

**An Exploration of the Experiences of Zimbabwean Women
Informal Cross-Border Traders at the Zimbabwean/South
African Beitbridge Border Post.**

By

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Signature_____Date_____

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GLORY BE TO THE ALMIGHTY GOD!

ABSTRACT

Much research on economically-enforced migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa locates women as partners of men, rather than as economic agents in their own terms. Research on cross-border trade, however, has theorized that gender dynamics may empower women traders as they learn to negotiate new business networks and as they develop economic independence; a different perspective on gender dynamics suggests that far from empowerment, women cross border-traders face particular abuse and harassment.

This research worked with eleven Zimbabwean cross border traders to explore the theoretical tensions between notions of 'empowerment' and notions of 'disadvantage' arising from the traders' experiences. The study concentrated in particular on the traders' representation of their experiences at the Zimbabwe/South Africa Beitbridge border post crossing point.

Analysing the material qualitatively, the dissertation argues that while gender dynamics can be seen to afford the traders both opportunities and great challenges, the traders' representations of the interplay of official corruption and the impact of economic pressure on all border-players reveal the border-post itself as a complex site of micro-negotiations whereby survival becomes the 'business' itself.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 WOMEN INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADING IN THE WAKE OF AN ECONOMIC CRISIS IN ZIMBABWE

“... Zimbabwe’s multiplex challenges linked to interlocking political and macro-economic dynamics have generated economic hardship, perpetual uncertainty and vulnerability. Amongst other things, these conditions have produced a new wave of emigration from Zimbabwe, particularly to neighbouring countries such as South Africa” (Matshaka ,2009).

Zimbabwean women have been no exception in this new wave of emigration to South Africa, mentioned above, as informal cross-border traders due to, among other things economic hardships. This influx is not a new phenomenon, as Ndela (2006) points out that informal cross-border trading dates back to the late 1980s, however, this time around, large volumes of women engaging in informal cross-border trade. Women’s participation in informal cross-border trade has increased considerably during the past ten years. The country’s decade long economic and political crises have partly contributed to the unprecedented increase in the number of women in informal cross-border trading. According to the International Organization for Migration, (IOM), (2010) South Africa has been the most popular destination for Zimbabwean migrants, women cross-border traders being a major component of this migrant population.

Economic hardships occasioned by hyperinflation and the collapse of social services in Zimbabwe forced many citizens to look for alternative strategies of survival (Ndlela, 2006). Scholars note that the wave of emigrants varies considerably, ranging from traders, shoppers, borderland residents, asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors (Kiwanuka and Monson, 2009). This is against the gendered history of migration in Zimbabwe which was dominated by men. Rugube and Matshe (2011) observe that women constitute a bigger proportion of the informal cross-border traders’ category of Zimbabwean migrations in South Africa. This phenomenal increase in cross-border women traders has prompted many studies seeking to explore these complex gendered and gendering experiences of migration

(Matshaka, 2009:65). The present study seeks to explore the experiences of Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders at the Zimbabwean-South African border post in Beitbridge, in order to gain insights on how social constructions of gender are intertwined with migration.

A number of scholars have noted that informal cross-border trading in Zimbabwe is a livelihood strategy for women whose households have been pushed into poverty as a result of Zimbabwe's economic and political down turn. This demonstrates how informal cross-border trading has transformed women's day to day lives in the country (Muzvidziwa, 1998, 2012; Peberdy and Crush, 1998; UnWomen, 2008; Ndlela, 2006; Kiwanuka and Monson, 2009; Rugube and Matshe 2011). Muzvidziwa (1998:29) shows how families in Zimbabwe were able to leave poverty behind through cross-border trading activities. Ndiaye (2008) concurs, noting how informal cross-border trade cushioned many households in Zimbabwe during the 2006-2007 food crisis. Informal cross-border traders are a unique category of migrants whose activities have a significant contribution to both the host and sending economies, and have become an integral sector for regional trade and global economies, while playing a critical role of guaranteeing regional food security (Ndiaye, 2008; Ndeyapo, 2012; Rugube and Matshe, 2011).

Despite the importance of informal cross-border trade as a livelihood strategy for women and an immense contribution to the welfare of both the home and the host country, informal cross-border women traders face a myriad of challenges (Ndiaye, 2008; Chiliya *et al.*, 2012). Makombe (2011:44) notes that informal cross-border trade is generally perceived as a threat that needs to be controlled rather than a genuine economic activity. As a result, there are number of obstacles that informal cross-border women traders face, for example, registration requirements, access to finance and credit, as well as the necessity to comply with business-related taxes, corruption and harassment by border officials who extort money from informal cross-border traders (Ibid:44).

However, these challenges remain largely a matter of speculation rather than academic research, not least because it is assumed that the challenges women face as a gender, are assumed to be similar to those faced by their male counterparts. There is, therefore, need to accumulate knowledge on the experiences informal cross-border women traders so as to have a better understanding of how migration experiences impact on the day to day lives of women, and whether those experiences actually enhance or undermine women empowerment. Professionals and activists who champion poverty eradication programmes

under the auspices of organisations such as UNWomen are concerned about the plight of vulnerable and unregistered small informal cross border traders who work under very difficult conditions as it has been noted that the majority of these traders are women (Malaba and Chipika, 2012:11).

Although there is considerable research on the informal cross-border trade in Zimbabwe (Muzvidziwa,1998; 2012; Ndlela, 2006; IOM, 2010; Kiwanika and Monson, 2009; Peberdy, 2002; Ndiaye, 2008; Makombe, 2011; Malaba and Chipika, 2012), literature that specifically focuses on the experiences of informal cross-border traders at the border is generally patchy, if not non-existent.

This study seeks to contribute towards building empirical data through the narratives of informal cross-border women traders by delving deeper into their lived experiences at the Zimbabwe/South Africa Beitbridge border post.

1.2 Background to the Study

For more than a decade, Zimbabwe has been experiencing an economic down turn that has brought untold suffering to the population. This crisis was preceded by the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) of the 1990s which left thousands of workers jobless due to retrenchments (Kanyenze, 2004). Makombe (2011:45) notes how the recent global economic crisis which has shaken the “big industrialised economies of the global North has sent weaker economies of the global South into a tail spin, resulting in massive job losses, deteriorating working conditions and disintegrating social protection systems”. This has forced many to seek alternative methods to sustain their livelihoods (Makombe, 2011:45). The job loses pushed many into the informal sector in order to earn a living (Rugube and Matshe, 2011). Mwaniki (2005) notes that the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes introduced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to reverse the problems of poverty in most African countries (Zimbabwe included), worsened poverty levels instead of reducing them. As retrenchments took their toll on men who were the main bread-winners, the burden of looking after families was transferred to women, resulting in the feminization of poverty.

Bennett (2009:49) argues that “Poverty is a gendered state, in the sense that the lack of resources and opportunities for employment services and agency are experienced differently by women and men”. Thus, the effect of poverty on women and men is very

different in the way both of them experience it in Zimbabwe, particularly in the context of the economic crisis which began in the late 1990s. It is women more than men who bore the brunt of the festering economic crisis, mainly due to their low social status, which is linked with historical factors such as lack of educational and employment opportunities and the effects of patriarchal culture, which gives preference to the boy child ahead of the girl child in terms educational opportunities.

In the specific context of Zimbabwe, apart from retrenchments occasioned by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPS), the country's controversial land reform programme, beginning in the year 2000, aggravated the harsh economic conditions, resulting in a huge outflow of the population. The new land policies, coupled with prolonged droughts, brought unprecedented instability to a sector previously considered the back-bone of Southern Africa's second largest economy. The collapse of agriculture had a negative impact mostly on women who could no longer sustain their families as they became more impoverished and were forced to shift to alternative means of survival, in particular cross-border trading (Tekere, 2003).

This was particularly true between 2007 and 2008, during which period, the country experienced serious food shortages. As some were voting with their feet heading for far flung places like the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia (Gaidzanwa, 1999), informal cross-border traders flocked to South Africa where they traded various kinds of merchandise or bought commodities for resale back home (Peberdy, 2002; Muzvidziwa, 2005). Muzvidziwa (1998) notes that the macroeconomic environment in Zimbabwe was such that informal cross-border trading became the most viable economic activity that one could engage in, in order to secure employment, supplement income, or improve house-hold food security.

Although informal cross-border trading provides an outlet for survival for most women, it is full of risks and hazards that militate against women's contribution to the welfare of their families, and to the economies of the host and home country (Mate, 2005; IOM, 2010; Chiliaya, 2012; Ndiaye, 2008). In spite of cross-border trading being dangerous and violent for cross-border women traders, cross-border women traders have very few options of survival due to the worsening house-hold poverty in the home country. Therefore, they have to confront these challenges head-on on a daily basis.

Some scholars argue that the migration of women is hardly given enough attention on the global policy agenda unless it is conflict or disaster related (Jolly and Reeves, 2005). Others contend that efforts to mainstream gender issues are half-hearted, and approaches like the so-called “add and stir approach” (Boyd and Grieco, 2003), which advocates for incorporating women into migration, have not necessarily led to a better understanding of how migration impacts on women. Focusing on women as “added migrants” has prompted Non-Governmental Organizations and civil society organizations to come up with initiatives, policies and programmes that look at the specific needs of women as a vulnerable group so that they can assist where there is need. Such efforts are ostensibly meant to empower, protect and support women migrants. For example, International non-governmental organizations such as Partnership with Regional and Economic Communities (REC), Government institutions, African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa, have made efforts to enhance leadership commitment and accountability, in order to address issues facing informal cross-border women traders and also to mainstream gender issues into the trade agreement process.

