

## Double-Rootedness and Networking among Urban Migrants in Zimbabwe

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**ABSTRACT** Notions of double-rootedness were deeply ingrained in Zimbabwe's urban migrants' lives. Double-rootedness implies holding on to the concept of 'home' while simultaneously being located in a foreign setting. Home in the context of urban women migrants from Chinhoyi and Harare implies a connection with some village or rural place. When applied from outside the country 'home' refers to Zimbabwe. For the women urban migrants in the study double rootedness was adopted as a survival strategy in the face of a declining and collapsing national economy. For many urban migrants double-rootedness implied having a real or imagined connection with some rural place called 'home'. The paper builds on the experience gained by the author during 12-months of an OSSREA funded research project conducted in 2002 in Chinhoyi the capital city of Mashonaland West Province and Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. The methodology adopted for the study was mainly qualitative in nature. The research participants for this study displayed double-rootedness in their really or imagined life-worlds. For this group of women research participants, social networks played a critical role in enabling them access the much needed resources, information and social support. Thus, urban women migrants in this study demonstrate little support for the thesis that under conditions of scarcity and poverty there is little basis for reciprocity. Shared knowledge and information and the activation of social networks enabled many migrants to access accommodation, jobs and other resources thus, allowing many to continue to stay in town and to support their households. Not only did networks enrich people's lives, they acted as a resource that enabled many to hang on, cope and at times even propel some migrants to climb out of poverty. Networks generally involved kin, friends and neighbours. The study showed that non-kin networks became more pronounced under conditions of poverty. Social networks had become a key organisational principle among urban residents. An interesting observation noted amongst many urban residents was their shared perceptions that the rural area was still their home. This view persisted even amongst urban migrants with minimum contact with their rural homes.

### INTRODUCTION

Cross-border trade runs deep in the psyche of urban women in Zimbabwe. Since 2000, Zimbabwe's economy has been in a free fall and the country lost its status as the bread basket of Africa. Zimbabwe once ranked a middle-income country with a robust, diversified and strong industrialised economy than any other country in sub-Saharan Africa except South Africa. But it has since slipped into the lowest ranks of low-income countries. At one time in 2008/2009, before the formation of the Government of National Unity that was born out of the Mbeki brokered Global Political Agreement between Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and Mutambara's splinter MDC party, rampant inflation rate peaked at nearly 2 million per cent per annum and was deemed the highest in the world.

The study which is the basis of this paper draws from an ethnographic study of a selected group of cross-border women traders residing in

two cities in Zimbabwe, namely Chinhoyi the provincial capital of Mashonaland West Province and Harare the country's capital city. The study was conducted between December 2001 and December 2002. This study on informal cross-border women traders took place in the face of unprecedented poverty levels in Zimbabwe. The study was funded by the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA). While the results of this study of informal cross border women traders resulted in a book publication and a journal article there remains many issues that were not explored in depth in these publications and yet are of material interest to scholars interested in understanding the dynamics and developments in the area of cross-border trade internationally. Two issues that are intricately connected and explored in this paper are the concept of double-rootedness and the emergence of social networks as part of a repertoire of social capital by cross-border women traders.

Double-rootedness is governed by sets of beliefs that are influenced by strong attachments to a social field (people, objects and place). The

experiences of the women cross-border traders show that migrant life-worlds are premised on rootedness, that is strong notions of belonging and possession of a shared identity. Rootedness encompasses the totality of the women's lived experiences. It involves deeply held assumptions about the existence of strong attachments to more than one locality. With double-rootedness there is strong connectedness of individuals to real or imagined places. As a concept double-rootedness is the basis for understanding women cross-border's lived experiences as well as most of the on-going contestations.

