

Breaking the Shackles of Gender Stereotyping to Create New Norms: The Case of Zimbabwean Migrant Women in Mthatha Town

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Abstract

The migration of Zimbabweans into South Africa is shaped by several factors and processes. Traditionally, the decision to migrate was mostly based on family considerations (where gender stereotypic roles were a priority), although in some cases the migrants exercised individualism and personal agency. This led to migration trends that were male dominated. Current Zimbabwean migration trends reflect large volumes of women as the socio-economic crisis forces them to leave their country. These migrant women encounter a myriad of challenges in their host countries. This paper explores Zimbabwean women's migration to the town of Mthatha in South Africa, highlighting their challenges and the strategies they employ to overcome these, as found in a recent case study. Applying a qualitative research design and using questionnaires and interviews to gather data from the 100 purposively sampled women, the study found that many Zimbabwean migrant women in Mthatha encountered numerous challenges. They lacked the required documents to live and work in South Africa, experienced exploitation and marriage constraints, and had broken ties with their families back in Zimbabwe. According to the study, these women managed to navigate these challenges, rising above the stereotypic norms and values that used to label them as non-productive citizens to superheroes who were supporting their families and the country's economy—thus breaking the shackles of gender stereotyping to create new norms. These findings underline the importance of shifting from the traditional approaches to women migration and pursuing perspectives that present migration as a critical component of the process of social change and development to all migrants.

Keywords: gender; gender stereotyping; migration; socio-economic challenges; women migrants

Introduction

For many years, human movement from Zimbabwe to South Africa has been a male domain because of the travelling distance and risks involved (Crush and Tawodzera 2017). The few female migrants had to endure the chains of stereotypes, which made them less significant in migration decision-making and in the processes that ensued. In most instances, they were labelled *accompanying spouses*, who join their husbands to perform the expected traditional *housewife* chores. However, the demands for autonomy and equal rights in the existing world, coupled with the need to ensure family sustenance in a harsh economic environment, have resulted in many Zimbabweans seeking greener pastures in South Africa (Crush and Tawodzera 2017). It is against this background that there are many Zimbabweans who reside in the town of Mthatha in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Women constitute a considerable percentage of this number. According to the findings of the study on which this article draws, most of these women encountered numerous challenges in their host town, Mthatha. This is not in line with the International Organization for Migration's *Migration Governance Framework* (IOM 2016), which seeks to ensure that migrants do not encounter migration-related problems in the host country (Girard 2017). Although the migration of Zimbabwean women to South Africa is relatively new, there is a lot of literature on the causes of migration and the challenges Zimbabwean women migrants face, with the feminisation of migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa (Mbiyozo 2018) covering a large space. This paper argues for the case of stereotyped migrant women who defied all the odds stacked against them to reconstruct migration patterns and change the social perceptions about women migrants. First, the paper will relate gender to migration, then briefly give an overview of the Zimbabwe-to-South Africa migration trends, and then describe the framework that guided this study in order to put the article's argument into context.

Gender and Migration

Gender is at the centre of any discussion on migration. From the causes and planning, to the processes and challenges, gender is integral such that we cannot separate or ignore it. It determines the nature of the services and products that are provided, and the promoting, facilitating and organising of migration (Cranston, Schapendonk, and Spaan 2018). According to the *World Migration Report 2018* (IOM 2018), every stage of migration is shaped by the migrant's gender, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. According to the same report (IOM 2018), gender influences reasons for migrating, who migrates and the destination, the transport networks used, opportunities and resources available at destinations, and relations with the country of origin. On the other hand, the vulnerabilities, dangers, and needs are also shaped by one's gender, and are usually different for various groups. The roles, expectations, relationships and power dynamics associated with one's gender (male, female, and all the other genders covered under transgender) greatly affect all aspects of the migration process and can also be affected by migration (IOM 2018). Donato and Gabaccia (2015) argued that in terms of the context of gender dynamics, studies on migration need to look beyond just differences in male and female movement trends and consider the inequalities that are typically hidden in those trends. Discussions on the impact of gender on migration (Cranston,

Schapendonk, and Spaan 2018; Donato and Gabaccia 2015; IOM 2018) often generate debates that are associated with *women accompanying male* migration, women whose migration is determined by the stereotypes bestowed on them. At times, these debates underestimate the economic contributions made by migrant women. Such debates create a crucial starting point for this article's analysis and argument.