Such initiatives include the harmonization of trade policies with gender policies, simplifying and popularizing the provisions of regional protocols and agreements from a gender perspective, advocating for gender sensitive border control procedures and taxation systems, and systematizing the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data on informal cross-border traders (UN Women, 2008). While these practical efforts are significant, there is very little empirical data to underpin and broaden understanding on the gender dynamics of migration. This is particularly the case in relation to the informal cross-border trade, which is often relegated to the back stage of the academic enterprise.

It is against this background, therefore, that the theoretical premise of my thesis sought to explore the tension between theories which suggest on one hand that cross-border trade is helpful to cross-border women traders, and on the other, that cross-border trade is harmful to cross-border women traders, thus positioning cross-border trade as ambivalent. As a result of this theoretical tension, the aim of this thesis is, therefore, to examine the experiences of Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders so as to fully understand the meanings that the border inscribes on the informal cross border business. This study is the culmination of field work undertaken in Zimbabwe between June and September 2013. I carried out indepth interviews with eleven purposively sampled Zimbabwean informal cross-

border women traders in Harare and Bulawayo, (Zimbabwe) as well as Cape Town (South Africa).

Through the interviews, I was able to gain insights that speak to the tension between the empowerment and surveillance on women particularly in view of the hazards of informal cross-border trade as a business creates. The major question, therefore, which this thesis seeks to address is whether cross-border trade is an empowering endeavour for cross border women traders, especially against the backdrop of the numerous hazards, challenges and dangers that cross-border women traders face through cross-border trading. The study focussed on the experiences of cross-border women traders at the Zimbabwean/South African Beitbridge border post. The border was chosen as a terrain for examining these issues because it is a site with many interesting zones, and it also has the potential to promote or undermine the cross-border trading business. Exploring the ambivalent relationship between empowerment and hazards of informal cross-border trade enabled me as a researcher to listen to the chilling stories of women cross-border traders as they took me through the journey of the good, the bad and the ugly experiences of cross-border trade. It is in recognition of this ambivalence that I will remain critical as to whether cross-border trade is an empowering endeavour to Zimbabwean women and also whether it has the potential to promote gender equality or not.

Through numerous travels which I made to South Africa, through the Beit-bridge border post, I observed that a lot of women were involved in cross-border trade. My keen interest in the cross border trade and the experiences I had at the Zimbabwean/South African Beit-bridge border post through my travels through the border triggered my curiosity to investigate the experiences of informal cross-border women traders. My personal experiences at the border contradicted my initial perceptions about cross-border trading and I felt that if I carried out an academic research I would satisfy my curiosity. In this thesis, I present my personal theoretical journey through an engagement with the experiences of informal cross-border women traders at the Zimbabwe/South African border post in Beitbridge. Below I give a synopsis of the chapters as presented in this thesis.

Chapter 1 gives an introduction and background to the study. The chapter gives an account of what the thesis sought to explore. Chapter 2 surveys literature linked to the study and discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study. I begin this chapter by examining migration trends and patterns in Southern Africa. I also dwell on the Feminisation

of migration and informal cross-border trading in Zimbabwe. Chapter 3 presents an outline of the methodological considerations, starting with feminist theoretical frameworks that guide feminist research methods, approaches and procedures used in data collection. It is in this chapter that I also discussed my positionality and reflexivity. Chapter 4, 5 and 6 constitute the analytic chapters where I present and discuss the findings of the study. Chapter 4 examines the findings relating to the opportunities that cross-border trading offers to cross-border women traders while Chapter 5 analyses the challenges women face at the border. Chapter 6 pulls together findings from Chapter 4 and 5 and critically examines the tension between opportunities created by the informal cross-border trade and the challenges faced by informal cross-border women traders at the border. It is in this chapter that I also examine how informal cross-border traders engage in sustainable strategies to cope with the challenges presented by the border. Finally, in chapter 7 I give an account of my concluding remarks by reflecting on my research journey. I advance the key arguments of my thesis through a theoretical lens, focusing on the implications of the findings of my study and its limitations. I also suggested aspects for further research in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO:

MIGRATION TRENDS AND PATTERNS: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section reviews literature on migration, in order to situate the study in a proper context of the existing body of literature, as well as to identify appropriate conceptual frameworks that underpin the study. Literature reviewed in this section mainly addresses three themes, namely migration in Southern Africa, the feminization of migration, and informal cross border women trading in Zimbabwe.

2.2 MIGRATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Scholars are generally in agreement that migration in Southern Africa has a long history, dating back to the 19th century (Williams, 2010; Kanyenze, 2004; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush *et al.*, 2006). A survey conducted in five countries, namely Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland by the Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP), in 2005, revealed that 3% of the respondents had a grandparent who had migrated to another country and 57% of the respondents reported that they had parents who had gone to another country (SAMP cited in Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush and Williams, 2010). This survey shows that migration patterns could be historically traced within families, as most of the people in the survey had grand-parents or parents who had migrated for work in another country. Olivier and Dupper (2012) support the above by pointing out that migration in the Southern African region is historically entrenched, to the extent that it is now regarded as a career by people from the region.

It is indisputable that migration trends have become more dynamic and complex over the years due to, among other factors, the end of apartheid in South Africa, civil, political and

economic strife in its neighbouring countries, the growing rural and urban poverty and rising unemployment, as well as the intensification process of globalization (Kanyenze, 2004; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush *et al.*, 2006; Williams, 2010). As a result of the restructuring of migration patterns in Southern African, migration has received considerable scholarly attention in order to a view to inform policy initiatives (Macamo, 1999; Peberdy, 2002; Kanyenze, 2004; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Williams, 2006; Moja and Nakanyane, 2007; 2009; Kiwanuka and Monson, 2009; Williams, 2010; Crush & Williams, 2010; Oliver and Dupper, 2012). The bulk of the studies tend to take a very broad and generalized approach to migration and to give an account of the history of migration in Southern Africa, as well as to identify migrants according to their motives of migration.

Studies show that migration in the region has increased phenomenally over the years. In the case of South Africa, figures of legal movements from Africa rose from five million in 1996 to over nine million in 2008. Scholars have identified the different categories of immigrants common in the region and these include informal cross-border traders, skilled and unskilled labourers, refugees, asylum seekers, legal and illegal migrants (Crush *et al.*, 2005, Williams and Crush, 2010). The different categories of immigrants above explain the types of migration trends common in the region, namely labour migration, forced migration, feminization of migration, irregular migration and the informal cross-border trade migration (Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush and Williams, 2010).

Researchers concur that labour migration is the primary and most dominant form of migration in the Southern African region, and there is also consensus among scholars that economic factors constitute the main reasons for migration in the region (Crush *et al.*, 2005; Olivier and Dupper, 2012; Williams, 2010; Williams, 2006; Moja and Nakanyane, 2007; Peberdy, 2002; Dookhony and Cuttaree, 2009; Kiwanuka and Monson, 2009). All the studies acknowledge that most people migrate to other countries in search of better economic opportunities.

Olivier and Dupper (2012) further note that the current flows of migration in Southern Africa point towards South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, making these countries the major receivers of migrants in the region because of their strong economies and their high demand for skilled labour. South Africa however, remains the most popular destination for migrants from most Southern African countries, with Zimbabwean migrants topping the list (Kanyenze, 2004; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush and Williams 2010). IOM (2005) identifies the

relative political stability in South Africa as a pull factor which, in turn, has triggered an influx of both legal and illegal migrants.

The International Labour Migration (cited in Kanyenze, 2004) cites South Africa's political liberation, deteriorating economic performance in neighbouring countries and the effects of globalization as the main reasons for the intensification of labour migration into South Africa, in recent times. Some scholars blame the implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s and 1990s in countries such as Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe for outward migration from these countries (Kanyenze, 2004; Tekere, 2003). This resulted in massive job losses and the worsening of economic hardships, thereby triggering a massive movement of people into neighbouring countries (Kanyenze, 2004; Tekere, 2003). The result has been a rise in the growth of the informal sector, which, in turn, has contributed to the dramatic increase of informal cross-border traders in the region (Mwaniki, 2005).

Crush and Williams (2010) examine the patterns of migration from the 1990s, the restructuring of labour after the end apartheid in South Africa and the end of civil wars in Angola and Mozambique. They also interrogate the impact of the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe and globalization on migration trends in the Southern African region as major contributory factors to the increase in migrants to South Africa, particularly informal cross-border traders. The study shows that between 2005 and 2010, there was a rise in irregular migrants, particularly from Zimbabwe, because of the economic and political crisis in that country, and also because of the fact that opportunities for many Zimbabweans to work legally in South Africa were slim.

Apart from labour migration, studies show that forced migration is another type of migration common in the region. Political instability and civil wars in countries such as Angola, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo have triggered migration to other regional countries (Williams, 2006; Moja and Nakanyane, 2007; Williams, 2010; Olivier and Dupper, 2012). In addition, Zimbabwe's political crisis has prompted a sharp rise in people applying for asylum in South Africa. As has been pointed out earlier, Zimbabwe tops the list of SADC countries as a source of migrants because of the country's political and economic crises (Crush and Williams, 2010).