This paper, excluding the introduction, methodology and conclusion is divided into six sections. The first section explores issues to do with double-rootedness, sense of belonging and multiple identities. Double-rootedness did not imply a physical presence in two places but rather a cognitive map by which the cross-border women traders continue to locate themselves as belonging and strongly identifying with at least the urban as well as the rural location. This heightened sense of belonging to both the rural and urban resulted in the development of multiple identities by women cross-border traders. It is the adoption of these multiple identities that gave women rights and entitlements in both rural and urban places. At times multiple identities functioned as a resource enabling many of the research participants to access business resources and other forms of livelihoods. The second section explores the concept of *Kumusha* ('home') and its implications as far as double-rootedness is concerned. This strong sense of belonging and identification with a place called home is prevalent amongst all migrants (urban migrants as well as cross-border urban migrants). Whether people are in Chinhoyi, Harare, Johannesburg and/or London the notion of *kumusha* encourages many to keep the fires burning. There is a need to stay connected to a place called home.

The third section examines globalisation and double-rootedness. Double-rootedness implies connectedness; this connects very well with the concept of globalisation that implies increased flows of information, goods and services as well as people in the form of migration. The fourth section examines the concepts of social networks and networking. These concepts are discussed in the light of double-rootedness. There is an attempt to view social networks as forms of social capital that urban women cross-border traders

strategically deploy to their best advantage as they seek to earn a living that will enable them to continue to stay in town. The next section further explores different forms and strategies for networking. Lastly before concluding the paper, double-rootedness and networking and their implications for policy are examined.

## METHODOLOGY

The study methodology was mainly qualitative. Fieldwork was organised into three phases. The first phase i.e. the exploratory phase extended from December 2001 to end of April 2002. During this phase observations of cross-border movements at border posts and other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries were done. Amongst the SADC countries visited are Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Africa and Zambia. Informal discussions with informal cross-border women traders and officials from the public as well as the private domain took place during the exploratory phase. The second phase comprised of in-depth interviews which commenced in Chinhoyi and Harare in early May and lasted until end of June. This phase focused on initial data gathering and in-depth interviews which was utilised as the key data-gathering technique. The third phase involved an extended in-depth study of a selected group of respondents. This phase extended from July to end of November 2002. Multiple research methods were adopted in order to gain greater insights into the strategic operations of informal cross-border traders. Data was collected using semi-participant observation, in-depth and intensive lengthy interviews with 20 selected full-time women cross-border traders and included more than 30 officials. In addition, informal interviews were done with an innumerable number of women cross-border traders and direct observations were made in terms of the movement of goods and persons at border posts and during transit to destinations as well as people's homes. Direct observation was used throughout the fieldwork when 'hanging-out' at border posts, during 'conversations' and interviews, and when walking and travelling, yielded an enormous amount of data. I spent many hours milling around and chatting (mainly in Shona but also in English) with women in their work environments. The snowball sample drew all its study population of informal cross-

border traders from Harare and Chinhoyi. The 20 women cross-border traders were interviewed in their homes while the 30 officials were interviewed at their work stations. Only those women informal cross-border traders living in Harare and Chinhoyi at the time of initial contact with the researcher became involved with the study. I was introduced initially at the point of entry to the twenty respondents, ten in each city, by three sisters-in-law. I did not include the three sisters-in-law in my research sample. However, all my sisters-in-law are informal cross-border traders?

### CROSS-BORDER WOMEN CASES

#### Case 1: Amai<sup>1</sup> Bee

Amai Bee was a divorcee, 35-year-old and a mother of three, a son aged 13 years, and two daughters aged 10 and 8 years. She was very religious and was a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. She lived in a rented house in Chinhoyi. Amai Bee was in the poverty coping<sup>2</sup> socio-economic category. Besides looking after her own children, she also supported a sister and her child who lived in the rural areas. In addition, she contributed toward the welfare of her mother and a retrenched brother's household. She began her cross-border trading operations in 1994. Her mother and sister-in-law gave her an initial start-up capital of Z\$6000. A relative of hers initiated her into cross-border trade. At that time she travelled to and from Zambia on a fortnightly basis. On the encouragement of a friend she shifted from Zambia to Botswana in 1999. The kinds of goods sourced from Botswana for resale included shoes, bedspreads, tea leaves. During trips to Botswana, the women carried foodstuff, cowpeas, groundnuts and doilies. Goods were sold both on a cash and credit basis. The destruction of trading goods and official harassment of traders forced her to move to Lesotho. She started operating the Lesotho route in 2002. She needed an operating capital estimated at Z\$80 000. She intended to concentrate on her Lesotho market for some time. She travelled to Lesotho on a monthly basis and spent close to two weeks of her time in Lesotho. Lesotho was very welcoming and traders experienced no harassment. She paid monthly rent for a room in Maseru costing SAR120. On average she brought back approximately SAR800. Her cross-border operations to Lesotho have been helped by the presence of her sister in Lesotho and her own past experience. She sold

