Maguma-gumas* are said to lie in wait for people who will be trying to "border jump" by traversing the river banks on both sides of the Limpopo or in the known paths that are used by migrants once they are on the South African side of the border. The *Maguma-gumas* can be equated to the coyotes that Mexicans and other Latin American migrants use to facilitate their entry into the USA (Mahler, 1995, Mahler 1998). *Maguma-gumas* have been reported to extort money, goods, mobile phones and other valuables from desperate migrants. The case of Tarisai, a 24 year-old man who was shot by *Maguma-gumas* on his way to SA after an argument about payment demonstrates not only the ruthlessness of these human smugglers but also the vulnerability of the migrants:

I was shot because I didn't have more money to pay. I had already paid them R150 they had asked for to be guided into SA from Beitbridge. I told them I didn't have any more money and he shot me on the leg. I was saved by the South African police who found me and took me to hospital. Now I am crippled, I left home perfectly normal but now I am an invalid. (Interview in Musina, 22 March 2015)

Notwithstanding the threats outlined above, a significant number of migrants stated that the greatest danger facing the '*border jumpers*' was the scourge of *maguma guma. Border jumper* is a term commonly used to refer to people who cross into SA through informal channels. According to the information provided by the interviewees, migrants were typically approached by members of the gangs or '*runners*' (people who recruit and channel migrants to the guides) at the Beitbridge border post with the promise of a safe passage to Musina. They were also usually being promised protection from *Maguma-guma*. The fee was usually agreed in advance and respondents spoke of negotiations taking place in the event that one did not have enough money. The fees charged by the *Maguma-guma* varied from as little as 50 Rands to as high as 2000 Rands. They accepted payment in kind such as mobile phones, watches, jewellery and designer clothes and shoes.

The experiences of respondents who were smuggled through the Beitbridge border post by '*Amalayitshas*' indicate that there may be some collaboration between the two networks. *Amalayitshas* is a Ndebele language term for delivery drivers who originally delivered goods from South African-based Zimbabweans to their homes in Zimbabwe. Increasingly, these are now smuggling people into and out of SA for a fee with the help of corrupt officials on both sides of the border. Zimbabwean bus drivers are engaged in the business of smuggling people too as they are well known to the SA border officials. Reports indicate that *Amalayitshas* work in concert with *Maguma-guma.*

People smuggled across the Beitbridge border post spoke of paying exorbitant fees to be helped through the border post and then being ordered off the vehicles a few miles into SA where *Maguma guma* pillaged their belongings and money despite having paid the full fare. This, said the migrants, is evidence of connivance between the two groups. According to migrant testimonies, *Amalayitshas* normally charge inflated fees to smuggle people without the necessary documentation through Beitbridge border post to destinations further inland in the hope of being paid by a guarantor (such arrangements are referred to as '*pay forward*'). Under this scenario, a human smuggler agrees to transport a client to a destination further than Musina without being paid the full fare, which a relative of the client would have promised to settle in full once the client is successfully delivered. However, in the greater majority of instances, the fare was extortionate, running into hundreds of South African Rands. When the guarantor failed/refused to pay the extortionate fare, the client was then made to repay the debt in kind such as being forced into sexual relationships with the driver and his colleagues with some allegedly being forced into the sex trade in order to pay back the money**.**

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Information gleaned from the survey suggest that the informalization of migration between Zimbabwe and SA has moved beyond both governments' envisioned scope of facilitating contact and travel between the same communities separated by a colonial border as Zimbabweans from all corners have resorted to using this mode of crossing into SA, driven in part by the exorbitant cost of passports and to escape the endemic poverty. In 2006, the Zimbabwean and South African governments agreed to waive passports requirements for people living along the border to facilitate contact between what were to all intents and purposes relatives who were separated by the imposition of colonial demarcations. However, because of the mass exodus of Zimbabweans into SA, this arrangement has since been revoked and everyone is required to have a passport to travel between the two countries.