Zimbabwe-to-South Africa Migration Trends

The migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa has a long history dating back to the mid-nineteenth century and was evident even before the drawing of colonial boundaries (Crush, Williams, and Peberdy 2005). The largest number of migrants were mine workers whose recruitment was formalised and guided by state-led contract labour migration systems (Maloka 1997). There were few migrant women because they were restricted by the selective migrant labour systems (Lefko-Everett 2007). This created the image that migration was a preserve of men. Besides the mid-nineteenth century movements, there was also a large-scale movement of Zimbabweans in South Africa between 1983 and 1987 as Zimbabweans from the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces fled political instability (Crush, Williams, and Peberdy 2005). The political instability code-named Gukurahundi led to a movement that was clandestine and undocumented (Crush, Williams, and Peberdy 2005). This mass movement paved the way for more Zimbabweans who had realised that South Africa offered better life opportunities than Zimbabwe to cross the Limpopo River in search of better opportunities. The fall of the apartheid era saw an increase in the volume of Zimbabweans migrating to South Africa. Data from Statistics South Africa shows that there was an increase in cross-border flows from Zimbabwe in 2012 (Statistics South Africa 2012). Crush and Tawodzera (2017) estimated that currently there could be more than half a million Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, a figure which may be very conservative as there could be more unaccounted movements of illegal migrants along the porous Zimbabwe-South Africa border. In recent years, more Zimbabwean women are migrating to South Africa, resulting in the shifting of the migration demography (Mbiyozo 2018). McDuff (2015) estimated that by 2010, 44% of Zimbabwean migrants crossing into South Africa for work were women. This trend is the same as the international migration trends where women account for 48% of the world's estimated 258 million international migrants (UN 2017). Zimbabwe's economic and political problems forced the women, just like other citizens, to search for work to support their families (Tevera and Zinyama 2002). The economic crisis also forced the women who could no longer rely on their husbands' wages to migrate in search of work elsewhere. The movements created a breadwinner role for the Zimbabwean women within family units (McDuff 2015).

It must be noted that Zimbabwe–South Africa migration is guided by protocols entered between the two countries (SAIIA 2008). These protocols are meant to guide movement in the migration corridor between the two countries. Due to the increased volume of Zimbabwean migrants entering South Africa, mechanisms were put in place to ensure a smooth flow of migration. Most Zimbabweans who migrated to South Africa at the height of the political instability as political refugees received asylum, which allowed them to stay, study, work and do business in the country (McDuff 2015). The author of

this article observed that this facility was later abused by economic refugees from Zimbabwe. These refugees claimed that they were facing political persecution in Zimbabwe for them to qualify for asylum, which was being received by political refugees, yet they were economic refugees.

A 90-day visa obtainable at ports of entry (mainly Beit Bridge Border Post) was introduced and this was followed by the provision of special permits that allowed Zimbabweans in South Africa to work, study or do business in South Africa (McDuff 2015). The special permits included the four-year Zimbabwean Dispensation Permit (ZDP) in 2010 and the three-year Zimbabwean Special Permit (ZSP) in 2014. A four-year Zimbabwean Exemption Permit (ZEP) introduced in 2017 is operational at present. Only holders of the ZDP qualified for the ZSP and ZEP as they were offered as renewals of the previous permit. The other measures included the scrapping of penalties for overstaying the duration of permits, although this was accompanied by a severe regulation that overstayers would be declared undesirable and be banned from entering South Africa for five years. There are also scarce skills and general work permits that allow Zimbabweans to work in South Africa (McDuff 2015). Those who do not qualify for these provisions are restricted entry into employment. Most Zimbabwean migrants do not qualify for these work permits because of some requirements, which renders most migrants undocumented (Smit and Rugunanan 2014). These strict provisions contribute to the creation of illegal migrants as they opt for alternatives that ensure them entry into South Africa and access to employment. It was these formal and informal channels that Zimbabwean migrant women in Mthatha used to enter South Africa.