goods on credit. Mai Bee was a member of a 20-person credit and savings group. They made monthly contributions of Z\$500 and could borrow money at 30% monthly interest rate. They had no problem of members defaulting. She bought through the local council a residential stand and was going to start construction of a house on the stand in 2003.

#### Case 2: Amai Tino

Amai Tino a 46-year-old widow was the mother of three; a 22-year-old married son, an 18-year-old married daughter and a 13-year-old daughter. She stayed with her 13-year-old daughter, a nephew and niece. She lived in Chinhoyi. She frequented her rural home where her mother resided. She gave her mother groceries and money regularly. Amai Tino employed a domestic worker who was very useful during her monthly trips to South Africa. After the death of her husband in early 1999, she managed to complete house extensions and got ownership of the house. Amai Tino had opted for urban permanency and had no intention of ever relocating to the rural areas yet she referred to her rural village as her home. Amai Tino was initiated into cross-border trade by a friend in 1994. Her initial stint into cross-border trade was brief as she had to stop due to strong disapproval by her husband. She only resumed cross-border operations toward the end of 1999. She was a successful cross-border trader, and was in the climbing out of poverty<sup>1</sup> category. After the death of her husband she sold some of the assets in her house such as a TV, radio, stove and chairs and used the proceeds as start up capita for cross-border trading activities. For Amai Tino South African customs officials were more understanding. She sold her wares on credit mostly to individuals. Sometimes shop owners placed orders with her. It was only under such circumstances that she conducted business transactions with shop owners. She found the church and her friends useful especially in times of crisis. Amai Tino was a Methodist. She had developed an informal network of friends in South Africa as well and relied on these friends when it came to customer references and debt collection.

#### Case 3: Amai Chengetai

Amai Chengetai was a 52-year-old married woman and a mother of three-two sons aged 32

and 29, and a daughter aged 23, lived in Harare and had opted for double-rootedness rather than urban permanency. She was in the climbing out of poverty category. Amai Chengetai had built together with her husband a four-roomed rural homestead. She also owned 7 acres of rural land and was able to harvest something meaningful even in the midst of droughts. Despite this apparent high commitment to rural life Amai Chengetai appeared not to be in a hurry to relocate to her rural area. All her children are married and looked after themselves and their households. Amai Chengetai had no dependent to look after other than her unemployed husband. In addition to the rural homestead Amai Chengetai and her husband owned an urban house and had just finished extending their four-roomed house into a seven roomed house. They could let some rooms to lodgers. She was planning to do this in the near future. Her husband is no longer working but does some piece work when such work avails itself.

Amai Chengetai was initiated into cross-border trade by a friend in 1994. She raised start-up capital from own savings based on dress, making profits. Her husband also contributed some money for her first cross-border visit to Botswana. In 1998 she changed to Johannesburg. She found Johannesburg to be a dangerous area to operate in. She lost her goods to theft on a few occasions and the market was not that profitable. The bad reception she got in Johannesburg forced her to relocate operations to Lesotho from 1999. She considered her cross-border trips to Lesotho to be a success. Amai Chengetai was a member of the United Methodist Church. She was a member of two credit and savings associations. She was a member of a 23-person savings and credit group and also a member of a seven-person savings group. Members made monthly contributions and could borrow the money at 10% interest rate.