Migratory Causes

Zimbabweans have migrated to SA since the colonial times. It was, however, after the political turmoil and economic crisis in Zimbabwe that exacerbated after the year 2000 that led to an increased exodus of Zimbabweans into northern SA seeking greener pastures (Rutherford 2010, 245). The causes of the exodus from Zimbabwe are complex and multi-faceted. In the period under review, these included the inception of the World Bank instigated Economic Structural Adjustment Program in the early 1990's with its uneven (or unequal) exploitative and capitalistic terms of trade, hyperinflation, hunger and poverty, security, political persecution, educational advancement, loss of livelihoods, employment opportunities, family reunification, social networks and health issues. Although hyperinflation had gone down in Zimbabwe in 2010, some immigrants moved from Zimbabwe in 2008 at the height of the inflation and did not return to Zimbabwe. As Muzondidya (2008) avers, migration has always been a livelihood strategy to counteract the climatic shocks that rendered subsistence agriculture impractical.

Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) and the departure of skilled professionals

The neo-classical economic theory posits that migration is principally caused by individuals trying to maximize their income by moving from low wage areas to areas where their labor is sufficiently recompensed (Borjas, 1989). Some scholars have attributed the migration of professionals in the 1990s to the hardships that accompanied the introduction of ESAP in 1992 (Gaidzanwa, 1999; McGregor, 2008). This school of thought ascribes the suffering that people were experiencing to the after effects of ESAP, which compelled professionals and ordinary people to leave (McGregor, 2008; Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009). The case of Dr. Chokuda, 48, who left Zimbabwe in 1995 for SA when the rumblings of discontent at the government's macro-economic policies first emerged, helps to explicate this. He now runs a medical practice in Limpopo:

I left early, way back in the mid 90s when I realized that the country was lurching from one crisis to the next. Remember ESAP that Chidzero (Dr Bernard Chidzero was independent Zimbabwe's first Minister of Finance described as the panacea for our economic problems and the damage that it caused? I was a doctor but I could not afford a car on my salary. (Interview with Dr. Chokuda, Polokwane, 24 March 2015)

As argued by Adepoju (2000: 385), migration may be a rational endeavour to mitigate the dramatic impacts of the World Bank inspired austerity programmes which make emigration a 'coping mechanism of last resort.' This is clear from Dr Chokuda's account that demonstrates the predicaments faced by many professionals at that time. Medical professionals expect to exhibit a higher standard of living befitting their status and society's expectations (Hammett, 2008). Faced with the spectre of a run-away inflation, which was slowly denuding the value of the local currency, many Zimbabweans, professionals and non-professionals alike, started exploring ways to leave. Until this juncture, migration was largely rural-urban and intra-urban but now took on a more regional dimension.

Hyperinflation and the Black Market

An overwhelming majority of the interview participants in SA stated that they felt the full impact of the economic difficulties as they left when these were at their zenith. Hyperinflation eroded the purchasing power of the local currency. As noted by Hanke and Kwok (2009), hyperinflation in November 2008 reached 89,700,000,000,000,000,000,000% compared to 65% in 2000 when most migrants in the UK like Eliza left (Chitekwe and Mitlin, 2001). Furthermore in 2008, job losses were widespread. The interviewees spoke of the unbearable economic hardships and the loss of purchasing power of the local Zimbabwean dollar currency and loss of jobs as the reason for exiting the country. The impact of the deteriorating economic conditions in Zimbabwe in propelling departure did not vary according to ethnicity and gender as this was evenly spread. There was a strong co-relationship between the economic factors and the year of departure as the case of Davidson, a 37 year old engineer who left in August 2008 demonstrated:

You couldn't stay there because it was uninhabitable; it was like living in a desert without anything, any cover. I don't know how to describe it for you to understand, because words can't describe the suffering that we went through, the hardships that we saw and felt. If you were there in 2008, you would understand what I am trying to say. It was tough; the money was worthless for most of us who didn't have access to forex. It was only the ZANU PF people and their minions who enjoyed as the system was against everyone; it made all of us poor overnight except them. In the end, I ended up staying at home as the cost of transport changed hourly. Everything was changing by the hour, others by the minute so much that you never had enough money to buy anything.

