

**Women's Voices from the Zimbabwean Diaspora:
Migration and Change**

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Abstract

The increasing feminization of Zimbabwean migration is part of an overall increase in migration from Zimbabwe since 1990 – primarily to destinations in South Africa and the UK, though Zimbabweans now live in countries throughout the world. There are currently three to four million Zimbabwean cross-border migrants, or about 25 percent of Zimbabwe’s total population of twelve million. Most Zimbabweans leaving the country in the last two decades have been forced to do so because of economic and political instability, and it is women who have experienced the most dramatic changes in patterns of migration. Based on interviews with twenty-three Zimbabwean women migrants, this study seeks to explain the dramatic increase in the number of women who have migrated to work outside of Zimbabwe, and the impact of women’s migration on family structures and gender roles.

Keywords: Feminization of migration, Zimbabwe, remittances, transnational mothering, kinkeeping, cross-border trade, international migration, changing gender norms.

Women's Voices from the Zimbabwean Diaspora: Migration and Change

The number of female migrants crossing borders for work has increased significantly in the last few decades – women now make up almost half of the world's 214 million international migrants (Crush and Tevera 2010). In Southern Africa¹, however, women make up less than 15 percent of international or cross-border migrants, with the exception of Zimbabwe, where 44 percent of migrants crossing borders to work are women (Crush and Tevera 2010:10). This is a significant shift from the period before Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, when women were restricted to their rural "homelands" by the colonial authorities, with the support of local male leaders (Schmidt 1992). It is also a change from the post-independence period, when women first began to move out of rural areas in significant numbers to engage in informal work in Zimbabwe's towns and cities (Moyo and Kawewe 2002).

The increasing feminization of Zimbabwean migration is part of an overall increase in international migration from Zimbabwe since 1990 – mainly to destinations in South Africa and the United Kingdom, (UK)² though Zimbabweans are now present in many countries throughout the developed and developing world. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, there are currently three to four million Zimbabwean migrants outside the country, or between 25 percent and 30 percent of the country's total population of twelve million (Betts 2009:8). Studies of Zimbabwe's migration patterns suggest that most Zimbabweans leaving the country in the last two decades have been forced to do so by "an economy in free-fall, soaring inflation and unemployment, the collapse of public services, political oppression, and deepening poverty" (Crush and Tevera 2010:1).

Zimbabwe's economic and political problems are affecting both men and women, but it is women who have experienced the most dramatic change in level of independent migration. In the past, it was primarily men who emigrated for paid labor on white-owned farms and mines. However, in the last two decades, Zimbabwean women have been taking on a breadwinner role and leaving extended family and even their children behind as they travel outside of Zimbabwe in search of income sufficient for family survival, often staying away for long periods of time.

Both the feminization of migration and the increase in the total number of female migrants from Zimbabwe raise a number of important questions. Why have women migrated from Zimbabwe in such large numbers in the past two decades? What is responsible

for the major shift in Zimbabwean women's economic activity? What changes in society have been sufficient to "push" women to emigrate in large numbers, and to stay away from their homes and families for long periods of time (Castles and Miller 2009)? How are women's lives and those of their families changing as a result of migration? I would suggest that it is important to identify the factors that have contributed to the feminization of Zimbabwean migration, as well as those motivating the overall increase in migration from Zimbabwe.

While the large Zimbabwean exodus since 1990 has prompted a "flurry of research" on the drivers of Zimbabwean migration, the characteristics of the migrant population, and the impact of migration on sending and receiving societies, few of these studies have explored the specifically gendered aspects of Zimbabwean migration (Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera 2012; Crush and Tawodzera 2011; Chikanda 2011; Tevera and Chikanda 2009). Some quantitative studies now include women but offer little more than approximate numbers of women crossing borders. A number of these studies make use of official United Nations migration statistics, which are problematic due to "inconsistency in the availability, quality, and comparability of government sources...[and in their failure to consider that] women migrants...are in fact independent actors in migration decision making" (Levko-Everett 2005:6). While some recent studies of gendered patterns of migration in Southern Africa have taken a qualitative approach, and are therefore able to more effectively explain changes in women's migration, they combine the experiences of female migrants from the whole region, making it difficult to identify Zimbabwean women's unique motivations and experiences (Kihato 2010; Kiwanuka 2010; Dodson et al. 2008; Levko-Everett 2005; Dodson 1998). These limitations and gaps suggest a need for a qualitative study that takes an in-depth look at Zimbabwean women's motives and agency in the decision to migrate, their experiences as migrants, and the impact of migration on gender dynamics in households and communities in both origin and destination countries.

This study therefore uses semi-structured interviews to gather information from twenty-three Zimbabwean women working in either South Africa or the UK. Based on an analysis of the themes that emerged from interviews, and using a grounded theory³ approach to conceptualize their experiences, I argue that changing economic and political conditions have created a strong enough "push" to bring large numbers of women into the migration stream because of: (1) the severity of Zimbabwe's economic and political

problems, (2) the instability of marriages in Zimbabwe, (3) women's increased responsibility as the main providers for children and extended family members, and (4) the "normalization" of women's migration as a form of "sacrifice" for the good of the family (Hofmann and Buckley 2011).

I also suggest that while Zimbabwean women maintain stronger ties than male migrants to home and family within social networks of obligation, they are increasingly likely to stay away for long periods of time, because: (1) their ability to provide financial support and long-distance guidance to their families has become a new form of "kinkeeping" that allows women to meet their normative obligations to family without being physically present (Rossi and Rossi 1990), and (2) the movement of female migrants away from direct patriarchal control, their increased financial independence, and their exposure to less restrictive gender norms have enhanced their sense of autonomy and empowerment, encouraging them to continue working abroad and to keep contributing to their families and communities (Hofmann and Buckley 2011).

I begin with a summary of recent changes in patterns of Zimbabwean migration as background for the two main questions. In the following discussion, I use a transnational model⁴ rather than an assimilation model⁵ of Zimbabwean migration, since Zimbabweans living abroad generally identify as members of a diaspora community with ties to both Zimbabwe and their country of residence. I also make use of a "push/pull" model of migration as a way of identifying factors contributing to migration decisions. "Push" factors are conditions that motivate people to leave their homes, and "pull" factors are conditions that attract people to certain locations (Lee 1966). Following the overview of migration patterns, I discuss the methods used in the study, then provide support for the argument outlined above, using information from other studies of migration, along with narrative examples from the interviews.

Background: Changing Patterns of Female Migration in Zimbabwe in the 1990s and 2000s

Migration to South Africa

When Zimbabwe became an independent country in 1980, the number of male migrants travelling from Zimbabwe to South Africa to work in the mines and on farms declined significantly (Mlambo 2010: 70). Instead, most Zimbabwean migration in the 1980s was

from rural to urban areas within the country, with women as well as men seeking new economic opportunities (Potts 2010: 80). Limited opportunities for work in the formal sector of the economy led some female internal migrants to engage in cross-border trading (Jamela 2013). In the 1990s, as Zimbabwe began to experience serious political and economic problems, the informal sector grew, and men as well as women became traders, though women remained in the majority (Jamela 2013:4). Whereas earlier economic migrants and traders had been young and often single, beginning in the 1990s, significant numbers of married, divorced, and widowed Zimbabwean women with children were working as traders in the Southern African region. Women were also increasingly likely to cross the border in search of other types of employment. A 1997 study found that 73 percent of Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa in the 1990s were married, 40 percent were household heads and primary breadwinners, and 39 percent were women (Crush, Chikanda, and Tawodzera 2012:9).

By the early 2000s, women were increasingly accounting for a larger percentage of the Zimbabwean migrant population; in 2005 women made up 44 percent of the total (Crush et al. 2012:18). In addition, migrants were staying away longer. In 1997, 70 percent of migrants stayed less than a month, but in 2006, half were staying 6 months or longer (Crush et al. 2012:17). Indicating a shift from temporary to more permanent migration, the percentage of Zimbabwean migrants working as informal traders in South Africa declined from 42 percent in 1997 to 20 percent in 2005, while almost half were employed in regular skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled jobs (Crush et al. 2012:19).

Zimbabwean migration to South Africa increased rapidly as the 2000s progressed. In 2005, 7,783 asylum applications were filed by Zimbabweans; in 2009 that number had increased to 149,453 (Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera 2012:23). As the number of applications for asylum grew, the percent approved dropped dramatically; 14 percent of applications for asylum were successful in 2007, but less than 1 percent were approved in 2009 (Crush et al. 2012). Not only was the Department of Home Affairs overwhelmed by the paperwork for such large numbers of asylum seekers, most Zimbabweans were considered economic migrants rather than refugees by the South African government (Middleton 2010). To avoid deportation, most migrants apply for asylum status, which gives them the right to work and access basic social services while they wait (four years on average) for their applications to be

processed. High levels of unemployment and widespread xenophobia⁶ in South Africa have made it difficult for some to find jobs and make use of public services. However, an International Labour Organization (ILO) study in 2008 found that within one to two years, most Zimbabweans with official status have improved their positions. Only illegal migrants without documentation continue to occupy unskilled positions or experience unemployment.