#### **Case 4: Amai Mabasa**

Amai Mabasa a 36-year-old never-married woman had two sons aged 18 and 12, lived in Harare and was in the poverty coping category. She was solely responsible for the upkeep of her sons', one in form six and the younger boy in grade seven. She received no maintenance monies from the father of her boys. Amai Mabasa

left school after form two. She rented a cottage but had bought her own stand in 2000. She hoped to start building her own house in 2003. For Amai Mabasa, investing in an urban house was the only way of guaranteeing a secure old age. She started cross-border trade activities in 1999. She used to source goods for resale in Zambia. Amai Mabasa did a lot of self-production of the goods in her home. She managed to raise her start-up capital. She travelled to Zambia on a regular basis, at least three times a month. She had stopped bringing back items for resale in Zimbabwe. Instead she brought back hard currency at least US\$100 to US\$150 per trip. Amai Mabasa had a number of dependents to look after. In addition to her sons, she looked after her ageing mother as well as her deceased younger sister's two children. Amai Mabasa was an active member of the Salvation Army Church. She participated in income generating activities organised by the church. She was a member of a group of 17 persons who contribute a sum of Z\$1000 monthly and at the same time members could borrow money at 10% monthly interest rate. Amai Mabasa only started cross-border trade after her retrenchment. She regretted why she had not entered cross-border trade much earlier. She was determined to diversify her income.

#### **DOUBLE-ROOTEDNESS, BELONGING AND MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

It is not surprising that the above four cited women cross-border cases like most of the other cross-border women traders in the in-depth study displayed strong attachments and connectedness to both rural and urban locations and people. Double-rootedness was deeply engrained in the mindset of these migrant women. Contrary to many writers who predicted that urban migrants especially women were more likely to develop stronger urban attachments and in the process discard their rural identities, this was not the case for cross-border women traders in both Chinhoyi and Harare. It even appeared as if their success in their trade heightened their sense of origin and belonging to the rural village. However, it should be borne in mind that connectedness with the rural village did not necessarily entail movements in terms of space. It was a mental cognitive mind mapping exercise.

Cross-border trade involved a lot of mobility

on the part of the women. These cross-border traders were a cosmopolitan footloose group of cultural and economic entrepreneurs. Cross-border traders were characterised by emergent, multiple and negotiated identities. Cross-border trade as an occupation had given rise to the image of a strong and independent class of women involved in long distance trans-border business. A new identity marking cross-border traders from others appeared to be emerging. It was quite clear that cross-border women traders were shrewd business strategists. Cross-border trade was the one single strategy for climbing out of poverty. At the interpersonal level cross-border women traders were forging ahead economically but at the same time establishing relations that differed from the exclusionary nation states ideologies. It is as Werbner (1996), observed a case of 'shifting identities', something also alluded to by Ranger (1996). The women's personal knowledge, common sense and strategising behaviour enabled them to cope under difficult and often threatening situations.

A new identity appeared to define and characterise women cross-border traders. This is the one successful strategy largely dependent on innovative marketing initiatives by the women. In the process of mobilising resources and energies to ensure success as far as cross-border trade is concerned, it is as Werbner (1996) observed a case of women traders adopting "shifting identities". Identity is not something that is unchanging. Cross-border traders have come to view identity as something people forge in dialogue with those around them. As the cases above indicate the women cross-border traders were developing multiple identities based on kin and non-kin relations. As Ranger (1983: 248) observed, "most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities" and this was the case with cross-border women traders. Ranger (1996) also noted that identity was a matter of choice and that it varied across a range of circumstances. In a related study Cheater (1998) noted the existence of a range of identities women adopt in order to cope with the demands of cross-border trade, as women shuttle back and forth in their trade. In a way, what was going on mirrored what Klaaren (2005: 175) noted for the Southern African region when she observed that "Southern Africa became a region with a history of differential levels of control over mobility according to gender". Thus, a study of

women cross-border traders revealed that rootedness is not static but something that captures fluid, multiple, dynamic identities and notions of belonging in the minds of women migrants. Urban residence and cross-border trade had sharpened women's sense of being and connectedness with the rural village. As the women became more firmly and economically grounded, their sense of belonging and origin in terms of who they are increased.

