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Majoni-joni: Survival Strategies among Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa

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Abstract

This article discusses the survival and organisational strategies adopted by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa as they struggle to deal with life away from home. It focuses on unskilled and semi-skilled migrants, 'majoni-joni'/'amadouble-up' in Zimbabwean lingua franca, who constitute the largest proportion of Zimbabweans in South Africa. Looking at these Zimbabweans as self-aware actors in charge of their lives and destinies rather than defenceless victims, the article discusses the various strategies (both legal and illegal) developed by migrants to get into the country, to procure employment as well as regularize their stay. It discusses the social and economic capital systems they utilise to deal with the harshness of life in South Africa. I argue that the harshness of life in both Zimbabwe and South Africa has produced new forms of action, including both ingenuous and capricious survival strategies, among these Zimbabweans.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the political and economic crises in Zimbabwe in 2000, a growing number of Zimbabweans have moved to different parts of the globe in search of political and economic refuge. As a result of this post-2000 dispersal, Zimbabweans are now found in their hundreds of thousands in Europe, North America and the relatively prosperous neighbouring countries of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. South Africa is by far the most important destination for both unskilled and skilled Zimbabweans seeking economic survival outside Zimbabwe because of its proximity and relatively larger economic base in the region.

This paper focuses on unskilled and semi-skilled Zimbabweans in South Africa ('majoni-joni'/'amadouble-up' in Zimbabwean rural lingua franca), who constitute the largest proportion of Zimbabweans in South Africa.¹ The paper discusses the various modes of, or mechanisms for, survival adopted by this heterogeneous group of displaced Zimbabweans in their bid to cope with the vagaries of life away from home. It analyses migration and settlement patterns of the migrants, their occupational profiles and opportunities and constraints of life in South Africa. I specifically discuss the various ways, including what Bourdieu (1986: 241-258) describes as the social and economic capital systems that Zimbabweans develop to deal with the harshness of life in South Africa and to negotiate space within the highly competitive labour market and business environment of their host country.

Research for this paper is based on both fieldwork and desktop research. The desktop research focused on published primary and secondary sources, including newspapers, online sources, books and reports. The fieldwork evidence largely comes from primary interviews, discussions and informal conversations with Zimbabweans based in the South African administrative capital of Pretoria. Some of the evidence is also drawn from

personal insights in my encounters with Zimbabweans and other population groups in the South African urban centres of Johannesburg, Musina and Cape Town. I have lived in Cape Town for six years, from 1995 to 1999 and from 2005-2006; in Pretoria since 2006, and have spent some considerable time visiting Johannesburg and Musina during all these years. Focussing only on the experiences of Zimbabweans based in the urban centres of South Africa, the findings of this research, admittedly, speak to the particularities of these Zimbabweans' livelihoods in their urban economies and sites. It does not speak to the experiences of all Zimbabweans in other parts of South Africa, especially those surviving in the rural and mining economies of Limpopo, the Western Cape and Mpumalanga who have significantly different experiences in their markedly different conditions (Rutherford and Addison 2007).

The survival strategies Zimbabweans have adopted in South Africa are not unique when viewed in comparison with other migrant groups in the country or with migrants elsewhere in the world. But, to understand the essence of the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe we need to examine how issues of migration, displacement and social change have reshaped the livelihood strategies of the current generation of Zimbabweans. By writing about the livelihood strategies of working Zimbabweans in South Africa, this paper also seeks not only to bring to the fore those aspects of displacement which have been suppressed in the large corpus of advocacy literature on Zimbabwean migrants but also the specificities of the Zimbabwean experience and what we can learn theoretically from these specificities.

There are conceptual and practical difficulties in writing about post-2000 displacement from Zimbabwe because there is contentious debate over why Zimbabweans are leaving their country (Makina 2007; Solidarity Peace Trust 2004; Ranchold 2005; Chikanda 2005). For instance, both the United Nations and the governments of South Africa, the main southern African host country, consider the current migration to be economic in nature (Polzer 2007: 10; Mail & Guardian Online, 25 August 2007). But civil society and advocacy groups, such as the Zimbabwe Diaspora Forum, Zimbabwe Exiles Forum, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Refugees International, consider the economic and political grounds for leaving not mutually exclusive and have argued for externally displaced Zimbabweans to be recognized as refugees (Refugees International 2004; Solidarity Peace Trust 2004).

However, the term 'refugee' is used in international law to define persons who are forced to leave their countries of residence because of wars, human rights violation and other disturbances seriously disturbing public order or fear of persecution on account of political opinions and activities or membership of a social group (1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; OAU 1969). While a sizeable number of Zimbabweans have applied for refuge in South Africa, 17,667 asylum applicants in 2007 according to the South African government's Department of Home Affairs, not everyone who has applied for asylum is a political refugee (UNCHR 2007). Some of these Zimbabweans, as South African government officials have argued in their refusal to grant refuge status to Zimbabweans, are labour migrants who have left the country in search of better economic opportunities.²

While the South African government and others would like to describe Zimbabweans in South Africa as labour migrants, the problem with the term 'migrant' is that it reduces all displaced Zimbabweans to voluntary migrants. Yet, increasingly, a number of Zimbabweans have had to leave the country because their livelihoods were destroyed or threatened by the deteriorating economic and social conditions. In these circumstances, as Castles (2003: 13-34) has argued elsewhere, it will be difficult to distinguish between those who have left in search of better opportunities and those forced to leave by the destruction of the economic and social infrastructure needed for survival.