In a recent change, as of November 2012, Zimbabweans with a valid passport are no longer required to apply and pay for a visa to enter South Africa; they are to be given a ninety day authorization to apply for a work permit (Zimbabwe and SA Agree 2012). The back-log of paperwork with Home Affairs, and the relocation of reception offices from major cities to border towns, however, continues to leave many migrants with uncertain legal status, and with fears of arrest and deportation.

As of 2012, women still made up about 44 percent of Zimbabwe's migrants to South Africa, but the range of migrants' ages, occupations, education levels, and points of origin in Zimbabwe had become quite diverse (Crush et al. 2012). Almost every Zimbabwean family had at least one or two members seeking work outside the country (Crush et al. 2012:25). For many of these more recent migrants, South Africa has become a long-term destination rather than a place to earn quick money to take back to Zimbabwe. About 46 percent of recent migrants said they have not visited Zimbabwe since migrating to South Africa (Crush et al. 2012). In addition, 13 percent said they want to stay "indefinitely" in South Africa, and 8 percent want to remain "permanently" (Crush et al. 2012:29).

Migration to the United Kingdom (UK)

Before 2000, most Zimbabweans migrating to the UK were white, well-educated, and assimilated fairly easily into British society. A majority of black Zimbabwean migrants in the late 1990s were also from the middle class, and had "the necessary financial resources at a time of hyper-inflation, and the support and connections, to afford long distance travel" (Bloch 2010:158). Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of black Zimbabweans entering the UK steadily increased. The number of asylum applications peaked at 7,800 in 2002, the same year that the UK placed significant visa restrictions on prospective Zimbabwean migrants (Bloch 2010:157).

After 2000, these visa restrictions, in spite of growing problems in Zimbabwe, reduced the total number of Zimbabweans entering the UK (not only asylum seekers) from 56,600 in 2002 to 39,250 in 2007 (Crush and Tevera 2010:4).

According to the Zimbabwe Association, a non-profit that provides advice and support to Zimbabwean asylum seekers, the number of individuals seeking help dropped from 7,000 in 2002 to 460 in 2012. Also, changes to immigration policy removed or changed many of the rights of asylum seekers for living and working in the UK. Asylum seekers typically spend about six months to a year waiting for a first decision by the Department of Home Affairs. Pending the outcome of this decision, asylum seekers can then file an appeal. Those who are waiting for adjudication, or who have exhausted their appeal rights, are granted “Temporary Admission” or permission to stay in the UK legally, rather than being immediately removed. However, those with “Temporary Admission” are forbidden from seeking paid employment, receive welfare at a fraction of the level of residents, and are “dispersed” around the UK to live in isolated communities. In spite of these restrictions, those with money and skills continue to come – by 2008, government census statistics showed that there were about 200,000 Zimbabweans (both official and unofficial) living in the UK (Pasura 2008). Men’s greater access to education and other resources in Zimbabwe traditionally favored men’s migration to the UK, but women are increasingly the primary migrants for high-demand but low-wage female-typed jobs like care-work, nursing, social work, and teaching (Pasura 2010). And both men and women with professional skills are likely to experience deskilling once they arrive, partly because of restrictions on using qualifications (e.g. degrees, certifications) obtained outside the UK, and partly because of racial discrimination in the labor market (Bloch 2010:163).

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were carried out between September and November 2012 with fourteen women in South Africa, and nine women in the UK, all of whom initially left Zimbabwe between the late 1990s and 2011. Interview participants were located by contacting some of my Zimbabwean former students (my husband and I were teachers at Mt. Selinda Institute in southeast Zimbabwe from 1981-1984), who have emigrated to London in the UK, and to Cape Town and Johannesburg in South Africa. In addition, several organizations that provide services to Zimbabwean migrants were helpful in locating Zimbabweans who were willing to

discuss their experiences, and snowball techniques⁷ were used to find additional participants. I also talked to several key informants in London, Cape Town, and Johannesburg who work for agencies doing advocacy work or providing migrant services, or who are doing academic studies of migration.

Participants ranged in age from 22 to 72, including 7 women in their 20s, 7 women in their 30s, 5 women in their 40s, and 2 women in their 50s, and 1 woman in her 70s. A majority of the participants migrated from urban areas in Zimbabwe to urban areas in the UK and South Africa, and all arrived in these destination countries between 2000 and 2011. Twenty-one out of the 23 women had completed at least secondary school, and 12 had tertiary education. This is not surprising, given Zimbabwe's reputation for a high quality system of education, and efforts by more developed countries to attract migrants with higher levels of education and skills (the "brain drain") (Taylor 2006).

The women in South Africa were employed in a range of formal occupations that included business and non-profit management, teaching, administrative support, and farm work. In addition, one had an informal job, making and selling crafts and one was a graduate student. This range of occupations is typical of migrants to South Africa in the 2000s. In the UK, the women were employed in a narrower range of formal professional and service jobs, including teaching, nursing, and care-work. These are typical of the female-typed jobs for which Zimbabwean migrants have been hired over the last decade in the UK.

Table 1: Study Participants Demographics

	Origin in Zimbabwe	Origin: Urban vs. Rural	Destination Country	Year Migrated	Age*	Employment in Destination Country*	Education Level*	Marital Status*
Bongile	Harare	Urban	United Kingdom	2001	38	Non-profit	Tertiary degree	Married
Busani	Harare	Urban	United Kingdom	2008	42	In-Home Care Work	Some tertiary education	Divorced
Chido	Mutare	Urban	United Kingdom	2000	43	Nurse	Tertiary certificate	Divorced
Chiedza	Harare	Urban	United Kingdom	2000	55	Social Activist	Some tertiary education	Divorced
Hope	Chipinge	Small town	United Kingdom	2001	45	Nurse	Tertiary certificate	Married
Joyce	Marondera	Small town	United Kingdom	2001	39	Social Work	Earning Tertiary degree	Divorced
Mercy	Harare	Urban	United Kingdom	2008	52	Unemployed	Secondary school degree	Divorced
Miriam	Seke	Urban	United Kingdom	2001	42	Nurse	Tertiary degree	Married
Rudo	Chako	Rural	United Kingdom	2004	44	Nurse	Tertiary certificate	Married
Beatrice	Bindura	Urban	South Africa	Early 2000s	34	Business management	Secondary school degree	Divorced
Beauty	Masvingo	Urban	South Africa	2004	27	Non-profit	Secondary school degree	Married
Faith	Harare	Urban	South Africa	2011	24	Administrative	Secondary school degree	Single
Farai	Harare	Urban	South Africa	2008	28	Administrative	Tertiary degree	Married

Grace	Bulawayo	Urban	South Africa	2009	22	Public Health	Graduate degree	Single
Itayi	Mutare	Urban	South Africa	2008	27	Teacher	Tertiary degree	Married
Kudzai	Marondera	Urban	South Africa	2001	31	Church maintenance	Secondary school degree	Divorced
Linda	Harare	Urban	South Africa	2007	30	Farmworker	Secondary school degree	Married
Martha	Chinhoyi	Urban	South Africa	2010	35	Farmworker	Middle school	Divorced
Naisha	Harare	Urban	South Africa	2010	34	Farmworker	Secondary school degree	Divorced
Praise	near Mutare	Rural	South Africa	2009	72	Craft production and sales	Primary school	Widowed
Rufaro	Harare	Urban	South Africa	2009	38	Non-profit	Some tertiary education	Married
Sheila	Harare	Urban	South Africa	2009	29	Unemployed; Student	Tertiary degree	Married
Thoko	Bindura	Urban	South Africa	2007	27	Retail sales	Some tertiary education	Married

*At the time of the interview.

Most interviews lasted between an hour and ninety minutes, and were conducted in English. They were audio-recorded and covered a set of core questions about reasons for migration and migration experiences. The recordings were transcribed by undergraduate student research assistants, reviewed and edited by the primary researcher, and analyzed using narrative analysis. Responses were sorted into six categories based on themes that emerged in response to the two main research questions. Narrative

examples from the interviews are used to provide support for the main argument. In reporting the results of the interviews, pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

Factors Contributing to the Dramatic Increase in Women's Migration Since 1990

The severity of Zimbabwe's economic and political problems as the primary cause of increased migration

In order to understand the increase in women's levels of migration and their long-term involvement in both formal and informal work outside of Zimbabwe, it is important to first be aware of the extent of economic decline and the increase in political instability since 1990, and how it has contributed to the last two decades of the Zimbabwean "exodus" as described in the background section on migration patterns.

Zimbabwe achieved its independence from white rule in 1980, after a decade-long liberation struggle. The two main African opposition parties were the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), led by Robert Mugabe. In 1976 the two groups formed a military alliance known as the Patriotic Front (PF). In 1979 the Lancaster House Peace Accord created conditions for the first independent election in Zimbabwe, and Robert Mugabe became Prime Minister. Nkomo occupied a position in the cabinet until 1982, when Mugabe sought to make Zimbabwe a one-party state by sending the Fifth Brigade into Matabeleland to crush dissent. As a result of the Gukurahundi campaign (1982-1987), about 20,000 residents of Matabeleland died, and almost a million people fled Zimbabwe to work in South Africa (Orner and Holmes 2010:468). In order to bring an end to the violence, Nkomo signed a Unity Accord that brought PF-ZAPU into ZANU-PF in 1987.