### THE CONCEPTS OF KUMUSHA AND DOUBLE-ROOTEDNESS

As evidenced by the four cases cited above, women cross-border traders' lives, irrespective of marital status, were premised on a deep sense of rootedness that meant being connected to some place and people. The concept of *kumusha* (home) is very important in understanding urban women migrants' behaviour as well as the lived experiences of those in the Diaspora. For Amai Bee, Amai Chengetai, Amai Mabasa and Amai Tino the notion of *Kumusha* i.e. home means the natal village. In a way for these women everybody has a *kumusha*/home to which one can trace one's roots. Amai Bee strongly invested in her *kumusha* by taking care of the welfare of her mother, brother, sister and her child all residing in the village. She felt strong obligations to do this as this was her home. Amai Chengetai was one of the few who invested in building a modern rural homestead. In addition to the homestead, she had a claim to 7 acres of rural land. For those who can afford to do so, putting up a rural homestead is a strong statement in terms of one's status as belonging to the village. In discussions with the women, most of them were of the view that one should never abandon one's *kumusha*. This was evident even amongst those with no intention of ever going back to the village. Surprisingly one might ask what is the basis of this strong sense of *kumusha* amongst these women? *Kumusha* is an ideology or as Godelier (1978) would put it across, the strong ideal realities that inform men and women on how they should behave under certain circumstances. The *Kumusha* ideological orientation of the cross-border women traders is not some sort of false consciousness. In fact, it is part of their lived reality.

When in South Africa, Botswana or any other country outside Zimbabwe, the women cross-

border traders, like most other Zimbabweans, refer to the country Zimbabwe as *kumusha*. It is quite surprising that despite the challenges that the country was going through during the time of fieldwork, a deep sense of patriotism could be discerned amongst Zimbabweans in far away countries as they continued to cherish and identify with home. Some of the women (in the sample) had children living in the Diaspora and they noted that their children had not forgotten *kumusha*. In fact, many in the Diaspora continued to invest at home through getting land on which to build a residential house. Quite a number of housing units at different locations in Harare and Chinhoyi were said to be by those in the Diaspora. Not only did they feel that they had *kumusha*, they took steps to prepare for the eventual day of return. This corresponds to Sadouni's (2009: 243) observations that "Diaspora is a migratory phenomenon characterised by a strong communal experience, an ethno-religious identity and strong links between receiving and sending countries. The ties between diasporic communities and the ideology of return to the country of origin are central in the definition of a Diaspora".

The ideals of *kumusha* have kept many in town and in the Diaspora connected and investing in Zimbabwe. To some extent this *kumusha* mindset has been an important fact in keeping the flow of remittances from the urban to rural and from the Diaspora to Zimbabwe constant. In many ways the situation of Zimbabwean urban women migrants' corresponded with that of Somali refugees in South Africa who shared a strong sense of belonging and remitted money back home. According to Sadouni (2009: 244), "besides remittances, a sense of belonging to the Somali people is strongly reinforced by the combination of migratory experiences and xenophobia in the host country". To a certain extent despite the existence of an economy in free fall and a run away inflation, Zimbabwe has been kept going through a constant flow of remittances independent of the official financial markets. *Kumusha* ideology is an important fact in explaining how Zimbabwe survived its worst political and economic crisis. In other words, *Kumusha* is a concept that cuts across the traditional binaries of rural/urban, traditional/modern and local/cosmopolitan. *Kumusha* connectedness is a concept that runs deep in the psyche of Zimbabweans whether at home or abroad.

### GLOBALISATION AND DOUBLE-ROOTEDNESS

According to Kiely (1998: 3), "globalisation refers to a world in which societies, cultures, politics and economies have, in some sense, come closer together". Giddens (1990: 64) observed that globalisation is concerned with "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa". Globalisation in Africa has witnessed an intensification of restructuring processes resulting in increased volumes of retrenched workers as is and has been the situation in Zimbabwe since 1991. The ruptures in family life and values that accompany migration are part of the resulting consequences of global flows of people a consequent of globalisation. Population movements and shifts have been greatest in Zimbabwe in the past ten years. At the local level, increased flows of people have implications in terms of emerging social identities. However, as noted above, globalisation has not weakened notions of *Kumusha*, to the contrary it has intensified Zimbabweans' feelings of *kumusha* and a sense of belonging. According to Mbiba (2005), remittances back home among global Zimbabweans show that those with insecure legal and economic status in the United Kingdom (UK) send proportionately more money back home than professionals with indefinite leave to stay. In other words, notions of *kumusha* are greatest amongst the least secure in the Diaspora. The imperative to go global is taking place in the context of increasing local awareness as shown by strong sense of *Kumusha* resulting in the growth of what can be termed double-rootedness amongst Zimbabwe's global citizens.