Apart from economic and political factors, social factors also constitute a significant portion of reasons that motivate people to migrate in Southern Africa. A SAMP survey of

migrants from 5 countries, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Botswana showed that for Zimbabwe, Botswana and Lesotho many people had crossed borders into South Africa to visit family and friends (Crush and Williams, 2010).

Studies note that men dominate in migration in the Southern African region because labour in regional countries is stratified by gender. This point is supported by Posel (2003:2) who notes the major reason why men dominate in labour migration into South Africa as historical. Walker (cited by Posel, 2001) argues that there are very few studies that have sought to investigate the gendered pattern of migration. Some scholars have however tended to present the rural household as 'a harmonious unit' in which all members of the household are committed and united in maximising resources thereby resisting any threats to the household's integrity. In South Africa, feminist historians have shown disdain at attempts to explain migration patterns as resulting from a unified household because this implies that the migration experiences of women and men are similar, thus, ignoring the manner in which the gender division of labour and power relations are mediated by social structures and ideology (Walker cited in Posel, 2001).

It has been observed that traditional structures of social control such as chiefs, fathers and husbands restricted the mobility of women, thereby reinforcing the traditional roles of women as wives, daughters and mothers (Posel, 2001). However, the fact that women remained at home maintaining 'sanity' in the home fits in well with the view of the unitary household theory. The fact that men control social spaces and household decisions meant that they determined how household resources would be utilised and, in most instances, it was to their benefit. Thus, men would opt to migrate leaving women behind (Posel, 2001).

The trends and patterns of migration remain circular and temporary since migrants do not migrate permanently into the host country. Reasons for migrating are temporary and many migrants intend to eventually return to their home country (Crush et al, 2005; Kanyenze, 2004; Crush and Williams, 2010). Stark, attributes the circular migration patterns to insecure employment contracts for migrants who were also not allowed to settle permanently in the places where they worked. As a result migrants sought to retain economic ties with their places of origin as a security measure in the event of losing their jobs (Stark cited in Posel, 2003). Scholars argue that receiving countries are perceived as best only in terms of employment, economic opportunities and health facilities, while the home country remains better in all the other respects (Crush *et al.*, 2005 Crush *et al.*, 2006; Olivier and Dupper, 2012).

Research shows that the countries' migration policies continue to be as restrictive as colonial policies were and, for some countries they still value the sovereignty of their countries more than the gains obtained in allowing freer movement of (Crush & Williams, 2004; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Williams, 2010). Olivier and Dupper (2012:7) argue that legal restrictions in both South Africa and other SADC member states are meant to control the movement of people rather than promoting human rights. This is also in line with Posel's observation that most of the studies in recent migration on Southern Africa questions the negative perceptions and stereotypes about immigrants and critique the South African immigration policies from a human rights point of view (Posel, 2003). In some instances, people in host countries have been perceived as hostile to the migrants who at times are viewed as takers of jobs, carriers of diseases and perpetrators of crime, resulting in xenophobic attacks the indigenous people feel their sovereignty is being intruded (Crush *et al.*, 2005 Crush *et al.*, 2006). This spells a gloomy picture for migrants in the Southern African region.

Neo-classical macro-theories of migration such as the "Theory of Wages by John R. Hicks (1932), where migration is seen as being influenced by geographic differences in economic opportunities (Schwenken and Eberhardt, 2008), could be used to account for the current trends and patterns of migration in Southern Africa. This theory argues that regional wage differences and abundant labour resources can trigger migration whereby people will sell their labour in return for better wages (Schwenken and Eberhardt, 2008). Above all, it is wage differentials due to different endowments of labour relative to capital, which trigger mobility from places where labour is abundant and earnings are low to labour-scarce and high wage destinations. In other words, "workers respond to regional differences in economic outcomes by voting with their feet" (Borjas in Schwenken and Eberhardt, 2008: 8).

However, traditional international migration theories such as the "push and pull" factors and the neo-classical migration theories are gender insensitive and treat migrants as a homogeneous group, thus failing to explain gender dynamics in migration experiences and gender differential factors that can affect migration (Chant and Radcliffe cited Grieco and Boyd, 2003). Schwenken and Eberhardt (2008:2) made similar observations and pointed out that the main economic theories of migration show that scholarly work on migration is far from gender neutral but is informed by a traditional understanding of gender roles. They

further argue that as far as the migration policy is concerned, economic theories are often called upon to assess the “fiscal human capital costs and benefits of immigration”. Urzua (cited by Schwenken and Eberhardt, 2008:2) points out that neoclassical economics is the dominant conceptual framework for explaining migration policies.

In an article on “The Feminization of Migration”, Gouws (2010) argues that, push and pull factors account for the migration of women. In this instance, push factors include gender based violence against women, as a result of civil wars, food insecurity, economic instability, human rights violations, corruption and human trafficking. Pull factors include opportunities found in the host country, such as trade, entrepreneurship, as well as the availability of conducive conditions for doing business (Gouws, 2010:1). Since women dominate in the private sphere the assumption that men migrate for work and women migrate as dependents of their spouses is perpetuated in many studies migration in Southern Africa.

2.3 FEMINIZATION OF MIGRATION

Although women are increasingly becoming a major component of migrants in Southern Africa, owing mainly to increased economic opportunities in the global economy (Crush and Williams 2010), research that focuses on women as subjects in international migration is scarce if not fragmented (Kelson and DeLaet, 1999; Jolly and Reeves, 2005; Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Honadanegue-Sotelo and Cranford, 2006). Sex role stereotypes based on traditional assumptions about men migrating as workers and women as spouses dominate the discourse on migration flows (Kelson and DeLaet, 1999). As a result, there is very little data on the migration activities of women because women are believed to be insignificant others in migration discourses due to these sex roles stereotypical assumptions (Boyd and Grieco, 2003).

Empirical studies on migration also lack perspectives on the lived experience of women or narrations based on view-points of women (Kelson and DeLaet, 1999). Although some scholars argue that women have a long history of migration the misconceptions that men migrate more than women persists (Mutanga undated). Research shows that by the 1960s, women constituted 49% of cross-border migrants the world over (Kelson and DeLaet, 1999; Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford, 2006; Caritas Internationalis,

2010). Caritas International (2010) provides regional statistics of women migration and notes in 2005 that women were slightly more than male migrants in other regions of the world except Asia and Africa. In North America, however, female migrants have always been more than male migrants beginning in the 1930s, and in 2005, female migrants in the region were about 50.4%. Similarly Europe and the Oceanic have been experiencing an upsurge in female migrants, who have overtaken the number of males since 2000, accounting for as much as 53.4% and 51.3% of the total migration, respectively. Similarly, the number of female migrants to Australia has outnumbered that of men in the last decades. The number of married and unmarried women who migrate alone or in the company of other women has increased as well (Caritas, International, 2010). In Asia, female migrants accounted for 44.7% of total migration, and in the Philippines 65% of the migrants in 2005 were female. In Sri Lanka women who emigrated were twice as many as men in 2002. The findings of Caritas Internationalis study also revealed that the majority of women migrants in Asia are destined to neighbouring countries in the region and the Middle East, while by 2005, Latin American and Caribbean female migrants became the first in the developing world to reach parity with male migrants, constituting about 50.3% of the number of migrants in the region. Asian and Caribbean women often migrate to Europe, North America and South America. The feminisation of migration has also been observed among Central and South America migrants moving to Spain where 70% of the migrants in 2000 were from Brazil and the Dominican Republic.

According to Caritas Internationalis (2010), worsening poverty levels, diseases, land degradation and high male unemployment are contributing to the upsurge in female migrants in Africa. The report also notes that by 2005, 47.4% of the 17 million migrants in Africa were women, an indication that women are increasingly taking up the responsibility of providing family incomes. It is significant to note that the bulk of these female migrants move within the region, as well as to North America and Europe. In the case of Cape Verde, it has been observed that women account for 85% of migrants to Italy. However, factors such as socio-cultural differences have been the main obstacles limiting the mobility of women into the Arab world (Caritas International, 2010:4).

The omission of women as players in international migration has obscured gender dynamics in migration, as scholars argue that women migrate for very complex reasons and experience migration in a very unique way (Kelson and Delaet, 1999). Studies on women migration do acknowledge, that although women migrate for reasons of family reunifications, it is not the

only reason why women migrate as there are other motives such as economic survival, running away from abusive family relationships and just also for the sake of being independent (Morokvasic cited in Kelson and DeLaet, 1999). A 1994 United Nations report (cited in Kelson and DeLaet, 1999) argues that, while men constitute the majority of migrants to developing countries, in recent years women migrants have dominated migration to many developed countries. Houston, Kramer, and Barrett (cited in Kelso and DeLaet, 1999) give the United States as an example of one of those countries that receive most legal immigrants overall. Women dominate in the migration flows in this country, meaning that women migrate more to countries that favour permanent resettlement, whereas men dominate in migration to countries that favour migrant labour. Although both men and women migrate almost on equal numbers, the direction of migration flows differ for women and men (ibid, 1999). They further note that, although the assumption that women migrate as dependents is dominant in international migration, the truth is that women migrate independently and for various reasons, and this can be proved by looking at the broad reasons why women migrate.