While the Lancaster House agreement slowed Zimbabwe's transition out of colonialism by protecting the land ownership rights of white farmers, the government was able to make a number of economic improvements in the 1980s. Between 1979 and 1984, enrollment in primary schools increased from 82,000 to 2.25 million, and secondary school enrollment grew from 66,000 to almost 500,000 (Orner and Holmes 2010:483). Clinics and roads were built, sanitation was improved in rural areas, and the majority of the population gained access to safe drinking water, all of which reduced infant mortality rates and increased life expectancy (Orner and Holmes 2010:483). The money to finance these improvements, however, came from international loans, and industrial expansion was dominated by multinational corporations, so that most profits from economic growth went into the hands of a small, local elite or Western corporations. Studies estimate that two thirds of Zimbabwe's national income in the 1980s went to 3 percent of the population – mainly white farmers and black elites with ties to ZANU-PF (Orner and Holmes 2010:483).

By the late 1980s, foreign debt was up to about three billion dollars (US), the economy was stagnant, and the government was under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to cut spending on social services and focus on debt repayment to continue receiving loans. In 1991, an Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) was introduced by the Zimbabwean government in cooperation with the IMF and the World Bank. The Zimbabwe dollar was devalued, government spending on social services was cut, import controls and export incentives were removed, and many state companies were privatized (Zeilig 2002). Food prices went up, real wages declined, unemployment and poverty increased, and life expectancy began to decline (Orner and Holmes 2010:485). Yet elite Zimbabweans (especially white farm owners) continued to prosper as a result of low wages and export profits.

President Mugabe's response to widespread frustration and unrest was to blame Zimbabwe's social and economic problems on "victimization by the imperialist West" (Orner and Holmes 2010:486). In November 1997, Zimbabwe withdrew from the ESAP and re-established direct control of social and economic policy. Mugabe also sent soldiers to fight in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo to gain "access to resources and new market opportunities for the Zimbabwean elite," and made unbudgeted payments to liberation war veterans to keep them loyal to the government (Orner and Holmes 2010:485). Approximately 1,400 white-

owned farms were targeted for expropriation, and the farm takeovers eventually displaced over a million farmworker families in order to resettle about 140,000 families on the farms – many of whom were war veterans or party loyalists (Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera 2012:12). International investors fled the country, leading to a 74 percent drop in the value of the Zimbabwe dollar in one day (Orner and Holmes 2010:486). Short of foreign currency and unable to pay their debts, Zimbabwe began to print more money, which, along with the cost of military involvement in the Congo and food shortages tied to the land seizures, contributed to rising levels of inflation.

In 1999, a new opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) emerged from a combination of labor unions, groups opposed to the land take-overs, and civic organizations that supported democratic constitutional reforms (McGregor 2010: 7). In 2000, when MDC supporters helped to defeat a new constitution which would have increased the ruling party's power and legalized land take-overs without compensation, the government's response was an intensive program of farm invasions, in which many white farm owners and black farmworkers were savagely beaten or killed (McGregor 2010:7). The US Congress reacted by imposing economic sanctions which intensified the downward economic spiral; the Zimbabwe Democracy and Recovery Act was passed in 2001, which instructed international financial institutions to oppose extending any loans, credit or guarantees to the government of Zimbabwe and to refuse to cancel any of Zimbabwe's debt (Tendi 2012). The Zimbabwe government in turn labeled MDC members as "the enemy," and launched a broad campaign of violence. The Solidarity Peace Trust estimates that between 2001 and 2004, 300,000 people were victims of human rights violations such as torture, destruction of property, and denial of access to food aid (Crush, Chikanda, and Tawodzera 2012:13). Also, since MDC supporters were concentrated in the urban areas and Matabeleland, some of the worst state-sponsored violence took the form of mass urban demolitions. In Operation Murambatsina (Remove the Filth) in 2005, more than 700,000 people living in informal urban settlements were driven out of their homes and deeper into poverty (McGregor 2010:7). Given the political and economic turmoil, it is not surprising that many saw cross-border migration as their only option.

Throughout the 2000s, inflation had been spiraling out of control, and an extensive black market in foreign currency had developed (Orner and Holmes 2010:486). By March 2008, one US dollar was equivalent to 25 million Zimbabwe dollars; by May it

was one billion, and food prices could double or triple in a few hours' time (Orner and Holmes 2010:487) . At the same time, in March 2008, Zimbabwe held presidential and parliamentary elections. It took five weeks for the official results of the election to be announced, and while Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC received 47.9 percent (according to the official vote tally) compared to Mugabe's 43.2 percent, neither received more than 50 percent so a runoff was required.

During the weeks between the election and the official announcement of results, and again after the run-off was announced, there were multiple violent attacks on MDC supporters – hundreds were beaten, tortured and killed. It was during this time that Zimbabwean out-migration reached its peak. Tsvangirai withdrew from the election in order to end the violence, but the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) rejected the election results, and pressed for the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU). After months of negotiations it was agreed that Mugabe would remain President and Tsvangirai would become Prime Minister. In January 2009, the GNU replaced the Zimbabwe dollar with the US dollar and the South African rand, and the IMF provided a 510 million dollar loan, eventually bringing inflation down to 6 percent (Orner and Holmes 2010:488).) Zimbabwe then launched a “Short Term Economic Revival Plan” which stabilized the economy, making it possible to reopen some schools and hospitals (Orner and Holmes 2010). However, in the power sharing agreement Mugabe held onto the security sector, which meant that the threat of violence as a response to opposition remained high.

In March of 2013, in the lead up to a new presidential election, Zimbabweans adopted a new constitution produced by negotiations between ZANU-PF and the MDC. It includes more rights for citizens and reduces the power of the president, but it legalized land seizures and did little to restore the trust of Zimbabweans in the rule of law. According to Andrew Harding (2013), BBC Africa Correspondent, “Plenty has changed here. Hyperinflation has gone. Schools are open. The violence and chaos that stalked Zimbabwe for so long have subsided. But fear remains. The instinct to whisper and look away.”

Interviewees' reports of economic and political conditions that shaped migration decisions

All of the interviewees had a story to tell about economic or political difficulties that made it necessary for them to leave Zimbabwe. Three of the women living in the UK faced threats because of connections with the political opposition, and one of the women working in South Africa experienced direct violence because of her son's involvement with the MDC. The rest of the women emphasized low wages and lack of opportunities for employment as their main reason for leaving Zimbabwe. However, as Crush et al. (2012:14) point out, "the distinction between economic and political reasons should be treated with caution, since the roots of the economic crisis of hyperinflation and unemployment were so clearly political."

Migrants to the United Kingdom

Bongile was a human rights activist, and had a good job in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, working for a non-profit involved with community development. She often travelled overseas to conferences, and while she was away her husband and two sons were attacked and threatened by ZANU-PF youth. It was then that she understood the full political implications of her work, and realized she would have to leave Zimbabwe. She migrated to the UK in 2001. Chiedza was also an activist in Zimbabwe with WOZA, a women's justice and peace organization, and she helped produce a controversial report on the violence in Matabeleland in the 1980s. When problems in Zimbabwe increased in the 1990s, she became a supporter of the MDC and hoped the situation would get better, but finally left for the UK in 2000 when her life was threatened because of her political involvement.

Other women reported migrating to the UK because of the declining economic conditions in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This was the case for Chido and Miriam, both nurses who were looking for better opportunities for themselves and for their children. Chido, who came to the UK in 2000, mentioned the stress she experienced working as a nurse in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s after so many other nurses had emigrated – nursing had become traumatic and overwhelming for her. Miriam, who arrived in 2001, was shortly followed in 2002 by her husband, Simbarashe.

Chiedza and Bongile have both continued to work as activists in the UK, engaging directly with migrant issues. Chiedza organizes a support group of older women and volunteers with the Zimbabwe Association but does not have a formal job or a regular income. Bongile created her own job by first organizing a community group for migrants, then serving as a consultant for refugee programs, and more recently organizing and chairing the Zimbabwe Diaspora Focus Group that coordinates the efforts of multiple migrant and refugee organizations. Chido started out with two jobs – one packing vegetables and one sorting mail, before finally finding a job as an in-home nurse. Miriam also found a job as a nurse, but only after many months searching for employment.

Those who have received official status and found work have generally been able to help support their children – either by bringing them to the UK or sending money to support them in Zimbabwe. Bongile’s two sons are with her in the UK and attending public school. As a nurse, Chido was able to bring her oldest daughter to the UK to finish high school, but also has children still in Zimbabwe whom she supports, along with other family members.

Miriam and her husband, Simbarashe, were not initially planning to stay very long when they first came to the UK.

I first came in 2001 – the border agents were very harsh then. At first we weren’t sure this was a proper environment for children. We thought we would work and go home. Then the economic situation back home became worse – by 2005 we decided to bring the children.

Each eventually found a stable job, but their first application to bring their three children was rejected. They kept applying, and finally were able to bring the children in 2008. Between 2001 and 2008, they provided financial support for the children and their brothers and sisters who were caring for them in Zimbabwe.

While Busani had finished secondary school, she did not have a formal job in Zimbabwe before migrating to the UK in 2008. She was the second wife of an army officer, and was accused of being an MDC member by the first wife, who wanted her out of the marriage. Busani feared for her life, so she left the marriage and Zimbabwe. She has asylum status in the UK, but could only find

work as a care assistant; she is hoping eventually to take a nursing course. She has been able to bring one son, a mechanic, to the UK, and is helping support a son in Zimbabwe and a daughter at a university in South Africa.