It was costing more to travel to town per day than what you were paid per month and in the end people just stayed at home. The hardships I underwent trying to provide for my family are indescribable…you can't put words to such suffering. We suffered too badly and no human being should suffer like we Zimbabweans did at the hands of that man (Mugabe). (Interview with Davidson, Musina, SA, June 2015)

Davidson lays bare the problems faced by formally and informally employed people in Zimbabwe in 2008. He equates living in Zimbabwe then to living in a desert, describing the country as uninhabitable due to economic problems that people were facing. It further illustrates the helplessness that people felt as they watched the currency crumple under the strain of hyperinflation. The majority of both the survey and interview participants ascribed the economic hardships to President Mugabe and his government (see for instance, Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009; Chan, 2003; Mpondi, 2012). James, 34, a former teacher now residing in Polokwane, gave a detailed account of his reasons for leaving Zimbabwe in October 2008:

I left Zimbabwe based on social, economic, and political factors. Politically, imminent danger from violence by Zanu youths, threats of food shortages that would have culminated in malnourishment and compromised state of health of my children and me. Economically I was earning less than US$12 a month due to hyper- inflation so I could not take it anymore. The need to queue for money at the banks that I would rarely get exacerbated it all. I noticed my economic viability had been seriously undermined by our economy so continuing to serve in such a public service was tantamount to me hanging myself in hunger, starvation, oppression, retrogression, disease, so to leave was the only solution when the opportunity arose. (Interview with James, Polokwane, SA, May 2015)

The interviewees revealed the level of desperation and hardships that were experienced by the migrants at home leading to scramble to exit for perceived greener pastures. Their narratives were couched in the following terms: '*escape from hunger and starvation, unbearable hardships, poverty, starting afresh, to look for employment, things being difficult at home, because Zimbabwe is not habitable anymore*'. (Various interviews in Limpopo Province, SA, February – June 2015). It is evident from the interviews that the overriding factor in their decision to leave Zimbabwe was premised on escaping the multiple problems resulting from the country's economic collapse.

Pepukai, a 46-year-old accountant who works for a financial institution in SA, describes himself as one of those who reluctantly moved to SA after his planned trip to London floundered due to visa problems:

I only came here because this was the only place, which was better. Imagine, I already had my ticket and was due to fly on 18ᵗʰ December 2002 when Blair (former Prime Minister, Tony Blair) decided that he now wanted us to have visas to go to London. Faced with the growing problems at home, this was the only place that I could come. I am still hoping though that one day I will be able to join you in the diaspora (although living in SA, he does not regard himself as being part of the diaspora). I was unlucky, very unlucky but then we were victims of the wider game between Mugabe and the West.(Interview with Pepukai, Limpopo Province, SA, May 2015)

Pepukai's view about SA not being a 'diaspora' is shared by other interviewees who view it as a stepping stone to destinations further afield. This is a novel revelation, as current scholarship appear to suggest that most migrants in SA are circular migrants without further migration intentions. Most migrants interviewed seemed not to consider the Limpopo Province of SA as a diaspora probably due to its borderland location and close proximity to Zimbabwe as the case of Pepukai demonstrates. The circulatory nature of migration has led some migrants to regard it as just a place of work from which they can travel regularly home to be with their families. Despite living away from home, Pepukai does not regard himself as a member of the 'diaspora' and considered SA as a conduit to destinations further afield. Thus, some migrants regard SA not as the final destination but as a launch pad for further migration, which is similar to what Collyer (1997) calls the 'fragmented journey' which,

> For many migrants on these routes their destination is not determined when they leave home, it may change many times during the course of the journey and, whatever it is, they may never get there (p.668).