Mthatha is situated in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. It is approximately 875 kilometres from Gauteng province, one of South Africa's economic/industrial hubs. Mthatha is predominantly a service town with no big industrial companies. Xhosa people constitute the largest population. Most of the Zimbabwean migrant women in Mthatha were from Harare Province in Zimbabwe, some 2000 kilometres away from Mthatha; some of them were from Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe, about 1700 kilometres from Mthatha, and the others were from other provinces of Zimbabwe. These women entered South Africa through the Beit Bridge Border Post, travelling through Limpopo, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Free State provinces until they reached their destination, Mthatha. Some of the women were travelling with their children. The main goals of these women were to provide family support and gain autonomy, with only a few who had migrated for studies.

Applying the Involuntary Immobility and Capability Approach

The study on the challenges encountered by Zimbabwean migrant women in Mthatha, on which this article draws, was guided by Carling's (2002) concept of involuntary immobility and Sen's (1988) capability approach. This article will use these two approaches as a framework to explore the challenges encountered by these women and argue for the case of women migrants. The paper will take the position that female migration is now dependent on women's capabilities (freedom) and aspirations to migrate, not on the automated and stereotyped reactions to rigid push-pull factors.

Carling's (2002) concept of involuntary immobility and Sen's (1988) capability approach interpret migration as a function of the migrant's ability and aspirations to move from one point to another (Lubkemann 2008). The study applied Sen's (1988) capabilities approach to define the mobility of the Zimbabwean women as dependent on their freedom to migrate to South Africa. Carling's (2002) concept of involuntary immobility was used to describe the factors that pushed Zimbabwean women into migrating to secure places which offered better standards of life and also to explain situations where Zimbabwean migrant women were forced to stay in the host country, having failed to raise enough money to go back to Zimbabwe. The study chose these two approaches because they present a distinct and realistic understanding of migration through interpreting it as a critical component of the processes of social change and development. We cannot understand migration if we conceptually separate it from change processes of which it is a part. These two perspectives allow for a deeper understanding of the Zimbabwean women's migration to Mthatha in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

Methodology

This article draws on a case study conducted in August 2019. Applying a qualitative research design, the study sought to identify the economic and social challenges encountered by Zimbabwean migrant women in the town of Mthatha. It also intended to determine how these female migrants overcame these challenges. With this purpose, it followed Terre Blanche and Durrheim's (2002) guidelines on how to conduct a case study. For the purpose of this study, 100 Zimbabwean migrant women were purposively sampled. Married women made up 42% of the sample and of that percentage, 19% had absent husbands; widows constituted 20%; divorcees constituted 15%; 23% of this sample were unmarried. This study did not consider women who had migrated for academic studies because this would widen the scope of the study. Most of these women were self-employed as vendors while others were teachers. There were also some who did part-time domestic work.

The study used self-administered (delivery and collection) questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data from the participants. The researcher hand-delivered 100 questionnaires, each to a participant at their respective homes. A total of 20 women from the constituted sample were interviewed by this researcher. The interviewer spent four days interviewing these participants. Content analysis, a method used to systematically analyse the meaning of collected information (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 2002), was used to qualitatively analyse the data. Of central interest were the core themes that the participants referred to—the information or messages that they wanted to pass on. Some of the methods used included the simple counting of the questionnaire responses and finding patterns in the qualitative data where many participants referred to similar trends of challenges and strategies to overcome those challenges. The similar trends were developed into themes, which were analysed and presented as data. In presenting the findings of the study, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants where necessary.

The Research Findings

The Challenges Encountered by the Zimbabwean Migrant Women

Previous studies (Hiralal 2017; SAIIA 2008) indicated that women migrants in South Africa face challenges from an inhospitable environment that exposes them to risks of violence, to overt inhospitality, social exclusion, economic exploitation, police harassment and sexual abuse. In addition to the challenges as a result of social and economic exclusion found by the identified studies, this study found that the women 1) lacked the required documents, 2) experienced exploitation, 3) experienced marriage constraints, and 4) had broken ties with their families back in Zimbabwe. The study also made some interesting findings: especially that the migration of some women was driven by the need for autonomy; that some embarked on an adventure of self-agency; and that some had become breadwinners in their family units and economic players who helped to sustain the fragile Zimbabwean economy through the injection of much-needed foreign currency. Although these findings were recorded in some studies, the stereotypic labels bestowed on Zimbabwean women migrants made the findings interesting and encouraging. These *interesting* findings will form part of an argument for the case of Zimbabwean migrant women, which will ensue after the presentation of the findings.