This view is in line with the findings of Caritas Internationalis, which notes that in the 1960s and 1970s, migration theories often assumed that most migrants were males, and women were merely wives and dependants who followed their husbands, meaning that migration was regarded as more of a male than female phenomenon. Although women have been part of the migration flows as spouses, daughters, and dependents of male migrants, recent patterns of migration show that this has been changing, in the sense that women are becoming more autonomous in their migration. The implication of this is that women migrants have increasingly become key players as “breadwinners” for their families rather than dependents (Caritas Internationalis, 2010).

Stereotypical traditional assumptions of migration being tied to sex roles appear to dominate scholarship on migration trends in Southern African (Kelson and DeLaet, 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford, 2006; Caritas Internationalis, 2010). The history of labour migration being dominated by men in Southern Africa has resulted in women migration being associated with their sex roles (Dodson, 1998; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush and Williams 2010). This theory of “sex roles” views gender as static rather than as mutable or dynamic, it fails to account for women’s increased mobility and the varied reasons for crossing borders as is the case in the contemporary context. It has been proven beyond doubt that women world-wide in general and Southern Africa in particular now migrate for economic reasons as seen in

informal cross-border trading, hence the common use of the term” feminisation of migration”.

Caritas Internationalis argue that the use of the term “feminisation of migration” which has become the current terminology to describe women migration is a little bit misleading and may be subject to debate on the relevance of its usage “insofar as it suggests an absolute increase in the proportion of women migrants, when in fact by 1960 women already make up nearly 47% of all international migrants a percentage that increased by only two points during the following four decades to about 49% at present”(Caritas Internationalis 2010: 1).

Studies show that feminization of labour migration and feminization of poverty in the Southern African region and many other developing nations have led to the migration of women in large numbers as a survival strategy, as well as independent migrants. Caritas Internationalis (2010:1) notes that since, the early 1980s, the number of both single and married women who are better educated than men, have been migrating to take up employment in other countries. This development has coincided with the growing preference for women labour internationally (Crush and Williams, 2010; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush and Williams, 2010; Kelson and DeLaet, 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford, 2006).

Thus, scholars agree that there is increased women mobility across borders in Southern Africa and the rest of the world and that there are remarkable gender differences in the motives for migration between women and men. Research shows that men and women exhibit differences in terms of their migratory behaviours (Caritas Internationalis, 2010). According to Caritas Internationalis (2010), men and women face different opportunities and different risks and challenges in the host country. For instance, risks and vulnerabilities such as human rights abuses, exploitation, discrimination and health risks affecting women and men differ significantly (Caritas Internationalis, 2010). The implication of this is that migration is not a “gender neutral” phenomenon. Thus, women’s experiences differ from those of their male counterparts from the very moment that they decide to migrate (Caritas Internationalis, 2010).

In Southern African region, studies observed that men’s primary motive of migration is to go and work, while women’s motives vary from trading, shopping and visiting family and friends (Dodson, 1998; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush and Williams, 2010). A SAMP survey (cited in Crush and Williams, 2010) shows that the reasons why women and men migrate

from Namibia, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique to South Africa differed significantly. The survey showed that 50% of men had gone to South Africa to look for employment compared to 10% women who had done so. While 50% of the women respondents had gone to South Africa for shopping, only 13% of the men had gone there for the same reasons. Also, 38 % of the female respondents had gone to South Africa to visit family and friends, while only 17% males had gone for similar reasons. Ten per cent (10 %) of the females had visited South Africa for informal cross-border trading, while only 4% of the male respondents reported that they had visited South Africa for informal trading. Dodson (1998) observed that women and men in the Southern African region migrate for very different reasons. This clearly shows that migration in Southern Africa is gendered.

Scholars, thus contend that the migration process in the Southern African region is a gendered process and motives for migrating differ considerably along gender lines, with men more likely to cross borders than women (Dodson, 1998; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush et al, 2006; Crush and Williams, 2010; IOM, 2010). Literature on migration in the Southern African region also shows that the gendered patterns of migration apply again in relation to the types and patterns of migration. For instance, women maintain short periods but regular visits in their trends, of migration whereas men stay in the host country for prolonged periods of time than women (Dodson, 1998; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Crush and Williams, 2010; Gouws, 2010).

In many ways, migration has transformed gender roles in Southern Africa as women are increasingly becoming breadwinners, independent and competent (Dodson cited in Crush *et al.*, 2006). The migration experiences of women in Southern Africa can best be examined through the social construction of gender lens. The social construction theory is a theoretical perspective which subscribes to the view that human life exists due to social and personal influences (Gergen cited in Owen, 1995). It provides a framework for understanding the traditional migration experiences of men in relation to those of women. The assumption that women do not migrate, and if they do, they do so as appendages of men is socially constructed in the sense that women are assumed to occupy peripheral roles in the domestic rather than the public sphere.

From a social construction standpoint, gender is a social construct in the sense that people learn through culture and discourse. This means that gender is more than an individual quality, in that, it is a whole system of social meanings that specify what is associated with

men and women in a society at a particular time (Wood, 2007). The meanings of gender are conveyed through culture and social institutions, which naturalize certain actions, beliefs and desires. The fact that gender is socially constructed, therefore, implies that people's perceptions of social reality and expectations in life are shaped by their social, cultural and interpersonal interactions.

The social construction theory is relevant in migration processes, in the sense that people's perceptions of themselves and normative societal expectations about them determine who should migrate, where and why (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). As noted by Lorber (2004:130), gender creates the social differences that define "woman" and "man" and, in social interactions individuals learn what is expected of them and react in ways that they are expected to react by society. To the extent that gender is viewed by feminist scholarship as a matrix of identities, behaviours or expressions of femininity and masculinity (Boyd and Grieco, 2003), it is useful to examine the migration experiences of women and men through a gender lens. Since gender is not static but fluid, the social construction theory remains relevant in explaining the way in which gender roles are shaped by changing social and economic structures, what Donato *et al.*, (2006:6) refers to as "the persistence or transformation of geographies of power". While it is true that migration experiences of women and men are shaped by cultural and societal expectations, gender can be deconstructed as much as it is a social construction. By the same reasoning, the vulnerability of women in their migration experiences could be deconstructed by putting in place policies that could empower women.

2.4 WOMEN AND INFORMAL TRADE

Before examining informal cross-border trade in Zimbabwe it is imperative to unpack the role of women in informal trade in general. In Africa, informal trade has always been the first response of the population to conditions of economic distress, political strife and poor governance, and in this trade women are usually the most active participants. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women have particularly played an important role in the economy through informal trade. Plunked and Stryker (cited in UNCTAD, 2010) note that, between four and five million people in West Africa are involved in the informal trade business, making a living out

of collecting, processing and marketing shea nuts. In Benin, it has been observed that about 80% of the women are involved in the informal cross-border trade.

Statistics also show that three out four people in Sub-Saharan Africa are unofficially employed and women constitute 60 % of the informal sector (UNCTAD 2010). In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, informal trade has been pivotal in the distribution of consumer goods, whether or not they are prohibited, thereby playing a stabilizing factor in food security. Chimbu and Musemwa (2012) note that, in Zimbabwe, between 80 % and 85% of the population was unemployed at the height of the country's economic crisis, thus making informal border trade, many of which women were the majority of participants in the sector their main source of livelihoods. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) found out that women controlled the most efficient and dominant segments of the informal sector economy in the Sub-Saharan region, and that they were best positioned to cope with economic crises (UNCTAD, 2010:152). This shows that informal trade has a key role to play in Africa.

2.5 INFORMAL CROSS –BORDER TRADING IN ZIMBABWE

Peberdy (2002) describes informal cross-borders as traders who travel into three or more regional countries for short periods, from less than a week two months, who either migrate to buy goods for re-sell in the home country or carry goods to sell in the host country and use the profits to buy goods to re-sell in home country. She describes informal cross-border trade as, “activities of small entrepreneurs who are involved in buying and selling across the national borders” (Peberby, 2002: 36). The term “informal” implies that these people operate on the fringes of the formal economy since they sell and buy their wares in informal sector markets Makombe (2011) notes that economic integration in the Southern African region is being spearheaded by developments in the informal cross-border trade sector in most Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. The informal border trade accounts for between 30-40% of the intra SADC (Makombe 2011:44). IOM (2010) concurs and argues that the findings show that the majority of women involved in cross-border trade activities are educated and enterprising in outlook. The study noted that 73% of the women involved in informal cross-border trade spent a week or less away from home each month and 45% worked for more than nine hours a day.

Rugube and Matshe (2011) argue that informal cross-border trading has become a lucrative sector for people who fail to meet the pre-requisites for formal employment in those countries perceived as better in terms of economic opportunities. Most of the people involved in the informal cross-border trade happen to be women, who have taken it upon themselves to take a leading role of sustaining their families and protecting them from poverty.

Although informal cross-border trading has a long history in Southern Africa, it has changed in nature due to the transformations in regional dynamics and the escalation of globalization (Rugube and Matshe, 2011). It has increased in scale in the Southern African region and in many other countries in the world for example in Uganda, the United States and Mexico. Crush *et al.*, (2005) point out that informal cross-border trading is increasingly being incorporated into transnational, continental and regional trade networks. Ndeyapo (2013) attributes the increase in informal cross-border trading in Zimbabwe to food insecurity challenges in the region and the effects of the 2007-2008 global financial crises in which pushed many urban dwellers into informal cross-border trading as a livelihood strategy. Rugube and Matshe (2011) attribute the increase of the intra-SADC trade to widespread unemployment and shortage of goods in the region. The IMF and World Bank sponsored economic structural adjustments programmes have also been blamed for the massive unemployment in the 1980s and 90s, particularly in countries like Zimbabwe and Malawi. De-industrialization linked to these programmes did not only result in massive closures of companies (resulting in a severe shortages of goods), but it also triggered massive job loss effects, which over-burdened women (Rugube and Matshe, 2011). Ndeyapo (2013) notes how, in countries such as Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe unemployment rates went up to over 50%, thus pushing many into the informal cross-border trading business as a livelihood strategy.