Pepukai's case highlights that visa restrictions on Zimbabwean nationals by countries such as UK had the unintended consequence of channeling migrants who intended to travel to the UK to SA.

Loss of Livelihoods

The loss of livelihoods was particularly felt by survey participants who owned businesses that they depended on for their upkeep and sustenance. Amongst this group were commercial farmers, bankers and bureau de change owners. Dan is a 52-year-old white Zimbabwean who used to own a farm in Banket, Mashonaland West province who is now leasing a farm in Limpopo:

I lost everything that my father and grandfathers had worked hard for, to the extent that I feel like my whole life was taken from me, just like that, in a flash and it was pointless to fight it because the bench (judges of the high and supreme courts) is full of his people. I thank God that my family and I weren't killed in the process, as were the other farmers. I can't describe the feeling…I was born on the farm, my parents are buried there, so are my grandparents. I guess I am lucky, I have managed to start something down here…others were not so fortunate. (Interview with Dan, Limpopo Province, SA, April 2015).

Dan's testimony underlines the scale of problems and anguish that former Zimbabwean white commercial farmers felt when they lost their farms and their source of livelihoods. For Dan, the loss of the farm not only entailed financial ruin but also symbolized a "disconnect" with his past given that his parents and grandparents were buried on the farm. This is captured in the documentary, *Mugabe and the White African*, a vivid reflection of the violent nature of the land reform program in Zimbabwe (Bailey & Thompson, 2011). The 'White African' has known Zimbabwe as his only home and the displacement by the land reform program was a big loss in terms of their connection to the farm, their source of income and their identity as white Zimbabweans.

Such losses were not only inflicted on white Zimbabweans, but were also felt by the people that worked on the farms as in the case of Darios, a 25 year old former farm labourer from Chiredzi, Masvingo Province:

I came here because baas (boss) lost the farm, it was invaded and we were told to go home. The new people didn't need workers; the people that took the land came from *maruzevha* (villages/reserves) in Zaka. They took all the cattle and ate them. I didn't have anywhere to go; I was born on the farm to a Mozambican father and a Zimbabwean mother. I had to come here as others who had homes in the villages went back to their villages and some like me, had to think of somewhere else to go. (Interview with Darios, Limpopo Province, April 2015).

Darios represents thousands of other farm workers who were ejected from their places of work during the violent land reform programme (Sachikonye 2003). He is also one of the many others who found themselves stateless when the Zimbabwean government revoked citizenship of people born in Zimbabwe to parents of foreign origin (Mpondi 2012). Rendered stateless, disenfranchised and ineligible for resettlement under the fast track land reform, a number of people such as Darios chose to leave for SA where they hoped to find jobs in the agriculture sector (Rutherford 2011).

Black elites were not spared either as the case of George, a 47-year-old former owner of a financial services institution who now runs a financial services company in Polokwane epitomized:

> I left in 2004 when Gono (Gideon Gono, Reserve Bank Governor) was persecuting bankers left, right and centre soon after he took over the reins at the apex bank. Remember when he came in, he labeled us (bankers) as economic saboteurs, accusing us of externalizing foreign currency. (Interview in Polokwane, 28 March, 2015)

The loss of livelihoods affected all social classes in Zimbabwe. George's experiences are typical of the fate suffered by emerging Black elites who were persecuted and scapegoated by President Mugabe's government for the economic malaise the country was wallowing in (Mawere, 2009). A number of well-known business people were hounded out of the country for illegally externalizing foreign currency. The state tried through the arrests to deflect attention from its own failings and sought to blame the economic problems that were being experienced on malfeasance by business people.