Lack of Required Documents

The participants in the study indicated that they faced a lot of challenges due to a lack of passports and work permits. In this study, 47% of the participants had the Zimbabwe Exemption Permit (ZEP) document, while 53% did not have work permits. A total of 26% of the participants held visas that allowed them to stay in South Africa with their spouses but not to work, study or conduct any commercial business in the country. In this study, 49% of those without permits were overstayers; 13% were on expired asylum permits and were failing to renew them; 27% stated that they were undocumented while the other 11% refused to disclose their documentation status. The overstayers and undocumented migrants played hide-and-seek with the relevant authorities as they were afraid of arrest and deportation. Chido bemoaned this when she said the following:

My challenge is the lack of the documents needed for my stay in South Africa to be legal. I also know of many Zimbabwean women who do not have permits to stay and work in South Africa. I was unfortunate to miss the opportunity of getting the special permit given to fellow Zimbabweans because I arrived late in 2012 when these permits were already issued. I was working to raise transport money so when I finally came, it was too late. It is very difficult to get the papers needed for the general work permit because some of us do not have the special skills needed. This is a hindrance for some of us who came here to make a living and provide for our families. However, of late the home affairs officials and the police have not been arresting us so we can sell our goods and make money for survival and left some which we can send home.

Chido's challenge reflects Smit and Rugunanan's (2014) finding that some of the requirements needed for a foreigner to get a work permit in South Africa renders many foreigners illegal migrants. It is a challenge many foreigners must manage in order to engage in activities that will help them achieve their aims of migration. In the study,

some participants indicated that they had managed to raise enough money to go home and obtain documents so that they would try to regularise their stay in South Africa. “I have raised money to go and get an *emergency passport* so that I will be able to move around on the 90 days’ permit just like some of my colleagues are doing,” said Shupiko. Shupiko was not the only migrant without proper documents who had contemplated such a move. There were other migrants who were planning the same strategy, an indication that these undocumented migrants wanted to stay in the country legally.

The Challenge of Exploitation and Its Management

Most of the participants who did not have proper documents indicated that they had experienced exploitation at some point during their stay in Mthatha. In narrating their predicaments, they indicated that in most instances, they received far less than the payment that was agreed upon for the part-time and menial jobs they had done. Some of the employers, the migrant workers alleged, knew that many of these women migrants did not have proper documents and hence they would not be reported to the responsible authorities. Patricia said:

Some of these employers are tricksters who just want to have their tasks done for little or no payments. They can give you some piece-job to do; say laundry, clean the house or any domestic task and after the work is done, it becomes difficult to get your payment. The employer can keep on postponing the pay day or give you less than the payment you bargained for. Some of them can even employ you for the whole month as a domestic worker but when it is month-end, you get a lot of excuses. You can easily see that I have been exploited and leave it. We have developed a list of those who don’t pay and blacklisted them so that we can advise those Zimbabweans who will have just arrived never to offer their services to the blacklisted. It is good that some of us have since moved into piracy, buying and selling goods.

It was found that most of the women who taught in private schools were receiving very low salaries compared to their counterparts in the public sector. This was despite their relevant qualifications. They said it was hurtful that they were considered cheap labour. This is in line with Couldrey and Morris (2000) and Hiralal (2017) who observed that some migrants are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Creating Own Social Structures to Address the Challenge of Social Exclusion

The participants bemoaned their lack of social and political participation. Most of them could not socialise with locals because of the language barrier and cultural differences. The participants without proper documents indicated that they did not even think of going out to socialise because they did not want to *invite trouble*. The women migrants had resorted to organising their own events and gathering in spacious homesteads, especially homes of those Zimbabweans who rented full houses. One migrant on a Zimbabwe Exemption Permit had this to say:

We socialise on our own due to the language barrier. Even though we can speak IsiXhosa, it is just difficult to sustain the socialisation because of the different culture. I do not want to end up spoiling my day or the locals’ day when we end up conversing in English

throughout the day. On the same token, those without permits cannot frequently socialise outdoors because they fear being arrested. Most of the time we organise ourselves as Zimbabweans and socialise in our homesteads.

Through their social gatherings, they have managed to organise a functional *Tanyaradzwa* (We have been comforted), a burial society to assist members in the wake of funeral. *Tanyaradzwa* has expanded to incorporate the Zimbabwean migrant men.