As in many conflict situations, it is therefore difficult to distinguish easily between 'forced' and 'unforced' migrants or political refugees from economic migrants among Zimbabweans in South Africa. Most migrants decide to migrate, as Turton (2003: 8-9) has argued, in response to a complex set of external constraints and predisposing events. Those constraints and events vary in their salience, significance and impact but there are both elements of compulsion and choice in the decision making of most migrants. Zimbabweans living in South Africa, like their compatriots in different parts of the globe, comprise both individuals who have chosen to migrate formally, especially professionals or those with skills or funds and old networks abroad, and others who have been compelled to move by their complex political or economic circumstances. Because Zimbabweans now living and working in South Africa comprise both voluntary and forced migrants, this article uses the term 'migrants' to refer to them all, but noting that some migrants may also be refugees.

Much of the literature on displaced Zimbabweans, especially from human rights and advocacy groups, has sought to portray them as weak subjects who have little control over their lives. This literature has specifically projected them as defenceless victims of both the deteriorating political and economic environment they are running away from in Zimbabwe and of the hostile external environment they find themselves in, in countries such as Botswana, South Africa and the United Kingdom (Human Rights Watch, 2006 & 2007; Refugees International, 2004; International Organisation for Migration, 2003; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2004; Ranchold 2005). In contrast, my work emphasises agency in its discussion of displaced persons' experiences. I look at displaced Zimbabweans as self-aware actors in charge of their lives and destinies. My study indeed acknowledges and examines the importance of both the source and host country environment in both influencing and shaping migrants' survival and organisational strategies. But, it deliberately emphasises the human initiative in all these processes as it seeks to show how the harshness of life in both Zimbabwe and South Africa has produced new forms of action, including both ingenuous and capricious survival strategies.

Composition of Migrants and differential Experiences of Life in South Africa

Zimbabweans appear to have become the largest group of foreign nationals in South Africa. But, mostly because of the illegal nature of much of the migration, there are no accurate statistics. What we have are wildly varying estimates such as speculative media and advocacy group estimates, which range from 3 million to 5 million, inferring that 60% of Zimbabwe's economically active men and women have moved to South Africa given that 7,6 million of Zimbabwe's estimated population of 12, 6 million by 2003 were

between 15 and 64 years old (Landau 2007; Polzer 2007: 5; Goliber 2004). The estimates in the few scientific studies that have been done suggest lower figures, estimating that there are about 1 million Zimbabweans in South Africa, including both legal and illegal migrants (Centre for Development Enterprise 2008: 8; Polzer 2007: 5; Makina 2007).

Given the absence of reliable ways of quantifying the number of Zimbabweans in South Africa, the dimension of their presence in South Africa can only be estimated through indirect evidence, such as deportation figures. But, these figures are not necessarily reliable mainly because they refer only to people apprehended and do not distinguish between first-time offenders and people who are deported multiple times when they re-cross the borders after deportation (Landau 2007). What is clear, though, is that the number of Zimbabweans deported from South Africa has greatly increased over recent years—approximately 17,000 in 2001, 74,765 in 2004, 97 433 in 2005, and 102 413 between January and June 2007 alone (Human Rights Watch, 2006; IOM 2007). Analysts argue that the increases in deportations indicate growth in undocumented Zimbabweans in South Africa. As a result of this post-2000 influx, Zimbabweans are now found in all parts of South Africa, with large concentrations in the provinces of Gauteng, where they are employed in construction, service and private security sectors; Limpopo, where they are mainly employed on the farms; and the Western Cape where they also work on farms (Sisulu, Moyo and Tshuma 2007: 555; Makina 2007: 6; Rutherford and Addison 2007: 621).

Broadly, Zimbabweans in South Africa can be categorised into earlier and recent migrants, and the organising and survival strategies of these migrants vary according to their migration history, social status and settlement patterns. Among the older migrants are, for instance, Zimbabweans who, together with hundreds of thousands of other unskilled and semi-skilled contract labourers from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique, moved to South Africa to service the labour needs of the South Africa mining industry during colonialism (Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman 1991; Van Onselen 1976). Many of these older migrants were either forced contract workers (*chibalo*) or labour migrants who voluntarily moved across the borders in search of employment and better wages in the mining, commercial agriculture and domestic service sectors (Ranger 1989). They also included others who migrated in search of tertiary education and further training. Some of these older migrants started families in South Africa as they married into local communities and eventually settled permanently. This colonial pattern of migration was, however, on a much smaller scale than the current one which involves hundreds of thousands rather than the tens of thousands of the colonial period (Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman 1991).

Older Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa also include white emigrants who initially fled from the 1970s war of independence and later the introduction of black majority rule in 1980 (Selby 2006: 117-118; Simon 1988: 1). The second group of post-independence emigrants consisted of political refugees from Matebeleland and parts of Midlands who came in the early 1980s fleeing the state-inspired, Gukurahundi violence and killings in Matebeleland of 1983 to 1987. The actual number of refugees who crossed into South Africa during this phase is difficult to quantify as many simply slipped into the country

unnoticed. Some of the refugees, especially those with military background, were absorbed, alongside white former members of the Rhodesian security services, into the apartheid government's military and intelligence services to carry out destabilisation programmes against Zimbabwe (Hanlon 1986: 181-183; Alexander, McGregor and Ranger 2000: 192; 195-197). Other refugees eventually acquired South African citizenship, both lawfully and unlawfully (Sisulu, Moyo and Tshuma 2007: 554; Solidarity Peace Trust 2004).