Included in this group of people who lost their livelihoods were the victims of the infamous Operation Murambatsvina (Clean out Trash) in 2005 who also reported leaving Zimbabwe because they had lost their livelihoods. Operation Murambatsvina was launched in 2005 by the government of Zimbabwe and resulted in the demolition of houses and flea markets which ordinary people depended on. It has widely been condemned as having targeted opposition supporters in the major urban areas that were perceived as strong MDC support bases. The operation started in Harare before rapidly spreading to other cities. Members of the army, state security agencies and police spearheaded it. Murambatsvina resulted in the obliteration of homes, businesses, vending sites and upwards of 700,000 people losing their homes, their source of livelihood or both (United Nations 2005; Musoni, 2010). The Zimbabwean government claims that Murambatsvina was necessary in order to bring sanity to the informal sector whilst the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and civic society organisations allege that the operation was targeted at destroying the support base of the MDC. The people who bore the brunt of this destruction were the informal economy actors such as traders and vendors.

Faced with destroyed livelihoods, many victims chose to go to their rural villages or to other countries such as SA. However, not all victims of Operation Murambatsvina had rural homes as exposed by Potts (2010) who argued that it's a myth to say that all Zimbabweans have rural homes and that those who did not have rural homes disproportionately suffered from Operation Murambatsvina. The damaging effects of Operation Murambatsvina is exemplified by the case of Fadzai, a 29 year old woman who chose to go to SA after both the cottage that she was renting in Harare and the market stall that she was operating was pulled down in May 2005:

I was running a flea market in Harare. I was lodging a two-roomed cottage in Highfield. One Tuesday morning, there was commotion outside the flea market and soon there were soldiers and police officers taking our wares and loading them into army trucks. They told us that what we were doing was illegal and that we should go back home. People were crying as this was our life, we were surviving because of the money that we were getting from selling second hand clothes and electrical gadgets. When I got home, I was met with the shock of my life, my house had been turned into rubble. Everything that I owned was gone; I was not even given the chance to remove my furniture. The bulldozers were actually in the process of destroying other houses and people were screaming, swearing at the soldiers but they couldn't do anything because these men had guns, they were armed to the teeth. Riot police was standing guard, watching the soldiers and police destroy people's houses. They are very cruel people, these ZANU people. I didn't have any alternative except to go either to my rural home (Mutoko) or to come here. I decided to come here after leaving my daughter with my mother at our rural home. (Interview with Fadzai, Musina, SA, June, 2015)

Fadzai's case is not an isolated one as Murambatsvina targeted mostly the informal sector and informal dwellings that made it to be mainly felt by the urban poor who lived in the high-density suburbs where most of the informal dwellings and activities were concentrated. The reason was that there had been a population explosion in the high-density areas in Zimbabwe, which had resulted in house owners erecting unapproved structures on their properties that they were letting out to homeless people working in both the formal and informal sectors.

Growing Political Intolerance, Violence And Repression

The emergence of the MDC in September 1999 as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic party that appealed to all segments of the population was to have far reaching repercussions in the way Mugabe and his ZANU PF party and the state interacted with the Zimbabwean citizenry. It is important that even though the MDC won the first round of the 2008 presidential elections, by 2015 when this study was undertaken its influence as a political force to be reckoned with in Zimbabwe appeared to be on the wane. In SA, a small minority of the interviewees predicated their departure on political motivations. Despite secondary data pointing to increased violence, the results of this study do not support this. It is surprising that despite leaving at the height of political problems, very few participants ascribed their departure to political persecution, violence and safety and security issues. This could be accounted by three factors. Firstly, the politically active migrants may have moved to metropolitan areas such as Johannesburg and Cape Town where there are vibrant MDC structures.

Secondly, it could be that the period of extreme political violence coincided with the height of the economic problems to the extent that those interviewed thought their economic problems took precedence over the political ones. Thirdly, it could be that the migrants surveyed in Limpopo area of SA were not politically active and/or resided in areas that were not blighted by violence while they were still in Zimbabwe. This may suggest that the media coverage of political violence was exaggerated.