Studies show that informal cross-border trading is a livelihood strategy and has transformed lives of both women and men in countries in the Southern African region. The 2009 UN Women, base line studies on the impacts of informal cross-border trading in three Southern Africa countries, namely Swaziland, Botswana and Zimbabwe, show how both women and men used their proceeds from informal cross-border trading. In Swaziland 76% of the women and 73% of the men used their income from cross-border trading for food for their households, while 60% of the women and 30% of the men used income to pay school fees. In Zimbabwe 89% of the men and 78% of the women used their income from cross-border trading for food for their house-hold, while 64% of the women and 51% of the men

used the income for rent. This shows that the main reasons for which people engage in informal cross-border trading are economic and also family sustenance.

A 2004 ILO study shows that 60% of the Sub Saharan Africa women were self-employed in informal cross-border trade, independent of agricultural self-employment. This is quite a significant shift from women's work in agriculture for survival. Women's participation in the informal cross-border trade guarantees them food and basic needs, and also empowers them in family decision making processes because of their financial clout.

Although informal cross-trade business is viewed with disdain research shows that this sector has an invaluable contribution to the economy, (IOM, 2010; Crush *et al.*, 2005; Peberdy, 2002). Nduru (cited in IOM, 2010) notes that informal cross-border trading forms a substantial percentage of economic activity in the southern African region. In its 2008 report, UnWomen estimated the value of informal cross-border trade in the SADC region at about US17.6 billion per year, contributing 30-40% of the SADC intra-trade. Crush *et al.*, (2005) argue that informal cross-border trade in the Southern African region is crucial in the transfer of goods and commodities in the Southern African region, thereby guaranteeing food security to the region, and also the development of small and medium enterprises, as well as the alleviation of poverty in general. Rugube and Matshe (2011) concur with this observation, further pointing out that informal cross-border traders create regional markets for goods and services, which improve livelihoods of Africans on the continent. This shows that intra-sub-regional trade can be a significant source of revenue and home grown sources of economic growth and informal cross-border trading is an important component of this trade. Informal cross-border trade is, therefore, a simpler way of fostering trade relations and cementing cultural ties between countries that share common borders.

The importance of cross-border trading has been noted across Africa as well, particularly in view of the fact that the informal trade appears larger than the formal trade (Ndiaye, 2008). Research shows that informal cross-border trading was able to cushion most of the African countries against food shortages occasioned by the 2007-2008 financial crises (ILO, 2009). A Rapid Assessment of the Global Economic Crisis in Uganda revealed that informal exports of industrial products doubled from US475 million to US963million (UNCTAD 2010). This was attributed to an increase in informal trade.

UN Women baseline studies conducted between 2007 and 2009 revealed that informal cross-border trading was used as livelihood strategy by women for poverty

eradication, employment creation and wealth generation in 6 African countries, namely Liberia, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Mali. The study found out that, of the 2000 women surveyed in informal cross-border trading the majority used their earnings to buy food and meet other important house-hold needs. Informal cross-border trading was the only source of income for many of them.

In Zimbabwe, informal cross-border trading intensified with the country's experience of a decade long political and economic downturn that pushed many people into the informal sector. This resulted in a sharp increase in out-migration into neighbouring countries, particularly South Africa and Botswana (Ndlela, 2006; Kiwanuka and Monson, 2009; Ndiaye, 2008). A key component of this migration, were women are mostly involved in small scale trade in the host and home country (Kiwanuka and Monson, 2009).

Ndlela (2006), in his study, examines cross-border trading between Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries, namely Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique and South Africa, focusing on trends, patterns, obstacles and policies on informal cross-border trading, mainly between Zimbabwe and South Africa. In the study, he acknowledges the increase of migrants in informal cross-border trading due to economic crisis in Zimbabwe, though he points out that there is a history of informal cross-border trading well before the crisis. He traces the history of the informal cross-border trade between Zimbabwe and South Africa, noting how, during the early 1980s, women in Zimbabwe started making trips to South Africa, wanting to take advantage of the Open General Import Licence (OGIL) facility, and how, later, in 1985, this trend was briefly interrupted due to souring relations between Zimbabwe and the apartheid government in South Africa (Ndlela, 2006). The coming of democracy in South Africa, in 1994, coincided with the escalation of economic difficulties in Zimbabwe due to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. As a result of increased poverty due to the economic collapse, there was a sharp rise in informal cross-border trade activities (Ndlela, 2006).

The study reveals that Zimbabwean Informal Cross Border Traders export a wide range of goods to other Southern African countries and these include crafts, agricultural products basketry, crotchety, clothes, bed and seat covers. Though the goods may vary from country to country, depending on the market, they constitute the most basic types of goods exported (Ndlela, 2006). Goods brought from South Africa by informal cross-border traders

to Zimbabwe include electrical and non-electrical house-hold items, motor vehicles spares, industrial equipment, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, clothing and blankets.

Although the study revealed that informal cross-border trading had positive impacts on both the economy of the home and host country, the experiences of informal cross-border traders were less than attractive and are not as lucrative as the positive impacts it has made in their lives. Some of the major challenges faced by Zimbabwean cross-border traders include long hours of travel and delays at the border, harassment by customs and immigration officials, muggings, abuse, exposure to corruption, regulatory obstacles both in the host and home country (Ndela, 2006).

Significantly, the study acknowledges the fact that in cross-border trading in Zimbabwe, in the 1990s, 90% of the informal cross-border traders were women who wanted to supplement the ever-dwindling incomes of their husbands. This observation is also made by both Kiwanuka (2009) and Muzvidziwa (2012). Lack of access to formal job opportunities in host countries due to low skills level forced many to resort to other survival strategies like informal cross-border trading. However, Kiwanuka's (2009) study is policy-oriented in nature, thus, does not delve deeper into the experiences of informal cross-border traders, which is the main focus of this study.

In 2008, UN Women carried out a base line study on women in informal cross-border trade in Zimbabwe at three of the country's border posts, namely the Beit-Bridge exit to South Africa, Plumtree exit to Botswana, and Forbes exit to Mozambique. The study surveyed 457 traders of whom 316 were women and 141 men. The methodologies used in the base line included focus groups, institutional surveys and in-depth case studies. Findings revealed that informal cross-border trade is a survival strategy, with more than half of the traders reporting that they were pushed into informal cross-border trading by the 2001-2008 economic crisis. The majority of the informal cross-border traders (85%) said they were involved in the informal cross-border trade for income purposes, 67% cited food security as their reason for engaging in informal cross-border trade, 60% cited employment purposes, while 49% said they were doing it because of poverty (UN Women, 2008). Because the survey lumped together women and men, the gender dimension of the motivations for participating in informal cross-border trade were not explored. The study, however, confirms findings by earlier studies concerning the challenges faced by informal cross-border traders.

These include delays at the border posts and violence against women (men being the perpetrators).

The study also concluded that women feel economically empowered by engaging in informal cross border trade because they become part of the decision-making process in their homes. Some, however, reported that domestic violence also came along with their success because their spouses felt threatened. The observation about women being empowered ties up with what has been noted by other scholars who point out that informal cross-border trading in Zimbabwe had given rise to the image of an independent and mobile class of women (Muzvidziwa, 2012; 2007; 1998). For Muzvidziwa, this was evidence of the shifting identities of women.

Muzvidziwa (2012) carried a study in 2002 on Zimbabwean cross-border traders looked at emerging, multiple and shifting identities. The study was largely on cross-border traders in Chinhoyi and Harare. The study sought to examine how identity is formed and legitimated in the context of cross-border trade and it focussed cross-border women's lived experiences. He concluded that informal cross-border trade as an occupation had given rise to the image of an independent and mobile class of women involved in long distance trans-border business. It is interesting to note how informal cross-border trading has shifted female identities and social roles in their day to day life experiences.

There are also many other studies focusing on the economic impacts of informal cross-border traders on the people and on the economy of Zimbabwe (Muzvidziwa, 1999, 2007, 2010; Ndiaye, 2008; IOM 2010; Malaba and Chipika, 2012). For instance, Muzvidziwa examined how the cross-border trade was a strategy for climbing out of poverty for some families in Masvingo Province, in the southern part of the country. Muzvidziwa (2007) notes how the informal cross-border trade became a livelihood strategy for women in Zimbabwe in the face of droughts and poverty in urban areas. This was in spite of their activities being viewed with disdain by the media and lack of support by the government. Women were able to overcome many obstacles that denied them access to resources in the formal economy. They developed survival skills better than their male counterparts as they were able to form networks in host countries, thus making them more resourceful, innovative and risk-takers (Muzvidziwa, 2007).

Peberdy (2002) and Peberdy and Crush (1998) explored the activities of entrepreneurial traders and places in the context of South African policy initiatives. They

concluded that the informal cross-border trade sector was making a significant contribution to the economies of Southern Africa by providing a source of income and cushioning countries from food crisis, as well as providing a livelihood strategy for women and a means of employment for many.