Hannerz (1996) links the concept of cosmopolitan with globalisation. This is something that is useful in studies focusing on cross-border traders. The cosmopolitan and footloose, in this case the woman cross-border trader, develops skills to manage and survive under conditions of increasing diversity and difficult circumstances. To a greater extent "cosmopolitans are usually footloose, on the move in the world" (Hannerz 1996: 104). Mobility is to a large extent part of the survival strategies adopted by cosmopolitans such as women cross-border traders. Cosmopolitan behaviour fits quite well with that of cross-border traders. Hannerz's observations are particu-

larly useful as women traders are constantly on the move, sourcing and selling their wares. As cultural and economic entrepreneurs, some of the women cross-border traders in my study like Amai Chengetai and Amai Tino were very successful and were investing their proceeds in Zimbabwe in their attempts to diversify their sources of income. These women were in a group that is termed the climbing out of poverty category. These women constituted an independent class of women characterised by emergent, multiple and negotiated identities as they moved about conducting their business in the Southern Africa region. The women's ability to shift and adopt various forms of identities was part of their tactical and strategic responses to challenges of operating in sometimes hostile environments as the situations were reported to be in Botswana and South Africa. In order to understand cross-border traders, one needs to locate them within a particular context. This leads to an emphasis on social networks as a resource that enables success in cross-border trading activities.

### **SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NETWORKING**

The women cross-border traders in the Chinhoyi and Harare study including the cases discussed in this paper showed a predominant role played by friends and kin in their cross-border trade. Kin and friends remained important sources of information especially at the point of entry. They acted as social supports for one in town as well as in the business of cross-border trade. The assistance received from kin was well appreciated. While most traders were committed to an urban life, they had not cut off kin in their lives. They did relate with kin in ways that did not materially disadvantage them. The women cross-border traders maintained effective links with kinsmen including those in the village. From time to time some of my respondents were called upon to look after kin. At the time of fieldwork Zimbabwe ranked fourth in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of HIV and AIDS prevalence. It was no surprise when women cross-border traders like Amai Mabasa had to look after two of her deceased sister's orphaned children. HIV and AIDS in particular had created the potential of extending reproductive responsibilities of these women thus stretching the resources and energies of ag-

ing traders. The women cross-border traders in my study besides supporting their children, elderly parents and siblings were also supporting in some cases orphaned children of siblings and affinities.

Amai Bee, Amai Chengetai and Amai Mabasa were members of very vibrant rotating credit and savings' clubs. It would seem credit and savings clubs were very popular amongst women entrepreneurs. To a large extent, the proliferation of credit and savings clubs went against March and Taqqu's (1986) assertion that rotating credit and savings groups are poor men's substitutes for formal financial institutions. These cross-border women could be considered as women in sound financial situations and yet were heavily involved in these groups. The 2002 study showed a large number of women being involved in these money exchange clubs. The credit and savings clubs were quite popular possibly because the women could easily access the money in times of depressed financial markets and high interest regimes in banks for borrowers. The women did not want to be indebted to banks and other money lenders or sharks but were busy developing financial institutional mechanisms that enabled them to raise money and at the same time develop inter-personal relations useful in times of disaster such as funerals and happy moments like birthdays and weddings. Surprisingly, none of the women complained about non-payment by members who would have borrowed the money. It would appear once a woman agreed to join a club she committed herself to repayments of money borrowed at stipulated times. The popularity of savings and credit groups contrasted heavily with the economic downturn and economic meltdown gripping the country in 2002. These groups empowered women and enabled them to raise cash and survive economically and politically during the hard times. Membership depended on trust and personal friendship hence the low levels of non-payments. These financial groups also offered emotional support to members.