Since the formation of the MDC in 1999, the political atmosphere in Zimbabwe had become polarized between two protagonists, President Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai. This polarization reached fever pitch during the March 2008 harmonized elections during which President Mugabe and his party lost but refused to concede power on the basis that Tsvangirai did not garner 51 percent of the votes as required by the constitution. This prompted a violent run-off, which Tsvangirai withdrew from and President Mugabe was declared the victor. Migration to SA peaked during this post-2008 election period. Victims of political violence told us harrowing stories in SA. ZANU PF resorted to using brute force to whip the electorate into submission by voting for President Mugabe, resulting in the death of over 500 MDC supporters during the run-off (Human Rights Watch 2008). The experiences of Ntokwazi, a 26-year-old MDC activist in Gokwe, Midlands province, captures the pain and suffering that people who were perceived by ZANU PF to be MDC supporters endured:

> I had to leave home because the CIO (central intelligence organization) and green bombers wanted me dead. They killed my comrades, two of them in broad daylight and had I not escaped, I could also be dead. They are ruthless those people, I was a campaign organizer for the guy who was elected to be an MP beating a known Zanu person…After the elections and when they wouldn't declare the winner, that's when they started going door to door beating and killing known MDC supporters. They took us to the *pungwe* (all night vigil) where they killed the three people by dripping hot and smoldering plastic paper on their naked bodies. Whilst they were slowly killing my colleagues, they were asking us to sing ZANU's revolutionary songs, to clap whilst women were made to ululate. It was as if they were celebrating when actually someone was dying. It was horrific. Three of us were supposed to suffer the same fate the following day and we were kept at the *sabhuku'*s (village head) place when someone just came from nowhere and cut us free and told us to run for our lives. Up to now, I don't know who this person is and wherever he is, I just want to thank him from the bottom of my heart for saving my life. I walked and caught a lift from Gokwe to Gweru where we were given some money by the party (MDC) to come here (Interview with Ntokwazi, Musina, SA, May, 2015).

It appears as though ZANU PF and its supporters in 2008 went the extra mile through violence to ensure that the MDC party would not get into power.

Pursuit of Higher Education

There has been a rich history of Zimbabweans moving to SA for further education purposes. Higher education in Zimbabwe has been critical in an individual's economic status. It was and continues to be regarded in some circles as a safe path of social mobility ascendance and economic prosperity. Olivia came to SA on the presidential scholarship program:

> I failed my As, I only managed 8 points that weren't enough for me to get a place at UZ or NUST (National University of Science and Technology). I enrolled for the 2-year diploma in mass communication (journalism) at Harare Poly. Half way through, I got this scholarship that I applied for through my councillor in my rural home (Nyanga) who took my certificates to the governor in Mutare. I think it's better here than at Poly because I get a degree when I finish rather than a diploma (Interview with Olivia, Limpopo Province, SA, April 2015)

Olivia's narrative demonstrates the premium that is placed on university education by Zimbabweans. The availability of scholarships attracted young people and adults who were already employed.

Social Networks and the Lure of Others' Accomplishments

The role played by social networks should not be underestimated in propelling migration from Zimbabwe. Social networks have been shown in migration literature to play a significant role in the development of migration streams (Castells, 2002). The existence of Zimbabwean networks in SA facilitated and attracted migration. Dickson worked as an electrician in Zimbabwe prior to moving to SA. Most people of his generation in his village dropped out of school and went to SA where they worked. They would normally meet during the Christmas holiday when the South African-based people came back. According to Dickson, although they did not have any educational qualifications, they appeared to be doing better than him as exemplified by driving the latest cars and building modern houses at their homesteads. Additionally, they were also telling him of how well they were doing in SA:

I came here because of Joseph, a former classmate who lives in my village. He dropped out of primary school in grade 6 and crossed the river. He would come home every Christmas holiday laden with goodies for his mother and family. I have "A" levels but nothing to show of it. Joseph has built a big house... a 4 bedroomed house with asbestos roof when I only have a thatched hut and couldn't buy anything for my family at Christmas. Last Christmas, he came home with a twin cab and that did it for me... I decided to cross and make a name for myself. If Joseph, who was not so good at school and almost always came last in our class, could buy a car, electrify his mother's homestead...I could also make it in Joza (Johannesburg). Besides, Joseph said there were opportunities for educated people like me. (Interview with Dickson, Musina, SA, March 2015).