Chiliya et al (2012) give important insights on some of the challenges that are faced by Zimbabwe informal cross-border traders in South Africa, although the gender dimension is missing in the study. They found out that sexual harassment, robbery, xenophobic attacks, harassment by police and stigmatisation like being labelled prostitutes, lack of accommodation and delays at the border post were some of the problems faced by informal cross-border traders. This is supported by other studies which found out that informal cross-border traders in Zimbabwe were operating under difficult and risky conditions. They faced problems such as failing to raise capital, lack of transport and accommodation, as well as poor water and (Malaba and Chipika, 2012). In addition, informal cross-border traders also having problems of trading space, stiff competition from established businesses, harassment by immigration officials, health care, deportations, bribes, sexual harassment and HIV and AIDS, prostitution and xenophobia. Malaba and Chipika (2012) add that most of these problems have remained unresolved.

Other problems stifling the informal cross-border trade include restrictive visa procedures, the absence of clearly laid down policies and procedures of small scale traders, unfair application of rules of origin resulting in the poor paying duty while large corporations are exempted. In spite of all these obstacles, informal cross border women traders showed a lot of resilience, and poverty acted as a strong push factor. What is instructive to note is that the benefits from informal cross-border trade outweigh the negative consequences of the trade, a point that was underscored by the Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) (cited in Malaba & chipika, 2012).

In spite of the enormous contribution of informal cross-border trading, scholars note that the sector is hardly recognised let alone acknowledged for what it is worth (IOM, 2007; Crush *et al.*, 2005). Crush *et al.*, (2005) notes that informal cross-border trading in the Southern African region is an under-researched area. UN Women (2008) argues that neglecting this sector of intra-migration, given that the majority of women participate in I, might have negative consequences, particularly because women are vulnerable. Some of the

challenges women are subjected to can be addressed and rectified if the responsible authorities took gender issue seriously.

Informal cross-border trading is a unique type of migration, which is unlike other types of migration where migrants stay in the host country for a prolonged period of time or settle there permanently. In informal cross-border trade migration, traders stay in the host country for a few days before returning to their home countries. The short periods of time cross-border traders spend in the host country may make their experiences of migration a little bit different from those of people intending to settle permanently or work in the host country. International migration theories are better suited to explaining the migration experiences of women in informal cross-border trading. Migration push and pull factors, in relation to informal cross-border trade, show that poverty acts as a push factor, and the benefits available in host countries act as pull factors (Malaba and Chipika 2012:20).

Unlike in labour migration where men dominate in Southern Africa and which fit so well into the assumptions of traditional theories of migration which argue that men migrate for economic reasons and women as dependents, scholars acknowledge that women dominate in migration for economic reasons both internationally and regionally especially in informal cross-border trading, thus dispelling myths peddled in international migration theories that women migrate as wives and dependents of male migrants (Lee cited in Grieco and Boyd, 2003). Feminist scholars have challenged these theories on the grounds that they are gender insensitive and fail to account for women's reasons for migrating other than as dependents and spouses. It is, therefore, important to explore women cross-border traders' experiences of migration to hear women voices, which for long have been muted in these theories of international migration.

Given the immense contribution of this sector to the people and to the regional economies, research that explores the experiences of informal cross-border women traders, particularly at the Zimbabwean/South African border post, would be important since interaction at the border has the potential to hinder or promote women business trade. Exploring Zimbabwean cross-border women traders' experiences is important, in order to understand the disadvantages women face as a gender in their migration experiences so that they could be redressed with the intention of achieving gender equality. This is particularly so because of the restrictive and hostile environment in which informal cross-border traders operate in (Rugube and Matshe, 2011).

From the above discussion, on cross-border trade in Zimbabwe, a number of dominant theories that relate to the varied experiences of women in migration and cross-border movements have been raised. It has been noted that the mobility of women across borders has increased phenomenally in recent times, due to, among other factors, the feminization of labour migration and feminization of poverty, whereby women now constitute the majority among informal cross-border traders. There are also indications that migration experiences have positive gender impacts on the day to day lives of women. Women's gender roles have significantly transformed from the private to the public sphere through participating in economically empowering activities such as informal cross-border trading.

It has also been noted that, although migration experiences have created better opportunities for women, women still have to grapple with violence, sexual abuse and harassment, thus posing challenges that make women more vulnerable and disadvantaged as a gender. As a result, migration experiences of Zimbabwean women in cross-border trading, has had an ambiguous impact on women. While it has unlocked opportunities for economic empowerment, it has presented numerous risks and challenges that are linked to their gender. The contradictory impact of migration on women, therefore, brings into focus the debate on whether migration, particularly that of informal cross-border trading is good or bad for women in their day to day experiences. It is imperative for feminist scholars to join this debate to contribute scholarly data on the actual migration experiences of Zimbabwe women cross-border traders to South Africa.

This study is an attempt to advance this theoretical debate as a research agenda by building on a body of knowledge that broadens understanding on the ambiguous manner in which the cross border trade impacts on women. Previous studies on the informal cross-border trading in Zimbabwe, it has been noted sought to inform policy makers. Because of that, they have largely used methodologies which in their overall analysis do not reveal the experiences of women. The present study explored the experiences of women cross-border traders using methodologies that enable subjects to construct their views of the informal cross-border trade based on their lived day-to-day experiences.

2.6 RESEARCH FOCUS

As previously explained, my research interests were stimulated by both debates on contemporary theory on women and informal cross-border trading, and by my own personal experiences with cross-border women traders.

My research focus, thus seeks to explore women's experiences of cross-border trading through theoretical debate, which positions them as either "empowered" or as "vulnerable". In addition, I am particularly interested in the interaction of such "power" and "vulnerability" within the zone of concrete border-crossing, the physical and institutionalized space in which they must engage with a number of state actors, in order to become successful business-women. My questions concern cross-border women traders' representations of their work as full of opportunities, and/or as replete with challenges or disadvantages. I seek to explore possible routes beyond the dichomotization of their experiences as 'either' disempowering 'or' 'fortunate.' I particularly focus on the border-crossing itself as a key zone in the work of 'cross-border' trading.

I am aware that my research is a small contribution towards building knowledge that can improve the situation of vulnerable Zimbabwean women. This thesis is, however, an opportunity for me to put into practice my conviction that feminist research can make a valuable contribution to knowledges capable of transforming stereotypes about informal cross-border women trading, and the meaning of a 'gender-neutral' border. I am aware that my efforts may be too small or insignificant to change the world, but I am also aware that a long journey begins with a small step.

2.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The central research questions of this study are as follows:

What are the experiences of Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders at the Zimbabwe/ South Africa Beitbridge border post?

The sub questions are:

- What opportunities do informal cross-border trade migration create for Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders?

-What challenges do Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders face at the Zimbabwe/ South Africa border post?

- What strategies do Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders employ to cope with the vulnerabilities they face at the Beitbridge border post and suggestions women cross-border traders make?

These sub questions will independently direct the discussion on the presentation and analysis of data, by focussing on the opportunities, vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms of informal cross-border women traders in their migration experiences to South Africa through the Beitbridge border post. The next chapter looks at the methodological considerations and frameworks of the study, by placing emphasis on the values of feminist research through arguments on feminist epistemology and standpoint theory.

CHAPTER THREE:

THEORIES OF RESEARCH, METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents my understanding of feminist theoretical frame-works that are central to the production of knowledge in feminist research and the transformations that occur through engagements and disengagements in feminist ideological issues. In this chapter I outline my understanding of feminist theories and link them up with the methodologies and research design used in this study.

3.2 FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Since the 1960s, feminists have questioned traditional methods of knowledge generation that exclude the experiences of women. The fundamental argument has been that traditional epistemologies systematically exclude women intentionally or unintentionally as “knowers” or “agents of knowledge”, in the generation of knowledge (Hardings 1987:3). Cope describes epistemology as “the theory of knowledge” (cited in Tyler, 2006:101). Feminists contend that current knowledge in traditional disciplines is constructed from a male view point, meaning that men are the reference point, while women experiences are left out (Hardings, 1987; Longino and Lennon, 1997; Ann Oakley, 1998, Jiang, 2005). As a result, the formulation of knowledge in traditional disciplines is androcentric, and, therefore, biased in favour of men. Male norms have been naturalised as objective and the universal standard (Jiang, 2005). Thus women experiences and perspectives in knowledge production have been marginalised (Jiang, 2005). Men’s knowledge is regarded as superior, while that of women is regarded as inferior. Feminist epistemology is, therefore, about taking women’s experiences from the margins to the centre of knowledge production. (Jiang 2005:56) clearly demonstrates this as she says that feminist epistemology is “Concerned with the way gender influences what epistemic agents take to be knowledge”. Thus, the feminist theory of knowledge contends that “knowledge claims are always socially situated” (Harding cited in, Jiang, 2005:56). Jiang, (2005:56) further notes that:

How we conceptualise things and what kind of standard of epistemic enquiry we use are socially and historically decided. One’s way of knowing is affected by one’s class, gender and racial background.

The gender identity of the knower is the main social aspect of knowing that feminist epistemology investigates, although it is not investigated in isolation from other social aspects such as class, race and culture.

The above argument shows that knowledge production is socially situated and therefore, influenced by a person's gender, background, culture, race and social circumstances.