Alongside these refugees who constitute the early post-independence migrants were also labour migrants, especially from the drought prone districts of Masvingo, Midlands and Matebeleland South. The aforementioned labour migrants include those who mainly came in the late 1980s and 1990s when the Zimbabwean economy showed signs of trouble, and small numbers of Zimbabweans began to leave, searching for better-paying jobs in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia (Amanor-Wilks and Moyo 1996; Tevera and Crush 2003). Many of these early migrants managed to secure jobs as general labourers and establish themselves in South Africa. They were predominantly young single men who would migrate for short periods of a year or two and return home. While some set up homes and families in South Africa, these migrants popularly known back home as '*injiva*' [Ndebele *lingua franca* for rich person], continued to go back to Zimbabwe during holidays. They also continued to lead dual lives, establishing families across both sides of the Limpopo (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2004; Maphosa 2004: 16).

But, the pattern of movement changed dramatically after 2000 onwards when political uncertainty and the economic 'meltdown' in Zimbabwe drove hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans into South Africa (Human Rights Watch 2006). While during the pre-2000 period the migrants were predominantly young males from the southern parts of the country, the young and old; married and unmarried; northerners and southerners, have been all involved in post-2000 migration. A growing number of women and children also joined the migration stream, especially after the 2005 elections when the economy rapidly deteriorated and the disastrous '*Operation Murambatsvina*' destroyed the livelihoods of many urban-based households (United Nations 2005). In some cases, entire families have relocated because of the increasing economic hardships in Zimbabwe and the growing shortages of basic services and commodities. The politically-induced nature of some of the movement, especially for opposition activists fleeing from political persecution by ZANU PF and government security agencies, has resulted in relocation of entire families. At the same time, refuge has also made it difficult for the displaced to go back home more often. Equally, the tightening of security along the Zimbabwe-South Africa border as authorities try to control the growing tide of Zimbabweans crossing into South Africa has also meant that migrants also now spend more time in South Africa than in the past (Solidarity Peace Trust 2004).

Unlike the earlier migrants, many of the post-2000 migrants have struggled to gain entry into South Africa and settle down in the hostile environment of their host country. First, the South African government, in an attempt to deal with the increased flow of Zimbabweans, has over the last few years not only tightened its borders with Zimbabwe, fortified by the wide Limpopo river and the 200km electric fence, but also introduced

restrictive immigration conditions aimed at controlling the influx of unskilled labour from its African neighbours (Forced Migration Studies Programme 2007: 5-6; Immigration Act No 13 of 2002, as amended by Act No 19 of 2004; Immigration Regulations of 27 June 2005). Because of the stringent immigration conditions and further tightening of borders, post-2000 migrants have increasingly found it more difficult to get into South Africa legally. They have had to cross into South Africa illegally through illegal entry points. This involves swimming across the Limpopo and opening holes into the fence that divides Zimbabwe and South Africa, a treacherous route as has been detailed in media, advocacy and scholarly work (Rutherford and Addison 2007; International Organisation for Migration 2003).

Second, the new migrants have struggled to secure jobs on the South African job market which has, over the years, not been generating enough jobs to absorb both the domestic and foreign supply. The majority of unskilled Zimbabweans, indeed, continue to find work on South African farms (which are struggling to meet their labour requirements through local supplies mainly because locals shun the low wages paid in this sector) and the construction industry (The Sunday Independent (SA), 16 April 2006). Zimbabweans interviewed for this study stated that farm work and bricklaying were the most easily available jobs for unskilled Zimbabweans in South Africa. The working conditions in these sectors are, however, far from desirable. For instance, farm workers, especially undocumented migrants who have no recourse to the law, are reportedly severely exploited by farm owners who capitalize on migrants' vulnerability. They are sometimes paid wages far below the minimum wage of R885 and subjected to a wide range of exploitation and abuse that include racism, sexual abuse and poor working and living conditions (Rutherford and Addison 2007: 625, 627 & 629; Human Rights Watch 2006).

Women are particularly vulnerable. They have more limited employment opportunities than their male compatriots. The few who manage to secure employment usually work as domestic servants in the homes of South Africans or shop assistants in retail shops owned by Asian migrants, where wages are low and sexual abuse is also rampant.³ Others get employed in hair salons, usually owned by local black South Africans or other migrant African entrepreneurs and are paid on commission. To make ends meet, some female migrants end up turning to prostitution (Mail and Guardian Online, 20 April 2006; The Zimbabwean, 23 December 2005) or taking up low-paying jobs, such as being employed as street sales/advertising agents by small private companies and other self-employed migrants. Many of these sales agents are paid on commission, while those who are paid a fixed wage earn an average of R150 per week.⁴

Living conditions for these Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa are crowded and often unsafe. They live in makeshift, plastic houses in informal settlements, where the majority of poorer South Africans reside. Others are found in the inner city areas where the rent is low but crime rates high.⁵

On top of all the above problems, Zimbabwean migrants have to deal with the hostility of their host communities towards African migrants. As many studies and reports have shown, South Africa has increasingly become a hostile environment for many African

migrants, and Zimbabwean migrants in particular (Nyamnjoh 2006; Crush 2001; Abdullah 2000; Human Rights Watch 2006; Solidarity Peace Trust 2004). For instance, South African government officials, ranging from immigration officials at the Department of Home Affairs to soldiers and police officers, have been accused of ill-treating Zimbabweans and other African migrants (IRIN, 25 November 2004; The Herald, 16 February 2007). Zimbabweans, alongside Mozambicans, have been the targets of xenophobia, a major national problem which has often led to vigilante attacks against Zimbabweans and other African migrants in townships and informal settlements populated by the urban poor (Business Day, 25 October 2000; NewZimbabwe Online, 1 April 2006; Sunday Times, 18 May 2008).