Migrants to South Africa

Most of the women who were interviewed in South Africa arrived in the 2000s – a decade of intense political turmoil, violence, and economic collapse in Zimbabwe. In talking about their motives for migrating, they tended to focus on economic factors, but as was the case for women in the UK, political problems were often present as background issues, just below the surface of economic problems.

Kudzai arrived with her husband in 2001 after they both finished secondary school and did not find any opportunities for employment in Zimbabwe. She first did domestic work, and is now a church custodian in Cape Town. Kudzai has taken her two children back to Zimbabwe to stay with her parents and attend primary school, and supports them on her salary. Beatrice also arrived in the early 2000s with her husband. After their marriage broke up, she applied for and received an independent work permit from the Department of Home Affairs.

Things were still not going well in Zimbabwe, so I moved to Johannesburg to find a better job. I also started a flea market business in Harare that my mom runs for me selling things I buy in South Africa. I had several different clerical jobs in Johannesburg – and I thank God I never had to do domestic work. I had some challenges but was treated fairly well in most of my jobs. I finally worked my way up to my current job which is a management position. I've been at this job a little over a year, and they also give me study leave to take classes to finish my bachelor's degree in business.

Because of her financial stability, she has been able to bring her two younger children from Zimbabwe to live with her and go to school in South Africa; the oldest is in boarding school in Zimbabwe.

Itayi, who came to South Africa in 2008, had been a math teacher in Zimbabwe, but had to leave when the government no longer had funds to pay teachers' salaries. In South Africa, the only job she could initially find was as a house-cleaner, but when special Quota Work Permits⁸ were offered to Zimbabweans with high-demand skills in 2009, she was able to get a work permit and a

teaching job. Itayi's husband came to join her, and also found a job as a math teacher. According to Crush et al. (2012), Zimbabwean math and science teachers are in high demand in South Africa, though only about 20 percent of Zimbabwe's 20,000 emigrant teachers have successfully found positions in government schools. The rest are working in private schools (which pay less than public schools but more than schools in Zimbabwe) or in low-wage jobs like farm labor. Itayi commented that her South African colleagues treat her with respect because they expect Zimbabwean teachers to have a good educational background.

Farai, who also arrived in 2008, came because her husband found a job at a private school as a science teacher, earning far more than would have been possible in Zimbabwe. Farai finished a Bachelor of Law degree in Zimbabwe, but in South Africa has only been able to find part-time administrative work. She and her husband have three children with them, and they are now able to provide for them financially, but Farai would prefer to raise her children in Zimbabwe.

Sheila came to South Africa in 2009 to be with her husband, Blessing, who, like Farai's husband, was not being paid enough to support himself or his family as a teacher in Zimbabwe; he now teaches science at a private school in South Africa. Unlike many others, Sheila left a good job in Zimbabwe with a foreign-owned company that supplied her with food and housing, and is currently taking a business course, since the certification she obtained in Zimbabwe isn't recognized in South Africa. Her two children are with her as both were born in South Africa, but part of the family's income helps to support their unemployed parents and siblings in Zimbabwe.

Kudzai, Itayi, Farai, and Sheila all emphasized that coming to South Africa was a necessity, as there was no way to earn sufficient income in Zimbabwe. Political motives for leaving are also evident in what each of these women had to say about what would make it possible to go back – all of them were hoping for a “good outcome” in the 2013 election and political stability. While they believe that the economy is slowly improving in Zimbabwe, they have little confidence in the country's long-term economic stability. They commented that things could change overnight, and they have seen too much violence to trust their lives and those of their children to an uncertain economic and political future.

Beauty came to South Africa in 2004 after completing secondary school but failing to find a job in Zimbabwe. She first worked with her mother as a cross-border trader, then worked for two years as a farmworker on a grape farm, and finally was hired to work in a coffee shop in Cape Town. Her experiences have led her to reflect on the challenges faced by Zimbabweans who come to work in South Africa.

On the grape farm, you can't dream, you can't see things...I remember the first day I walked into the farm and saw someone drinking water from a rusty pipe...I was so frustrated, I was shouting, 'I want to see the farm manager. This is not healthy.' [In Zimbabwe] we didn't have cash flow and income...but we lived a decent life; we're dignified people and had character. We had run away to be free and come to a place where freedom is preached but I didn't see it...Once you're drowned in the farms out there somewhere you are gone. I know a lot of qualified people, teachers, nurses, who are still stuck out there because there's just no way you can dream; you just feel you're boxed in.

Beauty now has a job working with a non-profit organization in Cape Town that provides support services for migrants.

While Beauty has been able to move on from the grape farm to more professional work, Linda, Naisha, and Martha have worked for years on a grape farm near Cape Town. Linda came to South Africa from Harare in 2007, partly because of a lack of jobs, and partly because of threats to her family preceding the 2008 elections. She had a passport, and her brothers and sisters who were already in South Africa helped her to navigate the paperwork and find her current job as a farmworker on a grape farm. After a year she was able to help her husband come and join her on the farm, but their two young sons stay in Zimbabwe with her sister. Naisha is also from Harare and has been working on the same grape farm since “jumping the border” (crossing illegally) in 2010. She came for economic reasons and is the sole supporter of her two children and several siblings in Zimbabwe. She says that you “have to be strong” to work in South Africa, since work on the farm is very hard. Like Naisha, Martha also came to work on the grape farm in 2010 because “there were no jobs in Zimbabwe.” Her older son is now working with her on the farm, and they are both supporting her younger son as he finishes secondary school. She says that farm work is very hard and doesn't pay enough – often she doesn't eat

so that she can afford to send money home – but she considers conditions on the farm in South Africa to be better than conditions in Zimbabwe.

When Thoko came to Johannesburg in 2007, she and her husband felt it was necessary because the economic situation was very difficult; “there was nothing in the shops.” For example, baby formula which she needed because she was working was only available in Botswana. They were fortunate because her husband’s brother, already in Johannesburg, helped her husband to find a job. In addition, the company Thoko was working for in Harare transferred her to their head office in Johannesburg. The hardest part for her was leaving her baby behind when she was 6 months old, and not seeing her again until she was 2 years old. They couldn’t bring her to South Africa because they worked such long hours, lived in one small room, and couldn’t afford childcare. Then Thoko contracted tuberculosis taking the train to work and was unemployed for 18 months. After she recovered, she went back to Zimbabwe to collect her daughter, returned to Johannesburg, and found a retail sales job in walking distance from her home. She misses Zimbabwe but doesn’t expect the situation to improve enough, economically or politically, to be able to return for many years.

Rufaro came in 2009 for both economic and medical reasons. Her youngest child has cerebral palsy, and with the collapse in Zimbabwe’s economy and the resulting deterioration of the health system, there were no services available. Her son’s doctor helped her with passports and a disability treatment referral, so she initially qualified for a grant in South Africa for a special school and health care. She now has a work permit and a job with a non-profit organization and no longer receives grants, which makes it difficult to afford the special school, therapy, and operations that her son needs. She has two older children in Zimbabwe, but is not able to send much to help; her mother and her siblings are caring for them. While she originally expected to be in South Africa only for a short time, she has been told by her doctors to plan to stay indefinitely for her son’s care, so she is trying to bring her other two children to South Africa for university education.

Praise arrived in Cape Town in 2009. She was the oldest interviewee at age 72, and she was the most directly threatened by political violence. Her son was an MDC activist who left Zimbabwe to look for work. About a week after he left, a group of men

came to her house and told her, “If you don’t bring him back, you’ll pay for it.” The next night, they came back to her house and knocked on the door.

Then I said, ‘My house is so secure that no one can enter if I don’t open the doors.’ And they said, ‘Well, we’re gonna burn you in there if you don’t come out.’ Then I decided to go out and face them, so I knew some of them, and they said, ‘No, Mama, if you don’t bring the son first, you’ll be in for it.’ Then I said, ‘I don’t know where he is. He is a grown-up man... Then they made me be afraid of life and, you know, things were so difficult as a widow... I decided, ‘I can go to South Africa and be a refugee there.’ Then I decided to do that to take care of the grandchildren. I had four daughters – three daughters passed away [from AIDS] and left the kids, and they’re in my house right now... I told my oldest daughter, ‘I’ll be going for work and for money’... So she allowed me... There was nowhere to go, nothing to do at home, you know. Children must go to school, they want to eat, need clothes and health. Then I said, ‘I’ve decided, this is my decision.’ Then I came here. In Zimbabwe it was so difficult. People had been killed and tortured because of politics, you know... So I just decided I wasn’t afraid of death – not at my age... I can manage to send a little for their school, and I can take care of myself... I go about selling... I make some shoes to sell to people, though my health is now deteriorating, because of the age.

Praise was hopeful that her stay in South Africa would be temporary, and that with an improvement in the political situation, she would be able to go home. However, when I contacted her in May 2013, she was still in Cape Town with no plans to return to Zimbabwe.