Social networks continued to play a critical role in the lives of women cross-border traders. They were useful in terms of facilitating access to markets, sourcing goods for trade purposes, avoiding trouble spots, as a source of information on the new demands by state and state functionaries. Shared knowledge and information enabled the cross-border women traders to over-

come obstacles and to strategise for success. Networking enabled the cross-border women traders to strategise to cope with new increasing demands in the field of cross-border trade. Increasingly, this powerful group of entrepreneurial and enterprising women cross-border traders turned to social networks as business aides. Social networks enabled many to cope with problems at the personal level and enriched their lives during periods of economic downturn.

### DIFFERENT NETWORKING FORMS

Migrant urban women's lives were embedded in multi-layered and multi-sited social fields characterised by multiple interlocking networks of social relationships. In order to succeed in their chosen careers as cross-border traders, the women forged varied but strategic alliances and partnerships with many people. Most women traders in the study population had managed to cultivate friendship networks not only with fellow Zimbabwean traders travelling to the SADC regional destinations they visited but also with some of the nationals in the countries visited. Women traders talked of the vast network of friends who were citizens of the various SADC countries. Some of the women in the study left their unsold goods in the care of friends in the destination country. Many of the women reported that they were assisted by regional friends in the destination country to find customers. These friends at times helped with debt collection. In some instances friends were useful not only in finding prospective customers but also credit worthy customers as well as accommodation. In many ways friends made cross-border trade much easier and a successful business venture. Not only do friends in destination countries offer help, information and as their front persons, they made traders feel welcome, secure and at home. Some of the friends in destination countries were able to visit Zimbabwe and at times stayed with the cross-border women trader friends. In and outside Zimbabwe kin and friends were useful in terms of sourcing goods for resale. None of the women cases cited above stayed in posh hotels or places during their sojourn to SADC countries. Cost and safety are two considerations that women look at when it comes to choosing where to stay. Friends are the main reference sources for accommodation. Women traders tended to

minimise costs by opting for shared accommodation. Friends, acquaintances and even customers were useful sources in terms of accessing accommodation.

Women like Amai Tino had managed to establish links with business people, especially shop owners in their destination countries. These shop owners mostly placed orders such as curios, art and craft works. The Rhodie<sup>1</sup> connection was very useful for some of the cross-border women traders. In some instances the Rhodies networked the women cross-border traders with other potential buyers. The Indian community was also very useful for the women traders as some also place orders with the women.

The study revealed the importance of connections between women cross-border traders various individuals contributing to the women's success as traders. There is strong evidence to the effect that these women traders were strongly connected. The women traders were able to strategise to maximise returns and minimise the negative impact of Governments restrictive bureaucratic constraints particularly those procedures concerning the movement of goods and persons, through sharing of information, comparing notes and sharing experiences, concerns and how to strategise for success. The cross-border women traders were able to advice and counsel each other in terms of opportunities and constraints in the face of economic difficulties. The connections they developed enabled them to succeed in their ventures. At the time of the study in 2002, after realising some of the constraints the traders faced within the SADC region from the officials of different sister countries, they established the Zimbabwe Informal Cross-border Traders' Organisation. The idea was that this organisation would lobby on behalf of traders for relaxation of passage of both goods and people within the SADC region. Cross-border trade had become a full-time activity for the women traders. Many of them were forging working relationships with the various gate keepers at points of entry in the different SADC countries. It can therefore be concluded that irrespective of the nature of connection social networks functioned as a business resource for women traders. While none of the women in the 2002 in-depth group admitted to sexual networking as a strategy to maximise returns, this is something that needs to be pursued in future studies of cross-border trade.

### DOUBLE-ROOTEDNESS, NETWORKING AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A major argument presented in this paper is the view that generally urban migrants including women cross-border traders were double-rooted. Double-rootedness is a mental map that connected the women traders with their village of origin even in cases where the possibility of ever relocating to the village was remote. The identification with the village as home i.e. *kumusha* cemented this notion of double-rootedness in the minds of these women. *Kumusha* and a growing sense of belonging are concepts not limited to women cross-border traders, they are equally important in understanding the behaviour of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. As Mbiba (2005) noted, the least successful amongst migrants in London popularly referred to as Harare North and other cities in the United Kingdom remitted back home to Zimbabwe much more than their more secure and successful counterparts. The strong sense of *kumusha* had produced the unintended consequence of sustaining a faltering economy and socio-economic system by enabling millions to live on these meagre remittances thereby averting disaster in the form of famine.