The participants indicated that besides the identified social barriers, they co-existed with the local community members very well. One would expect to find xenophobia, arguably the most dangerous challenge faced by foreigners living in South Africa, topping the list of the challenges faced by these women, but fortunately they never experienced it. The migrant women indicated that the 2008, 2015 and 2019 xenophobic attacks on foreigners did not affect them. They indicated that the Mthatha community was not xenophobic and the community members would always ensure that foreign nationals were safe.

Negotiating the Challenge of Economic Exclusion

This study found that some Zimbabwean migrant women did not fully participate in the economic activities of their host town. Some of the women living in Mthatha on the accompanying-spouse visa were skilled professionals who could not work because their visas did not allow them. The study found that some of the professional women in Mthatha were not executing the duties related to their professional specialisation. It was common to find secondary school-trained teachers teaching in primary schools and vice versa. Some of the women had resorted to being vendors, buying and selling clothes, selling vegetables, pirated music, video and movie discs, yet they had certificates, diplomas and degrees in some profession. This is deskilling a skilled person. Girard (2017) also found that migrants were frequently affected by socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, underemployment and deskilling. The migrants without papers could not work in the formal economic sectors and contribute to the economy. However, from the interviews conducted, the participants indicated that although their stay in South Africa was illegal, they were engaged in some economic activities, beating the stringent migration rules and making money that could cover expenses for their upkeep and their children's education. They said they frequently remit money home for family upkeep and family projects through formal and informal systems. Caroline explained:

I came to South Africa in 2010 to join my husband when the Zimbabwean economy was collapsing. I got a visa which did not allow me to work, study or do any business in this country. When my husband lost his teaching job due to the new requirements for foreigners to continue working, I could not watch my family starving. I joined my friend who is into buying goods from Mozambique and Johannesburg for resell in Mthatha. We now have a big market in town and the outlying areas. Right now, I am the one paying our rent, school fees, and family needs including the extended family. My husband frequently visits our plot in Zimbabwe where we have a thriving poultry project which was financed by my income, not my husband's money. He never invested a cent even on the house we built in Zimbabwe. My children, family members and even my friends look up to me and would like to join us in South Africa to do some business after admiring my achievements.

Most of the women indicated that they had found ways to engage in economic activities that could give them enough money and they made sure that they sent some money back home at some point. Some of the women had managed to raise money to further their education through Unisa, Walter Sisulu University and Fort Hare University.

Marriage Constraints

Another challenge raised by the migrant women was marriage constraints, which were a result of mainly abuse, cheating and alcoholism. In this study, the married women indicated that they had been exposed to some form of domestic abuse or violence at some point. The abuse and violence varied in degree. Most of them alleged that their husbands had become disrespectful and lacked good morals. They pointed out that the married women were left with nobody to consult for guidance and counselling as per tradition, because family members who were supposed to be providing these services to married couples were in Zimbabwe. It was found that some of the unmarried women did not want to have a romantic relationship with Zimbabwean migrant men because they were afraid of being abused. As Moreblessing put it:

Some of the Zimbabwean men have lost their moral compass. They no longer respect women and the marriage institution. They have become alcoholic and very abusive to their wives. We do not know what they discuss in their social space, but they have changed. No Zimbabwean woman would want to have a romantic relationship with them if they are to continue living that kind of a life.

The study found that most of the divorcees had separated from their husbands in Mthatha after experiencing continuous abuse and cheating. They alleged that most of the Zimbabwean men's sexuality was now heavily inclined towards the local South African women and this was threatening the marriage institution of Zimbabwean migrants. This resonates well with Couldrey and Morris (2000) who noted that there were marriage tensions that emanated from international migration, where often migrant husbands search for a more *traditional* spouse in the host country. Manalansan (2006) found that migrant men tended to have a shift in their sexual preference towards the local women of the host nation.

The Breakdown in Family Ties

Due to the distance between Mthatha and Zimbabwe and the travel costs involved, most Zimbabwean migrants find it difficult to frequently visit their homes. They said they would rather remit the money home to support the family than use it on transport and get home empty-handed. This has left them detached from what is happening at home. In this study, 10% of the women migrants had never visited home since they migrated to Mthatha and another 23% had visited home once since they migrated. This challenge worried some participants because they believed that events and gatherings like funerals, weddings and other traditional rites had to be attended by family members. Some of the participants indicated that they would appear as "misfits" if they visited Zimbabwe today because they were out of touch with the current social, cultural, and economic trends. Netsai, another participant, said:

My father died when I was in South Africa and I have never seen his grave, something which is still haunting me. It pains me that I have never set my foot at home since 2008. I know I am doing a good thing by sending money for the upkeep of my siblings since I am the breadwinner, but it is always important that I visit home to see my father's grave and also I believe you get blessings by visiting your home.