Levels of intolerance to the presence of African foreigners in South Africa have increased to an all-time high, as evidenced by the recent violent attacks on African migrants in townships and informal settlements in Johannesburg and Pretoria. Several businesses belonging to African migrants have been looted and their shacks destroyed by residents who accuse them of taking up their jobs and committing crime (Sowetan, 2 April 2008; Mail and Guardian, 31 March 2008; Pretoria News, 18 April 2008). The xenophobic violence has left 62 people dead, including 12 Zimbabweans, and over 80 000 people displaced (The Herald, 4 June 2008; Mail and Guardian, 23-29 May 2008).

In spite of all these hardships, Zimbabweans, pushed by the worsening economic and social conditions in home, have continued to seek political and economic refuge in South Africa. They have developed various strategies and mechanisms (both legal and illegal) to get into the country, to procure employment as well as regularize their stay. The following section discusses the various strategies deployed by Zimbabwean migrants to enter South Africa and deal with the harshness of life away from home.

Crossing the Borders and Surviving on the Margins of the Economy and Society

The art of survival in contemporary South Africa for *majoni-joni/amadouble-up* begins right from the border crossing phase, where one has to devise ways of crossing into the country illegally without being attacked by wild animals and the crocodiles of Limpopo river or getting intercepted by border patrol officials and thieves who prey on robbing border jumpers (*maguma-guma*).⁶ To avoid the hazards associated with crossing the border on foot, migrants cross into South Africa through the assistance of an established group of people based in Beitbridge border town, known as *malumes* (uncles) or *maguma-guma*, who now make a living through assisting people to cross the border illegally. The *malumes* charge undocumented migrants an average fee of R200. They not only know the 'safe' routes but also know the times when the border patrols are intense and not. In some cases, they make arrangements with corrupt border patrol officials to facilitate the border jumping. They also make arrangements with taxi drivers to transport their clients to the South African border town of Musina (www.zimbabwetimes.com. 1 February 2008).

In other cases, *majoni-joni* use official entry points to get into South Africa. Such entry is facilitated by individuals who have better knowledge of the functioning of the borders,

maguma-guma, and have contacts on both the Zimbabwean and South African sides of the border (Irish 2005). Entry through the official points is done through payment of a bribery fee (*kudhiza*) which ranges from R200-R350. The bribery is shared among immigration officers and border patrol officers involved in smuggling the migrants across the border. Sometimes truck and bus drivers plying the Zimbabwe-South African routes or *malaitsha* (transporters who ferry groceries to Zimbabwe) are hired to transport undocumented migrants across the border. These bus drivers and *malaitsha* bribe immigration officials at the border posts to facilitate the entry of their undocumented clients (Mawadza 2008: 4). They charge between R800 and R1000 to transport an undocumented migrant into South Africa (Business Day, 26 August 2006).

When they have slipped across the border, people usually settle with relatives or friends. Since Zimbabweans, especially from the southern regions, have always come to South Africa, many of recent migrants have relatives or friends settled in South Africa. Then, migrants try to integrate among locals by learning local languages, cultures and sub-cultures. Almost all migrants interviewed during this research could speak at least one of South Africa's official 11 languages, the commonly spoken ones being Zulu, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga/Shangaan. Zimbabweans from the southern districts, who share with locals a Nguni linguistic culture, find it easier to assimilate into local communities than their Shona-speaking counterparts, most of whom have no linguistic or cultural background in local cultures and languages. Shona-speaking migrants find it somewhat easier to integrate among the Venda-speaking communities of northern Limpopo province who are culturally closer to the Shona groups than to any other South African group.

Once in the country, the migrants rely heavily on social networks from Zimbabwe for both accommodation and employment. Having been in the country for a much longer period and having been settled economically, the earlier migrants have some established employment networks and know more about how to survive on the margins of the economy and society. Migrants interviewed in Pretoria indicated that they got their jobs through friends or relatives who have been in South Africa for a much longer period than them.⁷ Others indicated that even after they found jobs they continued to stay with friends or relatives, sharing room rentals and groceries, in order to cut down on accommodation and food costs.⁸

Sharing of accommodation and groceries is one of the major strategies deployed by migrants to cut down on living costs and to maximise their savings. Belinda who works as a shop assistant and shares a make-shift room with a friend in Pretoria explains that “*ndiyo ndazo yacho, unotogara navamwe namukuku kuti zvinhu zvako zvfambe kumusha [the reality of life here is that if you want to save and make investments at home you have to live with fellow Zimbabweans in these make-shift rooms in the informal settlements]*”⁹