It is evident that though double-rootedness was influenced and took shape and root in the context of globalisation, it should be viewed as a process of hybridization. Globalization is characterised by multi-dimensional and multiple unfolding realities characterised by increasing functional networks. For cross-border women traders, their high mobility enabled them to be highly adaptive global citizens who are able to cope with varied socio-economic challenges. Social networks were a major resource that the women deployed strategically thereby enabling them to cope and invest in the economically challenged global environment that Zimbabwe found herself in the post-2000 economic crisis. It is also important to see how this concept of *Kumusha*, hence double-rootedness impacted on other areas of people's lives. Double-rootedness had implications on outcomes and policy directions regarding Zimbabwe's land reform programme. When it came to land reform, the belief that every African has a rural home (*Kumusha*) left many farm workers vulnerable and subject to eviction without government having to account for their lot. The argument being that all displaced farm

workers had a rural home. Of course this is a myth but it worked to the advantage of the regime as very few people have concerned themselves with what happened to displaced farm workers.

This study underlined the fact that women's migration networks functioned as important conduits of information and opinions about the markets in and outside Zimbabwe. Migration networks sought to promote, sustain and to facilitate the retention of cross-border traders' social identities. It was quite clear that the existence of migration networks shaped the nature of social life and many women cross-border traders had responded to changing economic circumstances and the emerging opportunities by adopting multiple identities as survival strategies. In their private discussions in buses and trains, it was clear that the women had learnt how to extract what they wanted from the different states and their functionaries. The women's strategic responses to cope with the various demands in the conduct of their business, made them better tactical 'politicians'. In Bailey's (1993: 9) terms, cross-border women traders could be seen as *svejks*, who more or less undermined the credibility of the system from within without appearing to be doing so. By pretending to be getting along with state authorities, they appeared to be quite vulnerable, yet this appearance was the source of their strength. It is therefore imperative that the state rather than undermining the efforts of women cross-border traders should in fact take a leaf from them on how to cope under difficult circumstances without state aid. Policies should be more facilitative rather than restrictive of cross-border trade as this group of entrepreneurs were contributing to the welfare not only of their households but the country at large as they brought in the much needed foreign currency. There was a need to look at cross-border women traders in a more positive light than has been the case hitherto.

### CONCLUSION

For research participants in the Chinhoyi and Harare group, Jones' (1993) culture of achievement thesis best described the lived experiences of these women at the time of my fieldwork. Urban challenges had offered market opportunities and the cross-border women traders were able to subsist in the city without the aid of the

state or any other functionaries. The crisis in Zimbabwe has seen the emergence of an independent, economically vibrant entrepreneurial group in the form of cross-border traders. The women cross-border traders were the breadwinners for their households. All the women cross-border traders operated within the SADC region. Their experiences clearly demonstrated the fact that cross-border trade could result in a robust regional integrated economy if supportive trade and development policies were adopted by the regional grouping such as SADC. The 2002 study contrasted with my previous publications in that associational networks had become more pronounced and more common compared to the past (Muzvidziwa 1998, 2005).

Notions of belonging and a strong sense of identification with *kumusha* were very strong amongst the women. This possibly in some way contributed to the emergency of a group of fairly successful women entrepreneurs. Double-rootedness and networking were two different but intricately linked processes. The cross-border women's lived experiences were taking shape and root within the confines of a globalising world. Issues relating to matters of sexuality, mobility and citizenship and identity needed to be further examined in the light of the powerful influences of double-rootedness and *kumusha* ideology.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Amai means mother but it can also be used as a mark of respect, calling a mature woman amai irrespective of whether one has a child or not is a mark of respect.
- <sup>2</sup> Used as per classification by Muzvidziwa 1998. Coping referred to those who could balance the household budget.
- <sup>3</sup> Used as per classification by Muzvidziwa 1998. Climbing out of poverty referred to those who had a relatively healthy domestic budget, savings and investments.
- <sup>4</sup> Rhodie(s) are whites who lived in former Rhodesia/now Zimbabwe in the 1970s shortly before independence and in the 1980s shortly after independence.

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