All of these women, whether in the UK or South Africa, were motivated by economic necessity to look for opportunities outside of Zimbabwe. While only a few (Bongile, Chiedza, Linda, and Praise) directly mentioned feeling threatened by political violence, others (Chido, Kudzai, Itayi, Farai, and Sheila) acknowledged the connection between Zimbabwe’s political and economic problems, and the need for political change before the economic situation will improve. Praise’s story in particular clearly illustrates how closely intertwined economic and political concerns are in terms of their impact on women’s migration decisions. However, in order to understand how rising unemployment and poverty between the late 1990s and the late 2000s, compounded by political conflict, could create a strong enough “push” to send women away from their families in such large numbers, it is important to also

look at how the economic and political situation disrupted marital relationships, creating changes in traditionally gendered expectations for women and making it necessary for them to become both breadwinners and migrants.

The increasing instability of marriages in Zimbabwe and in the Zimbabwean diaspora as a reason for increased migration

Already in the late 1990s, economic and political conditions had deteriorated so dramatically that families and households could no longer survive on only the wages of a breadwinner husband working in Harare or Johannesburg – in fact many men were no longer sending money home (Crush and Tevera 2010:216). Several studies have found that this decline in men's ability to earn a stable income created tension and frustration within relationships, and in turn contributed to an increase in domestic violence and sexual abuse, especially in the last decade (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010). Under traditional law, a husband was obligated to maintain his wife only by providing her with land on which she could grow food (Armstrong 1992). In the current money-based economy, this responsibility has been replaced by the expectation that a husband will earn a wage and provide money for food, housing, school fees, etc. With the lack of opportunities in Zimbabwe in the last two decades, it has been difficult for men to fulfill these expectations, and some have taken their frustrations out on their wives. A 2009 study found that one in three women is in an abusive marriage, and “women and girls in Zimbabwe are increasingly vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse because of the social, political, and economic instability in the country” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010:2).

In traditional Zimbabwean culture, a woman was expected to marry and stay married, even in situations of battering, sexual abuse, or deprivation. Divorce was only possible in extreme circumstances, such as when a woman was not able to have children or was accused of witchcraft (Weinrich 1982). Both of the extended families who were involved in negotiating the marriage had to consent to the divorce, a proportion of the bridewealth had to be returned, and the children usually remained with the father. All of this put tremendous pressure on the wife to stay in the marriage. As couples have moved away from extended family, elders have had less of a voice in these decisions, and divorce rates have been increasing. In addition, children are increasingly remaining with the mother after a divorce.

In 2011, the Zimbabwean High Court received a total of 1,551 divorce petitions, a 90 percent increase from the 800 petitions filed in 2004 (Nyoni 2012). According to a Harare sociologist, Laura Machinga, one reason for the increase in divorce for educated urban women is their growing independence and awareness of their legal rights, making them less willing to stay in relationships with men who can't or won't support their family, or who are abusive (Diaspora 2005). According to Machinga, "Women have managed to acquire power through their education and careers so they no longer have to depend on their husbands for their livelihood, and that makes it easier for them to easily consider divorce as an option when things get bad...The society is also becoming more tolerant to divorced women than before" (Diaspora 2005:1).

While this may be the case for educated and professional women in urban areas who have some financial independence, a majority of Zimbabwean women live in rural areas, where there is still a strictly gendered division of labor (Goebel 2005). Yet divorce rates in rural areas have also increased, due in part to increasing rural poverty and male out-migration (Goebel 2005). Under customary law, women do not own land or inherit land – rather they are expected to farm for their fathers and later for their husbands, and finally for their sons, on land they do not own (Schmidt 1992). Thus when rural women divorce or their husbands die, they lose access to the land but are increasingly left with sole financial responsibility for their families. Whereas in the past, children remained with their fathers after a divorce, today it is standard practice for both urban and rural women to be financially responsible for their children.⁹ As rural women typically have few skills or resources to support themselves, when they divorce, migration becomes one of their only options, often involving "jumping the border" (illegally) to find work on one of the border farms in South Africa.

Interviewees' reports of how marital instability shaped migration decisions

In keeping with studies that have found a relationship between social, economic, and political instability in Zimbabwe, marital disruption or domestic violence, and the feminization of migration, many of the women I interviewed are divorced, widowed, or single mothers whose decision to migrate resulted from both difficult economic circumstances and lack of options due to the absence of a supportive partner (whose absence may also be the result of the economic crisis). The interviewees were not specifically asked

whether economic or political difficulties caused the disruption of their marriage or resulted from it, but their comments suggest a close connection.

Busani's failed marriage was directly tied to political conflicts in Zimbabwe. As was mentioned earlier, her husband was an officer in the Zimbabwean National Army, with close ties to ZANU-PF, and her husband's first wife came from a prominent political family with power and influence. So when she decided to get rid of Busani (the second wife) by accusing her of membership in the MDC, Busani felt she had no recourse and but to leave the marriage and move to the UK. Since her husband no longer acknowledges her or her children, she is responsible for helping her adult children with the small salary she receives from her care assistant job in the UK, especially a son in Zimbabwe struggling with drug addiction, and a daughter at the University of Johannesburg.

Chido, Naisha, and Martha all mentioned economic problems that contributed to their divorces and pushed them to decide to migrate. Chido left her nursing career in Zimbabwe and migrated to the UK, as the economy began to collapse, "because of a rocky marriage on top of all the stress at work; there was too much work for the nurses who were left after so many had emigrated." Naisha also divorced after being abandoned by her husband during the economic crisis of the late 2000s. She had no one to help her with her two children, as her parents are dead and her siblings are unemployed, so she felt coming to South Africa was her only option. She is now the breadwinner for several siblings and for her children who are in boarding school in Zimbabwe. Martha's marriage fell apart in Zimbabwe because of economic stress. As the sole supporter of her children and widowed mother in Zimbabwe, she came to work on a farm in South Africa.

Rufaro, who is the director of a project in Cape Town that supports disabled children and their families, commented that one third of the fifty-one mothers she works with were divorced, abandoned, or widowed in Zimbabwe. All of the women came to South Africa as the only way of financially supporting and meeting the medical needs of their children. However, even with jobs in South Africa, as the sole breadwinners for their families they find the costs of caring for their disabled children difficult to manage.

While none of the interviewees talked about personal experiences of domestic violence in Zimbabwe, several acknowledged it as a growing problem that is contributing to divorce and migration. Greta Schuler, an academic researcher who has interviewed

Zimbabwean sex workers in Johannesburg, said that many of the women she talked to left Zimbabwe specifically because of domestic violence in their marriages that resulted from economic problems. Beatrice, when asked specifically about domestic violence in Zimbabwe, also affirmed that it is a problem, and attributed it to economic problems that create stress for families. She believes that when couples move away from extended families for economic reasons, they lose a form of protective support that would otherwise reduce the likelihood of domestic violence.

The stories of these women suggest that increases in marital instability in Zimbabwe can be partly attributed to the economic and political turmoil in the country in the past two decades. This instability, often resulting in divorce, and combined with women's increasingly common role as sole provider for the children after a divorce, has pushed many women to migrate to find work.

The increase in women's responsibility as primary financial and emotional caregivers for children and extended family members

The "protective support" of the extended family to which Beatrice refers in the previous section was part of the structure of traditional Zimbabwean society that helped to maintain the stability of marriages and families across generations. For example, in the case of marital conflict, a "marriage negotiator," who was a trusted relative or friend, worked with both families to try and reconcile disaffected spouses (Weinrich 1982: 161). In addition, as was mentioned earlier, when marriages failed, the children remained with the father to perpetuate the lineage, while the mother was expected to return to her family. In other words, in Zimbabwe's patrilineal families, fathers and their relatives had primary control of and responsibility for children.

However, the recent increase in both rural-urban and cross-border migration has made it difficult for families to enforce these traditional gender roles. According to family sociologist Scott Coltrane (1996:146), it is "contact with kin [that] creates pressure to conform to the elders' more conventional standards." For many mobile Zimbabweans, family transitions are no longer governed by traditional practices, and without the pressure of extended family living nearby, some gendered expectations are changing.

Having and raising children remains a central value for most couples, but the goal of having children in order to preserve the continuity of the patriarchal family group has been declining. The father-son relationship has been marginalized and replaced by an emphasis on husband-wife and mother-child relationships, especially in urban and migrant families (Chinouya 2010). This has resulted in a shift whereby children are now the primary responsibility of their mothers. Women are therefore the central economic and emotional support for children, whether they are single, married, divorced, or widowed. As a result, it is their concern for their children and their needs that guides their decision-making, and is the primary motivation for women's migration.

Interviewees' comments about their role as primary provider for their children or grandchildren

Almost all of the women I talked to in both South Africa and the UK had made the decision to migrate primarily because they believed it was the best way to care for their children or grandchildren. While male migrants I met often emphasized how their work as migrants helped them to achieve upward mobility and meet career goals, female migrants' first priority was almost always the needs of their children. Economic and political turmoil and marital disruption can help to explain why migration is a woman's best option for earning an adequate income, but her purpose for earning that income is most often to take care of her children and other dependents. This is true whether the children are living with their mother in South Africa or the UK, or staying with family members in Zimbabwe.