Dickson's narrative is important in that it makes reference to the promises that Joseph made about the existence of opportunities for educated people like him. As a result, Dickson was pressurized to move to SA in order to realize his full potential due to the existence of better paying jobs. The people who had moved became sources of vital information about the existence of jobs, how to navigate the immigration traps and provided accommodation and in some cases, provided the much needed money for bus-fares. Dickson's case resonates with the work of Light and Johnson (2004) that observes that social networks and social capital enable other migrants to follow their footsteps through the provision of information about job opportunities, money for transportation and accommodation.

The Search for Life Saving Drugs and the Collapse of Health Service

The collapse of the health delivery system in Zimbabwe was cited as another push factor by a significant number of interviewees in SA. Further, the absence of basic life-saving medicines such as anti-retroviral (ARVs) medicines was a decisive factor for some migrants as staying in Zimbabwe would have led to death. Evelyn, a 28-year-old mother of two, left Zimbabwe for SA after the death of her husband and two children. Her husband died after a long illness (a euphemism for an HIV/AIDS related death) and the children died within a year of being born. Evelyn described her health when she was still at home as not too good as she was always down with stomach bugs.

I left home to be treated here. At home there are no medicines for my condition. I live in the rural area and the clinic there doesn't have any pills. Many people have perished in our area due to this disease. When I arrived here, it was during those days of cholera so there was a treatment centre for people from home at Musina. I was tested and this confirmed what I long suspected. I was given ARVs and now I am ok, all I have to do is to take my pills every day. I don't pay anything, as they are free. Certainly, if I had stayed at home, I would have died a long time ago, when I went home at Christmas people couldn't remember me. Those who were like me are long dead. AIDS has killed a lot of people. (Interview with Evelyn, Polokwane, SA, June 2015)

Evelyn's situation illustrates the devastating impact that HIV/AIDS has had on Zimbabwean people. In search of survival, Zimbabweans flocked to SA where an emergency treatment centre was opened to cater specifically for Zimbabweans in the border town of Musina. Many of those who came seriously sick chose not to return home to Zimbabwe; going back would have portended certain death. What emerged from the narratives of Zimbabwean migrants suggest that SA was seen as providing a safe haven – it had medical facilities and medicines to prolong life for those migrants who were suffering from ailments such as HIV/AIDS as well as those whose livelihoods had been destroyed by the fast track land reform program and Operation Murambatsvina.

Family Reunion

Castles (2002) has highlighted the importance of family reunion in propelling and perpetuating migration cycles leading to the formation of migration chains. Evidence adduced from this study did not show family reunion as big driver of migration possibly due to the circulatory nature of migration which sees the migrants shuttling back and forth, a practice that diminishes the need for family reunion. Moreover, immigration status is not a significant constraint to movement in SA as highlighted by the case of Rugare:

My wife is at home of course, why would she need to be here? She stays at home with the kids and she has been here once or twice but it's difficult to come here with a baby on her back, if she had a passport maybe, but because she has to walk like the other border jumpers, it makes it difficult. I go home frequently so she doesn't really need to come. It has always been that way, remember our fathers used to work away and we stayed at home with our mothers? Its tradition, wives stay at home and men work away and visit whenever they can. (Interview, Giyani, 15 March 2015)

This excerpt demonstrates how circulation impedes family reunification. Other factors include the dangers associated with informal migration and socio-cultural norms which require wives to stay at home doing reproductive roles like caring for the children and community (Ansell, 2001; Dodson, 1998) which Collins (1994) terms community *'motherwork'*.