According to Oakley (1998), feminist epistemology is about reclaiming knowledge generation from men by hearing the silent who happen to be women. For Oakley (1998) hearing the silent is all about rejecting the positivist approach to knowledge production. Because positivism sees material and social worlds as equivalent, it limits knowledge to facts knowable through human experience, while ignoring subjective facts about human experiences and the researcher's values (Kolakowski; Bryant in Oakley 1998: 710).

The dominant principle in positivism is the search for social facts and for social laws, which in turn will predict behaviour, thus, removing the researcher's own values and experiences from the research process, in order to make it verifiable (Jaggar in Oakley, 1998). Tyler (2005) concurs that positivism seeks for the objective truth, but neglects the subjective feelings of the researcher. Harding's (2004:6) adds that "the more value neutral a conceptual frame-work appears, the more likely it is to advance the hegemonic interests of dominant groups, and the likely it is to be able to detect important actualities of social relations."

It is against this background that I, as a researcher, became more sensitive to the fact that I was neither a knower in my view of cross-border women traders as objects nor was my research value free in my interaction with them. I tried as much as possible to negotiate the power hierarchies that are invested in the researcher as the knower. This is in line with feminist thinking that positivism accentuates the position of the researcher as the 'knower' and the researched as the 'object of the researcher's knowledge (Oakley, 1998:710). Feminist epistemology rejects any mode of explanation, which sanctions the imposition of the researcher's own views on the researched (Oakley, 1998:710). As I embarked on this research I was conscious of the feminist moral obligation that research is a collaborative process between the researcher and the researched, thus invalidating the hierarchical situation positions of the researcher as the knower and the researched as objects.

3.3 FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

The feminist standpoint theory has been widely accepted by feminist thinkers because it acknowledges the fact that researchers' particular social, cultural and historical circumstances have a bearing on their beliefs (Longino and Lennon 1997). Hekman (1997) argues that the feminist standpoint goes beneath the surface of appearances, by revealing concealed social relations. Harding (2004) argues that the feminist standpoint theory is more than an explanatory theory in the sense that it does not limit itself to the search for the salient voices of women as an oppressed group, but also guides feminist research. Hekman (1997:344) supports the centrality of women's experiences in research, arguing that "Women lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy".

Thus, the standpoint theory identifies certain perspectives as epistemically privileged. This implies that, because of their subordinate position in society, women are better positioned to understand and articulate how they are disadvantaged by patriarchy in their experiences. Women's experiences, under patriarchy form the basis of the feminist standpoint theory. This view links up with various strands of the Marxist epistemology, which argues that women have a different, and, by implication, deeper or more rooted view of the world because of their position in the social relations of reproduction and child rearing (McDowell, 1992). According to the feminist standpoint theory women have superior access to information about whose needs get better served under the patriarchal set up.

Although the feminist standpoint theory has had an immense contribution to feminist theory building it has its own flaws. Harding (2004:8) argues that the feminist standpoint theory has been accused of being essentialist, supposedly because it fails to account for the multiple feminisms, considering that there is no universal women's world. The theory has also been criticised for assuming universal knowledge about all women's problems. The position of women of colour regarding notions of "intersectionality" (Harding, 2004:8) has been particularly influential in challenging the assumptions of universality of knowledge about women. Women of colour view gender, race, class and other social factors as having a bearing on the situation of women, to an extent that universality is untenable. Harding (cited in McDowell, 1992:411) argues that the construction of knowledge recognises differences between women on the basis of class, age, ethnicity, sexuality and culture in an epistemology

of “permanent partiality”. This view alludes to a post-modern brand of feminism, which accentuates difference rather than universalism.

3.4 MULTIPLE FEMINISMS AND POSTMODERNISM

Multiple feminisms and postmodernism accentuate discourses of difference whereby they acknowledge difference rather than universalism. The discourse of postmodernism draws from theories such as Foucault’s which place emphasis on values, situatedness and the contestability of any particular claims to knowledge. Thus, Bordo (cited in McDowell, 1992:412) argues that the recognition of differences between women has led to the development of ‘gender scepticism’ (Bordo cited MacDowell, 1992:412. There are concerns that feminist scholarship has been largely dominated by Western feminists who claim to speak on behalf of feminists elsewhere and, yet, there is sufficient evidence to show that there is no coincidence of interests based on femaleness. A single feminist standpoint theory in the contemporary context is equally untenable because it fails to speak for women of colour, lesbians, Afro-feminists, northern and southern women (McDowell, 1992).

Furthermore, there is no longer a single unproblematized concept of patriarchy that transcends all research agendas, but rather a complex set of cross-cutting gender relations. McDowell (1992) argues that the criticism levelled against white feminists by women of colour takes away the common interest based on femaleness in all situations, thereby necessitating approaches to theory development that acknowledge the diversity of femaleness, appropriate circumstances and the possibility of alliances around specific issues. Thus, MacDowell (1992: 412) argues that “there is no longer a single unproblematized concept of patriarchy to uncover in our research, but rather a complex set of intercutting gender relations, specific to time and place.”

My study blends insights from both the standpoint theory and the multiple and post-modern feminist theories. My view is that informal cross-border women traders are a marginalised group whose work and contribution to the welfare of the society are neither recognised nor respected by the powers that be. My motive in researching on women cross-border traders stemmed from my desire to give voice to the ‘silent,’ while at the same time being aware of the fact that the common thread that runs through their experiences is that they are all likely to experience patriarchy, violence, and oppression at the hands of men.

Although all women are marginalised and vulnerable due to their embodiment, how exactly they experience this marginalisation and vulnerability, largely depend on the socio-cultural and economic locations of individual cross-border women traders. Post-modernist feminist scholars warn against the tendency to assume “a coincidence of interests based on... femaleness in all situations, but scholars must build theories appropriate to particular circumstances and political alliances around specific issues” (McDowell, 1992). Similarly, in this research, I was conscious of not generalising the experiences of the women cross-border traders because of their different social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

3.5 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study approached the research problem, at hand, from a feminist stand point, which places women at the centre of knowledge generation. As argued by Brayton (1997), feminist research is identified by its motives, aims and ideas in the research process. It investigates issues concerning women and is carried out by women for women (Harding, 1986). Wardsworth (2001) adds that feminist research is research invested in drawing on women’s lived experiences of oppression and subordination to men.

A feminist approach to knowledge-generation is premised on the assumption that women, the world over face some form of oppression or exploitation and what motivates feminist research is the need to get to the root of the cause of oppression of women with the ultimate aim of redressing it (Maguire cited in Brayton, 1997). The feminist approach is different from traditional methodologies in the sense that its agenda is inherently politically motivated and is sensitive about power imbalances between the researcher and subject.

In this study, the researcher explored the experiences of Zimbabwean cross-border women traders at the Zimbabwean and South Africa border in Beitbridge.

The assumption was that cross-border women traders although they have been able to negotiate their spaces across borders, in order to earn a living they are more likely to be disadvantaged in their migration experiences because of their gender. Feminist research calls for research that empowers women, and it is my desire to listen to women voices through narratives of their own experiences in informal cross-border trading migration. Traditional ways of generation of knowledge formulation are blamed for muting the voices of women through ignoring their experiences. Thus, exploring the border experiences of cross-border

women traders is one way of asserting their agency, and of creating opportunities for changing their situation. This study is a small effort towards filling the current knowledge gap on the migration experiences of cross-border women traders by seeking to understand the problems that they face at the border, and through employing feminist theories and methodological approaches to research that are acceptable in advancing the experiences of women.

As mentioned above, that the quest for objective truth in scientific knowledge, which seeks methods that quantify, measure or test and verify assumptions of positivism has been contested by feminist scholars. The belief that “science makes knowledge, practice uses it’ is an assumption of positivism, yet ‘scientific’ methods of investigation have great difficulty coping with the dynamic and complex social world of the human service” (Rein and White in Darlington and Scott, 2002:1). Neuman (2006) supports this view and notes that feminist research seeks to give women a voice with the intention to correcting the traditional formulation of knowledge, which is male biased. Oakley (1998) argues that situating feminist methodologies within the social context is the main reason why feminists contest the positivist stance.

As I went out into the field to carry out the study research, I remained fully conscious of the fact that it is important to interact with women so as to gain mutual trust from them, by establishing a relationship in which the women and the researcher would be in control and would treat each other as allies in the process of knowledge-.building. Thus, being sensitive to the ‘hierarchical situation’ that has been largely criticised for invalidating data outcomes was an essential part of the research (Oakley, 1998). I was also aware of the fact that, in carrying out this research, my primary concern was to hear silenced voices by taking into account the experiences of cross-border women traders.

3.6 METHODOLOGY

In this section, I look at methodologies considered in my approach to research. These methodologies were largely informed by the theories of research that have been discussed in the previous section. For a research that takes gender seriously my study was largely influenced by feminist theoretical frameworks namely Feminist epistemology, standpoint

theories and multiple stances of feminism, which emphasized on different situatedness of knowledge among women due to their locations. All methodological considerations in this research project are positioned within the feminist agenda of transforming knowledge production through anti-positivism in social research, and calling for subjective research processes. I have outlined discussions on the qualitative research method, positionality and reflexivity as well as ethical considerations that inform this research project.

3.6.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

“Although there are some signs of a new recognition within feminist social science of the usefulness of non-qualitative methods, both feminist methodology and feminist epistemology remain strongly founded in on qualitative methods,” (Oakley, 1998:716).