As they try to establish their settlement in South Africa, some Zimbabweans interested in regularizing their status, apply for political asylum permits which give migrants the right to stay and look for employment (Mail and Guardian Online, 24 July 2007). Others, alongside migrants from other African, Asian and European countries in South Africa, resort to tactical marriages with locals, simply for the convenience of getting a residence permit and becoming a citizen (The Star, 6 February 2006). Berita, a Zimbabwean migrant based in Musina, says publicly that she has fallen in love with a South African soldier who now facilitates her entry in South Africa and also "shields me" from deportation. Privately, she says she doesn't really love this soldier, but she just wants to survive (The Zimbabwean, 23 November 2006). To deal with their accommodation nightmares, the more enterprising young female migrants sometimes find a "boyfriend" who is South African who provides both shelter and food. The same survival strategy is also adopted by their male compatriots who sometimes find live-in South African partners (IOM 2003).

Some migrants collude with corrupt officials in the Department of Home Affairs to acquire South African identity documents fraudulently. A 2003 study done by the Scientific and Industrial Research and Development Centre (SIRDC) found that some Zimbabweans had taken up South African citizenship, legally and illegally (IRIN, 23 Jul 2003). Once they have these identity documents, Zimbabwean migrants seek jobs as locals and stop worrying about work permits. Others, according to sections of the South Africa media and public, use these documents to access government housing, childcare and health care grants accessible to unemployed South African citizens (The Star 6 February 2006; Sunday Times 18 May 2008)

Those who fail to find formal employment survive as best as they can in the interstices of the ghetto economy through theft, prostitution and informal trade. The literature on migrant entrepreneurship shows that structural factors such as social exclusion and discrimination, poor access to markets and unemployment are key driving forces and motivations for self-employment (Danson, 1995; Dallalgar, 1994; Davidson, 1995). In the case of Zimbabwean migrants, fieldwork evidence from this study suggests that they have also become entrepreneurs, heavily involved in the informal trade and micro-business sectors. Some Zimbabwean women, for instance, survive as independent traders selling Zimbabwean handmade crafts and traditional wares such as baskets and bead necklaces in the streets and suburbs. Many Zimbabweans living in Musina in fact survive on informal trade, vending goods in markets and on the side of the road. Some operate illegal street foreign exchange bureaus, selling South African rands and Zimbabwean dollars. The more established traders have moved beyond operating the market stalls themselves and employ both locals and other migrants to run their stalls (IOM, 2003).

Lack of opportunities and poor remuneration in the formal employment sector has also led some Zimbabweans, alongside other African migrants such as the Somalis and Mozambicans, to start their own businesses as part of their self-employment strategies in towns like Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Such businesses include vegetable and fruit hawking, small grocery or spaza shops, backyard workshops and shebeens operating mainly in the informal settlements and townships where most of these migrants

live and do not apply for operating licences and permits. Zimbabweans in self-employment interviewed pointed out that it was much more rewarding to run their own small businesses than to be in formal employment.¹⁰ The success of some of the business ventures set up by Zimbabwean migrants and other African migrants has in some cases bred resentment and jealousy among locals. As a result, their businesses have often been targeted in the xenophobic attacks that periodically occur in South Africa, such as the recent attacks in Gauteng (Pretoria News, 18 April 2008; Mail and Guardian Online, 13 October 2006).

The need for affordable transport services to travel back and forth to South Africa and to move their goods home has opened a market for transport entrepreneurs who offer unique courier services that transport both goods and people between South Africa and Zimbabwe. This new breed of Zimbabwean transport entrepreneurs in South Africa who exclusively cater for Zimbabweans, called the *malaicha*, deliver groceries to different parts of the country, including rural Zimbabwe (Sunday Mail 1 April 2007).

Zimbabweans in need of affordable accommodation have opened up a market for property entrepreneurs among the more established migrants who have acquired 'land claims' in informal settlements. They then put up makeshift plastic or tin or wooden cabin rooms (*mikuku*) which they rent out to new migrants. The average rental for these rooms is R120 per month.¹¹ And, as with the *malaicha*, group internal solidarity among the migrants mediates the business relationship between the landlord and the tenant. This internal solidarity among marginalised communities like Zimbabwean migrants, as noted by Hechter (1987) elsewhere, not only increases members' dependence on each other but also increases their willingness to subject themselves to a variety of obligations towards each other.

While some of the more established migrants have opened up business opportunities for themselves through provision of transport and accommodation services to fellow migrants, others have sought to survive as informal agents or touts, facilitating the acquisition of permits by recently arrived migrants. Many of these touts among established migrants, collude with corrupt Department of Home Affairs officials to profit from recent migrants in need of asylum and other residency and work permits (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2004). The touts (*maguma-guma*) charge between R500 and R1000 to facilitate the processing of a new asylum permit. They also control queues at the Department, and take bribes to allow one to be served before others.¹²

Clearly, life has not been easy for unskilled Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa who survive on the margins of both the South African economy and society. What is also clear is that these migrants have become more innovative in dealing with their condition of marginality in contemporary South Africa. To help deal with the vagaries of life in South Africa, Zimbabwean migrants have also established informal networks of friends and relatives who are not only relied on in times of financial troubles, family disputes, sickness or bereavement but also to help them to continue to support both their immediate and extended families left behind.