Amid such challenges, some women have taken advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, using advanced technology to take videos of family gatherings so that they can watch the events and partake in the proceedings through giving speeches and making contributions. "When I miss home or when there are family gatherings, I just video-call and be part of the family," said Agnes.

The migrant women indicated that although these persistent challenges had a negative impact on their daily lives, they managed to navigate around them. Some of them managed to overcome the challenge of a lack of documents by going to Zimbabwe to get the documents, which would help them regularise their stay in South Africa; others, however, were still playing hide-and-seek with the relevant authorities. The migrants managed the challenge of exploitation by avoiding the exploiting employees and changing their trades of business. The migrants had learnt ways of navigating stringent migration rules to engage in economic activities. The women were avoiding abusive relationships to address gender-based violence and had also taken advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution to minimise the impact of broken family ties.

An Argument for the Case of the Zimbabwean Migrant Women

This argument is set against the backdrop of large-scale movements of Zimbabwean women into South Africa due to food insecurity in Zimbabwe and the search for better income opportunities. Zimbabwean women have joined the great trek down south to find jobs, an escapade which previously was the preserve of men (Crush and Tawodzera 2017). These are the women who were previously bound by gender stereotypes and deterred from emigrating, as their culture demanded that they stay at home and take care of the children's welfare and the homestead in fulfilment of the popular Shona adage that says *musha mukadzi* (a homestead can only be successful if there is a wife who looks after it).

Most of the Zimbabwean migrant women in this study came from patriarchal societies where men hold the primary power, predominating in roles of moral authority, social privilege, and the control of property. Patriarchal societies exclude women from power, decision-making on critical issues and control of property or property ownership, which is detrimental to women's rights (Commission on Gender Equality 1998). There is excessive or prejudiced support for men (male chauvinism) in every aspect of life to promote gender stereotyping in order to maintain the status quo. However, the need for autonomy, economic freedom and to support one's family has resulted in the questioning of these stereotypic norms and values by the women concerned. The impact of the socio-economic instability has forced many Zimbabwean women to challenge the stereotypes which insinuate that the "man protects and provides" for the family while the woman "prepares the provisions and cares" for the children and home. This study proved that

these women were capable of planning for and undergoing migration procedures on their own and that they could manage migration challenges that came their way. There is a need for a critical analysis of the gender roles in migration as they exist in the new world order and not only a focus on the stereotyped medieval gender roles, hence this argument.

This part of the article argues that the migration of Zimbabwean women is no longer dependent on the men's decisions but is an independent decision, and that women are no longer *accompanying spouses* who join their husbands to perform their housewife roles.

Most of the Zimbabwean women who want to migrate no longer need men's permission to embark on the journey, as found in this study. This study found that most Zimbabwean women are forced to migrate to South Africa by poverty, a finding also made by Crush and Tawodzera (2017). The need to find a job that can sustain the lives of their families determined their migration. The interviews revealed that these women planned their journeys and raised the travel expenses on their own to embark on risky escapades of which some horrendous accounts were narrated. The women crossed the crocodile-infested, flooded Limpopo River, running under cover to escape the chasing police and army officers, and walking for tens of kilometres. These women indicated that they experienced these escapades with other migrant men from Zimbabwe. Some of the men were arrested by the authorities as they attempted to illegally enter South Africa and yet some of these women managed to escape. The women managed to arrive in Mthatha where they presently deal with their daily challenges. This disputes the traditional belief that the migration journey from Zimbabwe to South Africa is a male preserve. However, it must be noted that some of these migrant women used formal corridors of migration, since they had the required documents.

Some women indicated that they migrated to South Africa to free themselves from abusive cultural practices. There were practices that denied the unmarried women and widows the rights to their deceased parents' or husbands' property simply because they were women. The women alleged that they had limited opportunities to partake in social and economic development without the influence of men. The other women indicated that after their failed marriages, they had to take responsibility of their lives and that of their families, a reason also forwarded by the widows. These women felt they needed to be independent from the control and interference of the men in their lives, otherwise they would not be economically empowered and die of poverty.