Conclusion

Migration flows from Zimbabwe to South Africa (SA) in the new millennium have been largely informal due to the official South African border control and the porous nature of the Zimbabwean-South African border. Most Zimbabwean migrants in SA left after the year 2000 up to the economic crisis of 2008. Their reasons for migrating include hunger and poverty, security, political persecution, educational advancement, loss of livelihoods, employment opportunities and health issues. The mass exodus of Zimbabweans into South Africa led to a massive brain drain as skilled Zimbabweans left the country and ended up doing menial jobs for survival. Without proper documentation, a lot of Zimbabweans with university degrees and college diplomas have worked as farm workers, restaurant waiters and waitresses, petrol station attendants and maids just to eke out a living in South Africa.

The South African government's migration policy towards Zimbabwean immigrants seems to lean more towards temporary stay than permanent residency or citizenship. The detention centers for illegal immigrants attest to this short-term solution to the influx and migration flows of Zimbabweans into SA. To date, this has not discouraged deported Zimbabweans going back, and it shows that 'the focus on deportation rather than documentation reduces the resources of the government to combat real criminals, and creates a climate that encourages xenophobia. Deportation does nothing to address the influx of migrants; it does not lead to an increased number of legal and documented immigrants' (Solidarity Peace Trust & Passop, 2012, 37). The migration policies in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region 'evidences two contradictory thrusts, one which seeks to encourage close regional and specifically economic integration, and the other which resists the assumed threats posed to national sovereignty by increased migrant flows and which leads to a fractious regional governance system' (Cornelissen 2009, 347). On the same note, 'the South African government…categorizes many Zimbabweans as "mobile economic immigrants" and not genuine political asylum seekers' (Morreira 2010, 443).

There was a sense of mostly temporary stay than permanent relocation among Zimbabwean migrants in SA. For some Zimbabwean migrants, moving to SA has led to deskilling and exploitation. The interviews established that pursuant to the deskilling practices, highly skilled migrants experience downward social mobility by working in farms, mines, restaurants, and petrol stations and as maids.

In spite of their high levels of education and work experience, the survey participants in SA spoke of experiencing significant barriers to employment, which has led to under-employment. Even after the peaceful 2013 elections, more Zimbabweans continue to flow into SA through informal means seeking better opportunities in spite of the impediments of border control, deportations and arrests. ZANU PF's Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset) promised jobs and sustainable development to Zimbabweans but has proven to be a white paper devoid of pragmatism as it is manipulated by political hawks bent on serving their political lives than serving the people. More Zimbabweans have lost their jobs after the 2013 elections as hundreds of companies closed as a result of the dire economic situation. SA is an obvious migratory destination. Despite the impediments and challenges faced by Zimbabwean immigrants in the Limpopo Province of SA, it was better for them to stay in SA 'not as illegal immigrants but cross-border traders' than to go back to a politically and economically crippled Zimbabwe. The November 2017 forced resignation through military intervention of Robert Mugabe as President of Zimbabwe was a temporary relief for Zimbabweans inside and outside the country, but the problems that led to a mass exodus of people into South Africa are still a challenge to the military-assisted government. Mpondi (2018) claims that the system and institutions that Mugabe "created for almost forty years are still intact, and it will take some time to dismantle such a system that survived on patronage and cronyism" (p.49). Zimbabweans in South Africa are watching the developments in Zimbabwe with new President Emmerson Mnangagwa urging the Zimbabwean Diaspora to come back and help rebuild the country, but there is skepticism about the new dispensation in Zimbabwe that is fronted by a military junta and a civilian president. Some Zimbabweans in South Africa have gone to register to vote in the first post-Mugabe elections scheduled for July/September 2018, but it is a waiting game in terms of the certainty of returning to Zimbabwe permanently.

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