Bongile, in her efforts to bring about positive change for Zimbabweans, has made the needs of children a central part of her work with the Zimbabwe Diaspora Organization. She organizes "cultural exchanges" for youth to help them connect with extended families and their culture in Zimbabwe. In her own family, her decisions about work and migration were motivated by her desire to provide the best opportunities possible for her children. Similarly, the decisions that Miriam and Simbarashe made between when they left Zimbabwe in 2001, and when the family was reunited in the UK in 2008, were shaped by what they believed would be best for their children.

Depending on the type of work that each woman was able to find in the UK and South Africa, their level of struggle to generate adequate resources for their children and families has varied. Some women have had to take on multiple jobs to earn enough to support themselves and their children. For example, when Chido first arrived in the UK, she held two jobs and slept on the floor in a room with three other women, in order to earn enough to feed and educate her children who were living with relatives in Zimbabwe.

Most of the women migrants I talked to in South Africa had mixed feelings about whether it was better for their children to live with them in Cape Town or Johannesburg, or to live with their family in Zimbabwe, where they would learn “proper” values such as obedience and respect for elders. In both situations, women’s priorities are shaped by the needs of the children. If the children are in Zimbabwe, the women worry about the impact of the separation on their children. If the children are with them in South Africa, the women worry about negative influences at school (e.g. drugs, crime, and sex), the children’s distance from family, and their lack of exposure to Zimbabwean culture, including language and the development of a Zimbabwean identity.

Praise’s story shows how important the needs of children and grandchildren are to women’s migration decisions. Praise was directly threatened with politically-based violence, but she decided to migrate to South Africa, not to protect herself, but to provide for the needs of her grandchildren. She said, “I wasn’t afraid of death, not at my age, but I thought of the little ones, they were left in my hands...It’s better if I go, then I can take care of them...and have the money to buy bread for them...a woman cannot ignore the needs of the children, but men can do so.”

Changing gender roles in Zimbabwe have shifted the primary responsibility for both the nurture and financial support of children to women over the past few decades. This shift, combined with the lack of job opportunities in Zimbabwe, has pushed women to emigrate in order to fulfill their role as caregiver. These women’s stories confirm these motives, and demonstrate that women both prioritize and work very hard to ensure that the needs of their children and other dependents are met.

The “normalization” of women’s migration by reframing it in terms of traditional gender roles as a form of “sacrifice” for the good of the family

Given traditional patterns of male migration, with women expected to stay behind and provide agricultural and domestic services for family members, it is not surprising that as recently as the late 1990s, women encountered resistance from families when they considered migrating to trade or work. In a study of women’s cross-border migration from Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique to South Africa in mid-1997, Dodson (1998:19) found that while there had been an increase in the number of women migrants, 65 percent of them were not making the decision to migrate independently – women had to be given permission to migrate by parents or spouses. Further, half of them were being discouraged from migrating by their families (Dodson 1998). In addition to this lack of family support, women considering migrating in the 1990s had less information than men about South Africa and how to get a job, and fewer contacts who they could call on for assistance to navigate border crossings and to find a place to live (Dodson 1998).

The resistance that women faced and the challenges they had to overcome in the 1990s in order to go to South Africa to trade or work indicates how committed they were to providing for their children. It also shows how desperate they often were to earn money, since Zimbabwe’s growing economic crisis made it difficult for husbands to fulfill their traditional breadwinner role. As discussed earlier, most women migrants in the 1990s were only making short visits to South Africa to shop or trade, which did not significantly interfere with women’s family responsibilities. However, women who were migrating across borders in the 1990s found it stressful to do so, and perceived migration as having a negative impact on them and their families (Dodson 1998). Levko-Everett (2005:24) found that, for most women, “leaving children and other families behind in the countries of origin was exceedingly difficult.” At the same time women recognized that migration had benefits for their families and communities, given the severity of Zimbabwe’s economic problems. Essentially women were willing to make personal sacrifices and endure hardships in order to help their families and communities. Redefining their migration as a “selfless sacrifice” also enabled women to maintain a psychological balance between their potentially conflicting economic and domestic roles (Hofmann and Buckley 2011:80).

By 2005, the amount of family resistance had declined, and many women were making independent decisions to migrate in spite of opposition (Levko-Everett 2005). Some women simply left home “without telling anyone they were going,” but their families became supportive once they began sending remittances (Levko-Everett 2005:20). Other women received support and encouragement from their families because they saw women’s migration as a necessity for family survival. The important issue here is “necessity.” With more and more women migrating independently out of necessity, families started to interpret women’s decisions to migrate as a new and acceptable form of “sacrifice” for the good of the family. As has happened in other countries with large increases in female out-migration (Aranda 2003, Parrenas 2005, Dreby 2006), families in Zimbabwe started to use traditional images of “women’s devotion to their children and families, [in order to] construct narratives that define their migration as selfless sacrifice for the good of their families” (Hofmann and Buckley 2011:80). Thus, over time, women’s migration has become institutionalized as an essential family survival mechanism in Zimbabwe, and is no longer perceived as a significant challenge to traditional gender roles and hierarchies.

Interviewees’ comments about level of family support for their decision to migrate

The Zimbabwean women I interviewed who migrated to South Africa in the last five to ten years generally did so with the support of their families, who now recognize the importance of women’s migration and often depend on women’s remittances for family survival.

Praise made the decision to go to South Africa to work and earn money in spite of initial opposition from her daughter, who was concerned for her safety. Once Praise convinced her that this was the only way she could provide for the grandchildren, her daughter became more supportive. Similarly, Rufaro’s family supported her decision to bring her youngest child to South Africa since it was the only place to get treatment for her child’s cerebral palsy. Her family actually helped with the cost of travel, and is helping support her two older children who are in boarding school in Zimbabwe.

Thoko's family was also supportive. They understood why she had to go to South Africa, and acknowledged that her help was needed. She said that, "Everyone was just leaving the country so it was normal to hear that someone is leaving." Beatrice's family understood that she had to leave the country to work because of the economic crisis. In fact, migration has become an established pattern in her family for both men and women. She has five siblings living nearby in Johannesburg, and many cousins who are cross-border traders.

According to the women interviewed, families have often been less supportive of women's migration to the UK, perhaps due to the higher cost, the greater distance, and infrequent visits to Zimbabwe. For example, Miriam's family was highly supportive when she first left in 2001, but they expected her to return to Zimbabwe soon and take her children back with her to the UK. Since it took seven years to get the paperwork in order, her family in Zimbabwe became very frustrated with her absence, and accused her of putting her job ahead of her family.

Bongile's family members, in contrast, supported her move to the UK, and respect what she is doing. Even though she is far away, they encourage her to stay in the UK and send money home, since her success has raised her family's economic status in their community. One important difference is that she brought her children with her, so there are no questions about her commitment to her family, as was the case for Miriam.

Overall, most families are supportive of women's decisions to migrate, as long as the women are sending money and interacting regularly with their families – especially if they are able to visit occasionally. This "normalization" of women's migration represents a dramatic change from only a decade ago. Migrant women are not perceived as behaving selfishly but selflessly, and are respected for playing a proper, supportive female role within the family.

Summary of Factors Contributing to the Increase in Women's Migration

It is evident that the economic and political turmoil in Zimbabwe played a major role in the overall increase in international and cross-border migration of Zimbabweans over the last two decades. However, this is not a sufficient explanation for women's migration; it

took a combination of factors to push them away from their families and across borders to work. Women's migration narratives typically begin with Zimbabwe's economic and political problems in the 1990s, and growing unemployment and poverty. With many men unable to earn enough income to meet expectations as the family breadwinner, women began taking on more financial responsibility. Some women began working as cross-border traders, and even though this only took them away from home for short periods of time, marital ties began to weaken as a result of both financial hardships and frequent separations. Increased migration also meant a loss of support from extended family for couples experiencing conflicts, and rates of domestic violence and divorce began to increase. By the 2000s, this combination of factors had put many women in the position of primary breadwinner as well as the main caregiver for children, and with the economic and political situation continuing to decline, migration for work by both women and men was seen as essential for family survival. Then as families became increasingly dependent on women's migrant labor and remittances, they began to see female migration more positively, and both families and the women themselves came to define migration as an acceptable, female-typed "sacrifice" for the good of the family.

Factors Contributing to Long-Term Migration by Women

While it is clear that there are multiple factors that have pushed Zimbabwean women to migrate, what has motivated these women not only to migrate but to stay in South Africa or the UK for many years, perhaps seeing family members only irregularly, in spite of close family ties? According to the women I interviewed, since women's migration has been "normalized" by many families as an alternative way for women to serve as family caregivers, it has become easier for women to justify continuing to work outside of Zimbabwe for longer periods of time. Families have also come to accept women's migration as "normal" because migrant women are more likely than migrant men to send regular remittances to family members in Zimbabwe. Thus women's financial support for their families has become a new way for them to meet their normative obligations to close kin and extended families, which in turn has created greater acceptance for women's long-term migration. In addition, some of their comments suggested that they are staying

longer because returning to Zimbabwe and its patriarchal social structures would require them to give up some of the autonomy and independence they have achieved and enjoy in South Africa and the UK.