Social Organisation and Networks

Social networks among Zimbabwean migrants are mainly based on kinship and extended family ties. These networks are maintained through social visits during weekends or important family events like birthdays and regular phone calls to discuss developments at home. The networks are normally activated in times of need, such as periods of unemployment when the migrant would need support in terms of both accommodation, food and transport money to go and look for a job. The larger networks among migrants are based on ethnicity, and ethnic networks mobilise around elder members of the community or prominent members in the group, such as businessmen and property owners, who are usually relied on for conflict and dispute resolution among members of the community.¹³

Such networks include burial societies to assist each other in times of illness and bereavement. Migrants from the south-western parts of the country, for instance, are members of the Masasane Burial Society, one of the first burial societies to be formed by earlier migrants who came to South Africa during the political upheavals in Zimbabwe of the 1980s. The burial society is based in Hillbrow, Johannesburg (IWR Africa Report No. 92, 30 January 2007). Other societies include the Zvishavane Burial Society which is also based in Johannesburg, Maranda and Mberengwa burial societies both based in Pretoria. Members of societies meet on one Sunday each month, and pay monthly subscriptions of between R30 and R50 redeemable only when there is bereavement in the family. The burial societies assist in covering funeral costs of their members and dependents, including transporting the body of the deceased back to Zimbabwe, where most migrants are taken for burial.¹⁴ Some burial societies have moved beyond issues of death and bereavement and become agencies of development in Zimbabwe by raising funds for the development of local communities. In the south-western district of Tsholotsho, for example, burial society money is being invested into the building of a library and a laboratory for a secondary school (IWR Africa Report No. 92, 30 January 2007).

Churches, especially Zionist churches which operate in many of South Africa's townships and informal settlements, also provide a vital network linking migrants together, especially women. Women interviewed in Pretoria pointed out that they go to the Zion Christian Church, every Sunday not just to pray but to socialise with fellow Zimbabweans and to get updates on news from home. They explained that the church fills a big social void in their lives because it offers them the only opportunity to socialise with others outside their homes.¹⁵

For young men, and a few single young women, socialisation with fellow Zimbabweans mainly takes place over weekends at shebeens and other drinking places in the informal settlements and townships where the migrants live. The frustration of isolation has created a strong culture of drinking among young men and women. There are now a number of shebeens and pubs in areas with large Zimbabwean communities, serving the drinking, entertainment and music needs of Zimbabwean patrons and wishing to meet and socialise as Zimbabweans. These places have become very popular among young Zimbabwean men and women not only because they offer them the space to socialise as

Zimbabweans only, but also because they keep them in touch with contemporary Zimbabwean popular culture. As Bigman, an owner of a shebeen in a Pretoria informal settlement explains:

Many Zimbabweans come to my bar not just to drink but to enjoy the music and musical videos of popular musicians like Aleck Macheso and Tongai Moyo that I offer as part of patrons' entertainment. Many actually say that *kwaBigman ndiko kumusha, saka todzokerei kuZimbabwe* [why should we return to Zimbabwe when Bigman provides us with all the entertainment we miss about Zimbabwe].¹⁶

Social networking among migrants is also facilitated through organising weekend parties and braais, where Zimbabwean food is served and music from home is played, and football tournaments featuring Zimbabwean amateur footballers, called 'boozers soccer'. The tournaments entertain and facilitate socialisation among the participants and spectators. The tournaments also provide the platform for discussion of news from home and the exchange of goodies or latest Zimbabwean music (Muzondidya 2006).

Zimbabweans in South Africa try to keep in touch with families and maintain their social networks with friends and relatives in Zimbabwe by sending money and food items to them. For a community living on the margins and facing an uncertain future in South Africa, remittances are also an important aspect of migrants' social security system. Investments made at home through remittances are not only relied on in times of need, but are also meant to sustain migrants and their families when they eventually return to Zimbabwe. The following section focuses on the various ways migrants save their earnings, remit and invest them in Zimbabwe.

Savings and Remittances

The sending of remittances by migrants to their home countries is as old as labour migrancy itself, and remittances have now become an increasingly important part of the modern, globalised economies. In countries like Ghana which has a much longer history of postcolonial migration dating to the 1960s, remittances from migrants from different parts of the globe have become the biggest source of Foreign Direct Investment received by the country, much more than amounts received from western donor countries and multilateral institutions (Higazi 2005).

In their research among Zimbabwean farm workers in northern South Africa, Blair Rutherford and Lincoln Addison found out that most workers occasionally send money, food items and other consumer products to family members and dependants back in Zimbabwe (Rutherford and Addison 2007: 628). The migrants have developed various formal and informal ways of saving their earnings, remitting part of these earnings back home and investing them in Zimbabwe. The various informal networks used to send goods and remittances back home include relatives, friends or fellow villagers travelling to Zimbabwe. Friends and relatives travelling home are preferred to send money and goods home not simply because formal institutional routes are expensive and risky for most undocumented, low-earning migrants but mainly due to the key ingredients of mutual trust and security. In cases where relatives or friends are not available, taxi and bus drivers, now known as the 'Homelink' guys because of their role in assisting fellow

Zimbabweans to send food, clothing and other scarce items to relatives in Zimbabwe, are utilised (Bracking & Sachikonye 2006; SW Radio, 21 March 2006).