The results from this study show that these women achieved their goals because they were able to free themselves and support their families. Some of them have agricultural and construction projects that help generate employment in the country. The remittances they send home enter the economy of Zimbabwe, thereby boosting the country's foreign currency reserves. The money is sent through formal channels such as Mukuru and/or informal channels where money is hand-delivered in Zimbabwe by friends or relatives who will be visiting home. The country's finance ministry acknowledges that the diaspora remittances rank as one of the most important and reliable sources of foreign currency (World Bank 2018). The Zimbabwean women migrants' achievements

disproved the Zimbabwean patriarchal stereotyped belief that women are “housewives” who accompany their husbands during migration. These women have become “superheroes” who dismantled the shackles of the “stay-at-home” female stereotype attached to them to become breadwinners, shaping femininity along the way. Against all the odds, the women migrants seem to have provided a solution to most patriarchal societies’ problem of portraying women as a gender that lacks strong (physically, mentally, and economically) and independent role models.

This argument resonates with Carling’s (2002) involuntary immobility perspective. The Zimbabwean socio-economic and political instability left the Zimbabwean women with no choice but to migrate to South Africa. They were forced to migrate and expected to find better paying jobs and food security. The same concept applies very well in situations where Zimbabwean women migrants failed to go back home because of a lack of recourses. Sen’s (1988) capability approach, which portrays migration in terms of freedom and aspirations, aligns well with the movement of Zimbabwean women to Mthatha. The women exercised their freedom to migrate to South Africa. They believed that they could migrate and embarked on the journey to South Africa, and with that belief they arrived in Mthatha. Some of these women were freeing themselves from traditional cultural practices that limited their potential, and through this feminisation process they attained autonomy. Their migration was less depended on their male counterparts’ movements. The desire to have autonomy and a better life for themselves and their families served as an impetus for the women to migrate. Although these women encountered a host of challenges, their capabilities and aspirations benefitted them, their family units and country.

This argument is not in dispute with the fact that men also encounter high risks in the migration journey and face life threatening situations and violence, but that they cannot abandon migration because the mission will have to be accomplished, or that they contribute to their families and country. The purpose is to highlight that the demographic trends of migration have changed, with more women migrating for the same reasons as those of men migrants, and that they undergo the same migration processes where the same documents are needed and encounter the same challenges as the men migrants. The women have become breadwinners who support their families and country, just like their male counterparts. They have managed to rise above the stereotypic norms and values that used to label them as non-productive citizens to the status of superheroes who run successful families; thus, they have broken the shackles of gender stereotyping to create new norms. The traditional thinking that female migration is dependent on male migration is incompatible with the idea of equality and does not apply to the women of the existing world. Hence, there is a need to change approaches, attitudes, and perceptions about migration for a better understanding of women migration.

Conclusion

This article indicated that a lack of documents, exploitation, economic exclusion, social exclusion, marriage constrains and the breakdown in family ties were the main challenges the Zimbabwean migrant women encountered. These findings were

supported by other studies which indicated that migrant women endure these kinds of challenges in their host countries. Guided by the capability and involuntary immobility approaches, and applying a qualitative case study, this study found that the Zimbabwean migrant women in Mthatha devised strategies to navigate the challenges they encountered, which enabled them to become economic players who could be a vital cog in the turnaround and transformation of the Zimbabwean economy. There is a need to do away with the stereotypes associated with the migration of women and support women's migration. The study has proved that with the necessary support, women's migration can build strong social structures and has high financial rewards. The Zimbabwean government must facilitate the availability of documents such as passports to undocumented migrants so that they regularise their stay in South Africa. They can explore further ways of assisting these migrant women to get work permits so that they can freely participate in the economic activities of the host country. The Zimbabwe Consulate in Pretoria, long accused of doing little for Zimbabwean migrants, can engage migration experts who could hold seminars and workshops for these women migrants. The women could be workshopped on the dynamics of migration and migration trends, best migration practices, and how to approach migration as an industry. Such an approach by the Zimbabwean embassy could yield better rewards, which could benefit the Zimbabwean migrants, their families and both South Africa and Zimbabwe.

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