Long distance “kinkeeping” and transnational mothering by women migrants

“Kinkeeping” is one way to conceptualize what families “do” as they provide support for one another in order to maintain ties across generations and among extended family members, providing for both individual and collective well-being (Harris and Rosenthal 1985). Kinkeepers have been women in most societies, since women are typically expected to have a propensity for emotional and caring work (Rossi and Rossi 1990). Underlying the kinkeeping role are bonds of affection and norms of obligation that tie generations together (Bengston and Roberts 1991). Studies of kinkeeping in the US have generally argued that women’s increased labor force participation has reduced women’s availability or willingness to serve as kinkeepers (Goldschneider and Lawton 1998). I would argue that, for Zimbabwean women, becoming breadwinners and migrants is simply a new form of kinkeeping that serves the goal of providing support for family and helping to maintain both generational and extended family ties.

Traditionally, kinkeeping for Zimbabwean women involved direct care for family members, with a particular focus on food production and cooking. Preparing and cooking food was a central role for women in the family – single men tended to go hungry when separated from mothers and sisters. Migrant women may no longer be cooking food for their families, but this responsibility has been taken over by female relatives who buy food using remittances sent home by the migrant women.

A 2009 study of remittances and household survival in Zimbabwe found that “poor households in the rural and urban areas of Zimbabwe are engaged in a grinding struggle for survival” (Tevera and Chikanda 2009:12). The study found that 69 percent of Zimbabwean households were only able to access adequate food because of the regular receipt of remittances from migrant family members. The Solidarity Peace Trust’s 2004 report found that 300 million dollars (US) is remitted each month from the Zimbabwean diaspora. In addition to cash remittances, many migrants also send food supplies and groceries as in-kind remittances because declines in the agricultural sector and periodic droughts that have reduced food availability (Tevera and Chikanda 2009).

While the average amount of cash that men remit per year is slightly greater than women, women have been found to be more consistent and reliable in sending remittances (Tevera and Chikanda 2009:21). Moreover, some studies show that women have a higher sense of responsibility for their family members who remain in Zimbabwe than men, increasing their attractiveness as migrants within family networks (Ratha and Riedberg 2005; Hofmann and Buckley 2011).

The Philippines is another country that has experienced a substantial feminization of migration in recent years. According to Parrenas' (2010:1828) study of the experiences of women migrants from the Philippines, traditional mothering was defined as "nurturing children in close proximity." The out-migration of large numbers of women from the Philippines has led to the development of a new form of "transnational mothering," which involves an "organizational reconstitution of motherhood that accommodates the temporal and spatial separations forced by migration" (Parrenas 2010:1827). In other words, the concept of "mothering" has been expanded to encompass migrant "breadwinning" (Parrenas 2010:1827).

In addition to the remittances they send that allow their families to buy food and other necessities, cell phone and internet technology have made it possible for global "transnational mothers" to manage to "be there" in spite of tremendous distances. Parrenas (2002) found that children of migrant mothers in the Philippines credit those mothers who communicate regularly with providing emotional care and guidance from afar. This transnational model of mothering or kinkeeping is common for Zimbabwean migrants as well, keeping family ties strong over long periods of separation.

Interviewees' comments about remittances, communication with family, and transnational mothering

The migrant women I interviewed in both South Africa and the UK, when asked about their relationship with family in Zimbabwe, talked about remittances as a regular means of providing care and support to children, siblings, and parents, or as a way of responding to specific requests for help. Women also talked at length about frequent, often daily, calls, texts, and emails to family members. For women working in South Africa, regular visits to Zimbabwe were important, but such visits are more difficult for those living in the UK. When asked if and when they are likely to return to Zimbabwe, most women said they will go back when the political situation

improves, when there are more jobs, or when they retire. In other words, they expected to stay abroad for an extended period of time, while staying in close contact with their families.

Linda, who came to South Africa in 2007 to work on a grape farm near De Doorns, is the breadwinner for her two sons, ages 4 and 9, and for her sister who is the boys' primary caregiver. She is happy with how they are being raised and how the money she sends is being spent. She visits them once a year, and calls them every day. The 9 year old communicates for the 4 year old, and both of them understand where their mother is, and why it is necessary for her to work in South Africa. While she says she would like to go back to Zimbabwe to live, she doesn't see how it will be possible until the economy improves and there are more jobs.

Naisha sends money from her work on the grape farm to her family in Zimbabwe through a broker, to support her two children and her siblings, and visits every three or four months. Martha sends part of her income to her youngest son to help him finish secondary school, and to support her mother who is caring for her son. She sends the money home regularly with a transfer service, and her family collects it from the bank. Some of the money she sends is also being used to build a house in Zimbabwe. She is not able to visit, because she doesn't have a Zimbabwean passport, so she tries to call her son and her mother every weekend.

Beatrice, who is divorced but has a good job, is supporting her mother and her oldest child in boarding school in Zimbabwe, and her two younger children who are in South Africa. She brings her oldest child to South Africa for school holidays, and sends goods to Zimbabwe so that her mother can sell them at a flea market business that she started in Harare. She is optimistic that conditions in Zimbabwe will one day improve, and that many in the diaspora will return, rebuild, and improve the country, but doesn't have any plans to return in the near future.

Praise, the 72 year old grandmother in Cape Town, posts money to her daughter and grandchildren every other week through a courier service. She talks to her daughter, who is very concerned about how hard her mother is working, almost every day.

Just yesterday my elder daughter was phoning me: ‘Mama, we’re sick and tired of phoning. We want to see you. Can you please come back home?’ Then I said, ‘Oh, let me finish just this year 2012, and see how Zimbabwe will be next year - how it’ll be after elections.’

Thoko never told her family that she had tuberculosis, so they continued to expect financial help, and Thoko and her husband sent what they could. They have also helped two of Thoko’s brothers find work and housing in Johannesburg. She talks to her family regularly, and communicates on Facebook, but is only able to afford to visit once every couple of years. While she continues to feel close to her family, and is confident that they appreciate the help she is providing, she is planning to move to Australia soon to go to medical school. Someday she hopes to return to Zimbabwe, but acknowledges that her daughter may never live there.

Similarly, Miriam struggled for years to send money to Zimbabwe for her children’s school fees, uniforms, and food. The only way that she could send money was with people travelling from the UK to Zimbabwe, who kept a percentage. Now that the children are in the UK, she still sends gifts to Zimbabwe, but less frequently, and stays in touch through email. She doesn’t expect to return to Zimbabwe until she retires, which will be in another 10 to 15 years. Like Thoko, she doesn’t expect her children to live in Zimbabwe.

Clearly, sending remittances to families in Zimbabwe is an important part of the everyday lives and responsibilities of migrant women, regardless of their income level. In the current economy, men’s incomes are not sufficient to support most families, and many families are headed by single, divorced, or widowed women. All of these families depend on women finding jobs and providing all or part of the family’s income, which for many women means migrating to find work outside of Zimbabwe. Out of necessity, definitions of women’s caregiving and mothering roles have therefore expanded to include breadwinning and long-distance guidance and support. Family networks have also expanded, creating transnational families which extend women’s caregiving across national borders on a long-term basis.

Migration as a source of autonomy and empowerment for women

While South Africa is a patriarchal society much like Zimbabwe, the UK has a less restrictive set of gender norms. This has opened the door for “traditional customs” to be contested and changed by women migrants (Crush and Tevera 2010:209). Not only do women have the skills that are in demand in Britain’s service economy, they often arrive first and become the primary migrant in the family (Crush and Tevera 2010:211). As a result, women may find jobs more easily, earn more money, and experience more upward mobility, while men struggle to find low-skilled, low-wage jobs. This puts migrant women in a position of greater financial control and decision-making power, and puts migrant men in a subordinate position, often leading to conflict and tension in the marriage (Crush and Tevera 2010:210).

In Zimbabwe, men are still expected to be the main or only breadwinner, and working women are expected to “make a contribution” to the family income without challenging gender norms. Thus, when women in the UK assume control of their own income, this is perceived by Zimbabwean men as a threat to hegemonic masculinity (Crush and Tevera 2010:210). Moreover, in the UK, as women have spent more time outside of the home at work, men have been required to take a more active role at home, often taking part in household chores. (Crush and Tevera 2010:213). Women generally welcome these changes in gender roles, and experience shared housework as “liberating” (Crush and Tevera 2010:216). However, changes in gendered expectations can lead to marital instability, domestic violence, and divorce, as was discussed earlier. It is also important to note that changes in patriarchal structures in the private sphere are often counterbalanced by the affirmation of patriarchy in public spaces that are under the control of male migrants, such as the church. While both women and men are active in the many Zimbabwean diaspora churches, the predominately male pastors and church leaders tend to take a conservative approach to gender roles and tend to resist changes in gendered behavior.

In South Africa, Levko-Everett (2005:33) found that in spite of the patriarchal context, women who migrate experience significant personal changes, including improvements in their economic status and in their overall quality of life (Levko-Everett 2005:33). These economic improvements enhance women’s sense of independence, increase their social status and authority, and raise

their positions in the household (Levko-Everett 2005:36). In addition, she found that migrant women experience personal learning and growth, becoming more comfortable “interacting with people from different backgrounds, and learning about a broader range of rights” (Levko-Everett 2005:34). Women migrants express pleasure in “being able to support their families without depending on men...and see migration as a strategy for standing up and doing things for themselves” (Levko-Everett 2005:64). They perceive themselves as being advantaged by their ability to take on both an “income-generating productive role plus a reproductive role of parenting and caregiving” (Levko-Everett 2005:65); they generally do not see the added responsibility of breadwinning as a burden.