Because many migrants have not legalized their stay in South Africa, they cannot formally open savings accounts with local banks. At the same time, the insecurity of most of these migrants' places of residency makes it risky to resort to 'mattress banking'. To overcome such obstacles, the migrants have developed support network systems which help them keep their savings. Such network systems, according to the migrants interviewed at an informal settlement in Pretoria in August 2007, involve trusted friends, relatives and fellow villagers who have residency status and who are relied on to keep savings. Those who do not have trusted individuals to rely on usually save their earnings by procuring goods which are later sent home for resale or personal use. This especially applies to goods known to be too exorbitant or in short supply at home, such as cooking oil, soap, flour, sugar and salt.

The remittances from unskilled migrants, alongside those from their skilled documented contemporaries, have a direct poverty mitigating effect in Zimbabwe. For instance, a survey carried out in Harare and Bulawayo in 2005 and 2006 showed that 50 per cent of urban households are surviving on migrant remittances for everyday consumables (Bracking and Sachikonye 2007: 1). Remittances from migrant labourers working in South Africa are an important source of support for many families in the Southern districts of Zimbabwe (Maphosa 2004: 16), while most people in Malipati, one of the poorest and most remote settlements in southeastern Zimbabwe, survive on remittances sent by children and husbands working out of the country (IOM, 2003).

There has been a lot of debate on the impact of remittances on the home country (Ratha 2004; McCormick and Wahba 2002; Taylor 1999). Internationally, there has been concern that remittances are usually spent on consumption and prestige goods such as radios rather productive investment). In the case of Zimbabwe, evidence from the limited research on the subject shows that the impact of remittances depends on their use and remitting behaviour differs according to households and background (Maphosa 2004; IOM 2003; Bloch 2005; Bracking and Sachikonye 2007). While some migrants interviewed in this study are spending their earnings on consumption, others are acquiring capital, fixed assets and reinvesting back home.

Zimbabwean migrants view their stay in South Africa as temporary and they look forward to returning to Zimbabwe when the political and economic situation stabilises. They therefore send some of their savings to Zimbabwe where they are supposed to help maintain their households, while assets bought through remittances are supposed to assist the migrants to re-establish themselves economically when they return home. As Trust who works as a barber in Pretoria explains, he has been sending equipment hair saloon equipment because he intends to start his own hair saloon business when he eventually returns to Zimbabwe.¹⁷

Some of the utility goods being acquired by migrants include wheel barrows, bicycles, scotch carts, water pumps, grinding mill and motor engines, solar panels for the

electrification of rural homes and building material for the building of modern houses. According to one of the interviewees, asbestos and zinc roofed houses are gradually replacing grass thatched huts in most villages in Mberengwa, and homes of *majoni-joni* are distinct because of the imported building material commonly used to build them.¹⁸

Focusing on migrants from the Matebeleland South districts of Bulilima, Mangwe, Gwanda, Beitbridge and Matobo, Maphosa (2004: 14; 16-17) also noted that remittances contribute significantly to the improvement of the livelihoods of the receiving households. Besides investing in houses, solar power and boreholes, these migrants invest in bicycles and scotch carts, major forms of transport in these rural areas. Scotch-carts, for instance, are used as transport for daily needs such as fetching water and firewood. They are also used as private transport, ambulances and hearses.

Remittances from Zimbabweans in South Africa are also used to acquire cattle, a highly valued asset in most Zimbabwean rural economies. A vibrant market for cattle in rural areas has thus been created and a new class of young cattle owners is emerging. This is changing rural social relations. In most rural communities, cattle ownership was associated with the rural elite from traditionally privileged families. In the current context, even those from traditionally marginalised rural families and groups have been able to acquire cattle from remittances from their sons and daughters working in South Africa. The price of a heifer in most rural parts of Zimbabwe ranges from R400-R600.¹⁹

Admittedly, not every labour migrant sends remittances home (IOM, 2003; Maphosa 2004: 9). Remaining spouses and families interviewed in the rural district of Zaka complain that it is not uncommon for the men to forget about their families back home and stop sending money and food back home. Some migrants interviewed in South Africa also conceded that the pressures of surviving in a foreign country on meagre earnings makes it difficult to save. At the same time, for most young men and women, the excitement of being away from home and the excitement of the 'bright lights of egoli' sometimes makes it easy for migrants to forget their extended family responsibilities. Single migrants sometimes have many girlfriends, while their married counterparts often marry new wives in South Africa and forget about their wives and children back home. Even those who do receive remittances from their relatives in South Africa only get this money sporadically and they can go without money for months on end.²⁰

More importantly, while money sent from Zimbabweans in South Africa has had beneficial effect on close kin, remittances, as Sarah Bracking (2003: 633-44) has correctly argued, has had negative effect on both urban and rural economies and households without migrating members, whose purchasing power has been partly undermined by the asset price inflation and the inflationary effects of parallel currency markets. In various parts of Zimbabwe, foreign currency inputs from the migrants have not only pushed the price of goods and services but has led to the dollarisation of local rural economies. Locals are now demanding payment for goods and services in foreign currency and, according to the MP for the rural district of Tsholotsho, Jonathan Moyo, rural people are now asking for payment in rands even for a simple service like a hair cut because they have lost confidence in the collapsed Zimbabwean dollar (City Press, 27

April 2008). Property owners in urban areas are likewise demanding rentals in foreign currency, charging between R150 and R200 for a single room (Chronicle, 30 April 2008). As a result, those excluded from benefiting from foreign currency inputs have increasingly found it difficult to compete or cope. Only those receiving money and goods from relatives in South Africa are not as struggling as the rest to afford basics and this has led to deepening class distinctions among households.