Sally Peberdy, a migration scholar and researcher at Gauteng City-Region Observatory, pointed out in a conversation about gender and migration that patriarchal discourse is slowly losing its influence in the lives of Zimbabwean migrant women in the diaspora. Women migrants, regardless of their destination country, no longer need men’s permission to leave home, can control their own earnings, and can escape from gender violence. She argues that migration is therefore leading to greater empowerment for women, and that it is not surprising that women migrants are not in a hurry to return to Zimbabwe.

Interviewees’ comments on migration as a source of autonomy and empowerment

Among the women I interviewed in the UK, several were the primary migrant in the family. Among those women who were married, most still took responsibility for the cooking and domestic chores, in spite of being the higher wage earner, and expressed feelings of pride in their ability to be both a breadwinner and a caregiver. They also were happy to be able to support their families in Zimbabwe, and felt empowered by the respect they received from family members because of the money they were earning as migrants.

Miriam arrived in the UK seven months before her husband, and was able to help him to establish himself. She commented that because of her work as a nurse and the success of her children, family and friends in Zimbabwe treat her with respect, enhancing her sense of self-worth.

Bongile also arrived first and helped her husband and children to obtain their visas. As she became involved in consulting work for refugee programs, “other organizations learned about my knowledge of community development, and asked for my help. The

work I did was really valued.” More recently she helped to organize and became the chair of a consortium of Zimbabwean organizations. This is a highly visible and challenging public leadership role in an organization that brings together many different agencies involved in both business and social issues.

Each step that you take is monitored closely. You are a woman coming into the world of leadership, a world that is owned by men. You have to be sure that you get it right. When I took up this position I had just a little background of working with civil society and community. Suddenly I found myself working at another level, plus learning the diplomatic language of another culture. One of the challenges of developing this team was rising above the sense that I can’t do this as a woman. I have to have confidence and take control of things.

In spite of her demanding position, she still does her “normal work as a housewife, preparing the children for school, cooking, and laundry.” Yet she was one of the few women I talked to whose husband was sharing responsibility for both housework and child care.

My husband is very supportive. If he knows I am not around he takes over housework. At times if I have to go to meetings, he can travel with me or with my sons, so they are more aware of what I do – they also learn how to conduct themselves in public situations.

When I asked her if he would have helped her as much in Zimbabwe, she emphatically responded that his behavior went through a major change.

Around two months after we were here, I was taking clothes to the laundry, and he decided to accompany me. I was pulling the trolley – a middle-aged man saw me pulling the trolley inside and my husband standing outside. As I took the bags off and was putting the laundry and the soap inside the machine, this man started shouting at my husband: ‘The poor woman is doing everything. Why can’t you help?’ He got so confused – I’ve never seen him so confused. After that, he started taking kids to school, making sandwiches, and making sure the clothes were cleaned.

Both Sheila and Blessing have taken on new gender roles because of the demands of their life as migrants in South Africa, away from family. Sheila's husband, a science teacher in Cape Town, has taken on non-traditional responsibilities such as sharing in the childcare for their 4 year old son and 8 week old daughter. While Sheila has struggled to establish herself professionally in South Africa, she was able to find work as a part-time secretary, and takes pride in her ability to help support her children and her unemployed siblings and parents in Zimbabwe.

While the women migrants who are working in South Africa encounter gender norms that are similar to those in Zimbabwe, their independent economic successes and experiences as primary breadwinners have enhanced their status in the family and in the diaspora community. This in turn often contributes to changes in their level of power and autonomy within their marriages and their extended families.

Naisha shared that because of her work as a breadwinner, she has earned respect from her family, and family members now ask her opinion in making decisions. Beatrice is proud of her ability to support herself and her children as a single, divorced woman. She is respected by her family and confident in her own ability. Chiedza commented that "women who are working overseas become more independent, because they are able to work and support their families."

Thus, while different gender norms exist in the UK and South Africa, many women migrants to both countries feel empowered by their roles as breadwinners and caregivers for their families, and their work in the public sphere. Their new roles, combined with separation from extended family, have increased burden sharing in the home, and have led to a change in gendered expectations in families. While the women didn't explicitly acknowledge these new gender norms or their increased autonomy as reasons to stay in the UK or South Africa, they did discuss plans to pursue educational goals or work promotions in order to continue to elevate their status and independence.

Summary of Factors Contributing to Long-term Migration by Women

As Zimbabwean women migrate in increasing numbers, they are finding new ways of meeting norms of obligation to family through their financial contributions, and are maintaining bonds of affection through regular phone calls, emails, and visits. In addition, with

family members dependent on and valuing migrant women's provision of basic necessities, women's position in the family is inevitably shifting. Their demonstrated ability as breadwinners as well as caregivers has enhanced their self-confidence and sense of independence, and has increased their status and authority in the extended family and community. Returning to Zimbabwe would mean a loss of access to current sources of empowerment. As a result, while women continue to value close ties with family in Zimbabwe, they are willing to remain in their destination countries for an extended period of time.

Discussion and Conclusions

It is likely that large numbers of Zimbabwean women will continue to migrate as long as economic and political problems at home limit opportunities for men and women to provide adequate support for their families, and in turn create conflict within marriages, leaving women with both caregiving and breadwinning responsibilities. Currently, these problems show little sign of abating. Also, now that the female migrant role has been institutionalized as an essential family survival mechanism, alongside more traditional female caregiving roles in Zimbabwe, women in both roles are working collaboratively across national boundaries to provide the care that family members need. Zimbabwean families are thus being redefined as transnational structures with specialized roles for different family members – both male and female – in multiple locations, all contributing to the overall well-being of the family. And as a result of the migration experience, women's roles and gender identities are being redefined in ways that will undoubtedly have an impact on Zimbabwean families and society as a whole. Women are broadening their horizons, and recognizing their potential for leadership and decision-making, both in the family and in other social institutions.

Chiedza had this to say about the impact of women, especially migrant women, on the future of Zimbabwe:

Women have always been active. They are the ones who play the most important role in development. This was especially true during the liberation struggle. They are the ones who came back from overseas and worked for change in Zimbabwe – established educational opportunities and programs... Women, both urban and rural, also organized politically to get what they needed. They have demonstrated a great deal of resilience and are working together to keep the next generation from having the same problems... As migrants, women are more likely to work together and help each other in the same way they worked in

Zimbabwe... Women become more independent who are working overseas... It is the Zimbabwean women living in the diaspora who are best prepared to go back and make changes in Zimbabwe.

The stories of Zimbabwean migrant women – their struggles, their resilience, and their achievements – are therefore important not only for understanding the ways that Zimbabweans have used migration to survive in the midst of economic and political turmoil, but for identifying new directions for Zimbabwe's future. Women may have been pushed to migrate by the severity of economic, political, and social decline in Zimbabwe, but what they have learned about themselves and their capabilities in the process may enable them to contribute in new and powerful ways to the work of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping their country in the future, and may further redefine gender roles, both in the diaspora and in Zimbabwe.

The twenty-three women I interviewed constitute a small sample of the thousands of Zimbabwean women who have migrated for work in many different parts of the world. In spite of differences, of age, education, socioeconomic background, and marital status, they have experienced similar struggles with patriarchal family structures as well as with Zimbabwe's economic and political problems. Most of them are aware of gender discrimination and inequality in the global economy that limits their earning potential relative to male migrants, and some have experienced gender violence either in Zimbabwe or in the process of migration. Yet, they affirm that their struggles have been worthwhile, and say that their ability to earn enough to support themselves, their children and other family members has given them a sense of independence, self-respect and pride in what they have been able to accomplish.

BIOGRAPHY

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ENDNOTES

¹The Southern African region consists of Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (www.sadc.int).

²Evidence for the UK and South Africa as primary destinations come from the South African census, the United Nations' migrant stock database, and World Bank estimates (Crush and Tevera 2010:4-5).

³Grounded theory begins with data collection, marks key ideas with codes, and groups the codes into concepts and categories which can be used to construct an explanation of observed patterns.

⁴A transnational model of migration involves a broad set of interchanges by which migrants and their families are fully engaged in the host society while maintaining a high level of social connections and interactions with individuals in their country of origin (Crush and Tevera 2010:19)

⁵An assimilation model assumes a process by which members of immigrant groups and host societies come to resemble one another, with immigrants expected to abandon their original culture, language, etc. (Crush and Tevera 2010:20).

⁶Xenophobia is fear or hatred of foreigners.

⁷Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which existing participants help to recruit additional participants from friends and family who fit the categories of interest.

⁸Math and science teachers are included in the category of "Skills Shortage Occupations" in South Africa. Math and Science teachers from other countries with five years of experience are given a three-month work permit, during which time they can search for employment. Once employment is secured they are to notify Home Affairs and a longer-term work permit will be issued.

⁹Under customary law, once lobola was paid, the husband had the right to his wife's reproductive capacity and labor. When there was a divorce, the father was automatically given custody of the children. However, Zimbabwe's 1985 Matrimonial Causes act changed this practice, with custody of young children most often going to mothers (Walter 2001: 203-204).