Nonetheless, unskilled and semi-skilled migrants' remittances from South Africa, alongside those from their professional counterparts living further abroad, have not only helped to keep Zimbabwe from economic collapse by supplying the country with both foreign currency and essential household goods in short supply. They have also helped to alleviate poverty and change social relations at home. While the low wages that migrants are paid does not do much to alleviate their own poverty or change their status in South Africa, the little they manage to save and send home has more buying power in Zimbabwe where most rural households can survive on R100 to R150 a month.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe's unskilled migrants in South Africa are not only living precarious lives, surviving on the margins of both the economy and society. They have also come up with various strategies to cope with their fragile existence. The various modes of, or mechanisms for, survival adopted by these migrants in their bid to cope with the vagaries of life away from home include both positive and negative ones. The positive ones mainly include the entrepreneurship skills that many migrants have developed in response to their precarious economic situations. The positive also include the revival and strengthening of kinship and extended family ties that is occurring among migrants and between migrants and those remaining at home as individuals reawaken to the importance of collectiveness in dealing with the harsh economic and social conditions that Zimbabweans now find themselves in. A new culture of survival is thus developing among Zimbabweans- a culture that emphasises resilience, innovation and group collectiveness. At the same time, the South African experience has also brought with it a number of negative influences on the migrants. Finding themselves in precarious economic and social positions, Zimbabwean migrants have often found themselves resorting to capricious survival strategies, involving corruption and criminality. A good example of this is the *gumaguma* culture, a ruthless, cunning and extortionary way of living which is fast becoming a norm among many young male migrants. To deal with the frustrations of being away from loved ones at home, some Zimbabwean migrants, especially young men, have resorted to heavy drinking and womanizing and this is causing strains in their own lives and that of their families.

End Notes

¹ The term '*majoni-joni*' is derived from the popular belief that all migrants heading for South Africa work in Johannesburg (*Joni*). The term has a historical resonance going back to the days of colonial migration, and it is widely used by both migrants and locals based in Zimbabwe. In the Ndebele-speaking parts of the country, unskilled Zimbabweans in South Africa are called '*amadouble-up*', a term referring to their use of informal routes and channels to get to their destination.

² The South African government has been reluctant to grant refugee status to Zimbabweans to avoid both the financial burden of caring for refugees and the prospects of a political fallout with the Zimbabwe government. At the end of 2005, the SA government had granted refugee status to only 114 of the 16 000 Zimbabwean applicants for asylum. See Human Rights Watch, 2006; Refugee International, 2004.

³ Discussion with Rose Mlambo, Pretoria, May 2007; Interview with Mutsai, Pretoria, 17 August 2007.

⁴ Fieldwork observations in Pretoria and Johannesburg, October 2006- June 2007; Discussion with Rose Mlambo, Pretoria, May 2007.

⁵ Fieldwork observations in Pretoria and Johannesburg, 2006 & 2007; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2004.

⁶ *Maguma-guma* is Shona urban lingua for conman. It is derived from the Shona verb '*guma*' (dust off) and it is used to describe the act of getting something easy. Some *magumaguma* are involved in a variety of criminal activities ranging from petty theft to facilitating the illegal crossing of goods through the border post. They comprise mainly young men who move easily between Zimbabwe and South Africa. See interviews with Belinda, Pretoria 17 August 2007; Philip Mbengo, Pretoria, 18 August 2007; Mathe (2005) and Irish (2005).

⁷ Interviews with Senior (*pseudonym*), Pretoria, 25 August 2007; Manuel Sango, Pretoria, 25 August 2007; Professor (*pseudonym*), Johannesburg, 26 February 2006.

⁸ Discussion with David, Chris, Nyarai and Simon, February & March 2007; Interviews with Philip Mbengo, Pretoria, 18 August 2007; Senior (*nom de plume*), Pretoria, 25 August 2007.

⁹ Interview with Belinda, Pretoria, 17 August 2007.

¹⁰ Interviews with Bigman, Pretoria, 19 August 2007; Belinda, Pretoria, 17 August 2007.

¹¹ Discussion with David, Chris, Nyarai and Simon, Pretoria, February & March 2007.

¹² Discussion with David, Chris, Nyarai and Simon, Pretoria, February and March 2007.

¹³ Interviews with Kavelo and Mutsai, Pretoria, 17 August 2007; Bigman, Pretoria, 19 August 2007.

¹⁴ Interviews with Bigman, Pretoria, 19 August 2007; Senior, Pretoria, 25 August 2007.

¹⁵ Interview with Mutsai, Ruth and Belinda, Pretoria, 17 and 18 August 2007.

¹⁶ Interview with Bigman, Pretoria, 19 August 2007.

¹⁷ Discussion with Trust, Pretoria, 2 June 2008.

¹⁸ Interview with Bigman, Pretoria, 19 August 2007.

¹⁹ Fieldwork observations in Chiredzi and Zaka districts, April and December 2007.

²⁰ Interview with Tinos Mupira and Magumise, Zaka, Zimbabwe, 9 August 2006; Ruth, Pretoria, 18 August 2007.

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