The above point is an insight of the extent to which feminist scholars argue for the use of qualitative methods in feminist research. Scholars are in agreement that the choice of a research method is largely dictated by the research problem at hand (Priest, 1996). In this study, the qualitative method was deemed appropriate and also the fact that it is the preferred method in feminist research. The Qualitative method is research that “elicits participant accounts of meaning experiences or perception” (De Vos et al cited in Oosthuizen, 2009:92). The feminist qualitative method is the preferred method because of its nature which allows for “exploring the full nature of a little understood phenomenon” (Polit and Hungler cited in Oosthuizen, 2009: 92). Oakley (1998:713) maintains that the qualitative method “acknowledges the authenticity of multiple viewpoints, the role of values, and the subjectivities of both researcher and researched.” From a feminist perspective, the quest for objective truth and value free science is problematic since it maintains distance between the researcher and the researched. Feminists advocate for methods that can validate women’s experiences through the interaction between the researcher and the researched.

Qualitative methodology lends itself well to feminist research because it seeks to understand those being studied from their perspective rather than from the researcher’s perspective (Gorman and Clayton, cited in Tyler, 2006: 107). The need for a research that can accommodate the experiences of women and the insider’s perspective motivated me to use feminist qualitative methods for this research. This position produces feminist research as

research advocating “an integrative, trans-disciplinary approach to knowledge which grounds theory contextually in the concrete reality of women’s everyday lives” (Oakley 1998:713). This also is in agreement with feminists who are interested in seeing research with or for and not about women. The qualitative method was best suited for gaining insights about the experiences of Zimbabwean cross-border women traders in the sense that meaning emerged from the participants themselves as they reconstructed their lived experiences in their social settings.

By its nature, the qualitative research design is more suited to conducting feminist research because its ultimate goal is to understand those being studied from their own perspectives rather than from an outsider perspective (Gormon and Clayton, 2006). Through the naturalist approach of qualitative research, I was able to present the experiences and perspectives of cross-border women traders as sincerely as possible (Esterberg 2002). The fact that the present study sought to generate ‘world views’ or ‘perspectives’ through discourse rather than generating numbers made qualitative research the most appropriate research design for this study.

As a researcher, I had an opportunity to get first-hand experiences of Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders through their own narrations and in their natural environment. Through the personal stories of informal cross-border women traders, I was able to capture and understand their world of reality. Denzin cited in Esterberg (2002:13) notes that qualitative research is grounded in the “behaviors, languages, definitions, attitudes, and feelings of the studied”. Through qualitative methods I was able to explore cross-border women traders’ experiences at the Beitbridge border post in depth, without having to predict or determine the flow of the narratives.

3.6.2 THE RESEARCHER’S POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY

“A reflexive research process can open up the research to more complex and nuanced understandings of issues, where boundaries between process and content can get blurred” (Sultana, 2007:376)

As mentioned above, a reflexive research process becomes particularly important to negotiate these hidden challenges between process and content of research. Reflexivity, according to Sultana (2007: 376), “involves reflection on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, and researcher’s

accountability in data collection and interpretation.” These are crucial aspects in research, which are usually taken for granted, but which have serious implications and connotations to the research. Being reflexive of my own positionality and power relations during the research process, brought an understanding of the hidden power dynamics that exist between the researcher and the researched. Patai mentions that, in as much as one would be conscious of empowering research methodologies, there is also a possibility that feminist researchers are unconsciously seductive towards their research subjects, raising their expectations and inducing dependency (cited in Macdowell 1992: 408).

The manner in which issues of concern are articulated by the researched to a large extent will build from how the researched relate to the positionality of the researcher. Thus, the researcher is allowed to insert ‘herself’ in the grids of power relations and how that influences methods interpretations and knowledge production in the research (Sultana, 2007). It is also important to bear in mind that it is easy to inadvertently generate expectations of positive intervention on behalf of the women being studied and, in some cases, as Stacey warned, lead to feelings of disappointment, and even betrayal. The challenge, however, is that there is no obvious way to resolve these problems (Stacey cited in MacDowell 1997:408).

The issue of representation in reflexivity and positionality, of which recently, the issue has become a concern for some scholars to dodge field work, especially, after the issue was raised by women of colour that, there has been biases by Western feminists purporting to be speaking ‘for’ women. Oldfield *et al.*, (2009:6) mention also the issues of re-representation as they argue that when writing it is important to question “particularly whom we write for, and why, as well as how we write.” It is an important concern as writing ‘with’ rather than writing ‘about’ is a challenge that scholars have taken up in recent years, in order to redress concerns about marginalisation, essentialisms and differences in representation.

3.6.3 RESEARCHERS’ PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

I am an African black feminist woman, and I am privileged to have gone through university education. Within popular and educational cultures with which I am familiar, discussion of class is usually couched in discourses concerning “privilege”. Coming from

background in which heteronormative conventions privilege marriage and child bearing as key markers of gendered authority for women, and having migration experience myself, with all the above experiences, I am aware of the ways in which gender dynamics can marginalize women. I am aware of the inequalities that exist in contemporary Southern African society, which perpetuate the norms of men's political, economic and social domination of women. I was, however, not aware of the myriad ways in which such norms would affect me as a researcher before I embarked on my work as a postgraduate student in Gender Studies.

One incident that I remember so vividly in my mind is of an encounter I had with one of the officials at the Cape Town Home Affairs Department. He nicely asked me what degree I was studying. I told him a Masters in Research in Gender Studies. Mentioning Gender Studies triggered an interesting debate before he served me. He questioned why Gender Studies had "a bias towards women" and asked why there were no studies on the empowerment of men. I tried as hard as possible to answer his questions before we laughed it off and I left. This was a quick reminder to me that the disciplinary area is inadequately conceptualized. Thus, each time I mention that I am an expert in Gender Studies, I should be able to explain a little bit, in order to broaden people's way of understanding of the subject.

Reflecting upon this experience suggested to me that, in one way or the other, I was likely to be interpreted as an activist, and that as a researcher, I was likely to be treated with suspicion, not only by men, but even by fellow women. As a result, I needed to be prepared to justify my interest in Gender studies and, from time to time, my motives would be kept under surveillance.

After I enrolled for my Honours Degree I was enthusiastic about the programme I was doing but to my surprise most people and friends I talked to about it, did not seem to have much respect for it. Again, this goes to suggest how patriarchal norms on the creation of credible knowledges are entrenched. One person even asked me if my postgraduate location in Gender Studies would not be more appropriate in a developed country, thus silently pointing out its "irrelevance" to African communities. This also enlightens me on how the journey on women emancipation and a community with no gender disparities is thorny and difficult due to hegemony that is so entrenched in all our ways of life.

Save for the mini-dissertations at undergraduate and Honours Degree in Gender Studies, I would not claim to have a lot of experience in research. I have not undertaken a

study on women informal cross-border traders before, but I have travelled and interacted with cross-border women traders to South Africa.

Over the past two years, on a monthly basis I have been travelling extensively by bus from South Africa to my home country Zimbabwe, through the Zimbabwe/South African Beitbridge border post. During my travels, I have encountered informal cross-border women traders with numerous stories to tell about their experiences at the border and this set me thinking. I developed an interest in women's informal cross border work, so much that at one point, I considered becoming an informal cross-border trader myself after I had left my job in 2011 to join my husband in South Africa. However, my interests in pursuing research and in the theoretical ideas which I have profiled in Chapter Two, led me to choose affiliation with a Masters level degree programme.

Being affiliated to the Gender Studies unit of the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Cape Town, and engaged with the work of the African Gender Institute (located, with Gender Studies), in the School has been particularly crucial for me, as it has afforded me the opportunity to understand the complex position of women within changing economic and political African contexts. I became more critical in questioning, and analyzing the gender dynamics within diverse settings and thematic areas, and explored the complex range of inequalities in the lives of black African women. I am now keener to research the notion of 'inequality' especially as I was brought up in a culture of patriarchal hegemony. It is true that from a very young age I questioned male domination of women, but because male domination of women was regarded as "common sense", the odds were always stacked against my theorization of the norms as "structural inequality", and I was left with very few opportunities to stand up for my ideas.

Each time I was in a bus, during my numerous travels, I observed that the number of women was greater than that of men and even at the border, I could see more women of different age groups busy having their passports stamped or declaring their commodities for trade. I became very interested in researching on their experiences, in relation to debates on the meaning of inequality. What I observed as the fortitude and feistiness of the cross-border women traders was a transformation of the stereotypical gender roles. Their strategic business sense, as I observed, also seemed to challenge dominant migration theories, which, for long, have placed women solely in the domestic sphere and, as I review in Chapter 2 as appendages of men.

At one point, when I was entering the South African side of the border, at the exit point, there was a laminated poster on the walls urging sexually abused women to come for support to a certain organization that was based in Musina. This poster further deepened my interest in cross-border women traders' experiences. It gave me an insight that these experiences involved more than could meet the eye of a fellow travelling companion, like myself and that serious research was needed, in order to see beneath the surface became obvious to me.

When I was admitted to the Masters in Gender Studies in the African Gender Institute, I thought to myself this was the right opportunity for me to pursue my interest. I started thinking about those stories that I had heard from informal cross border women traders and felt the drive to hear more of these stories. I felt that studying cross-border women traders would help bring to the spotlight the significant contribution women were making to their families, as well as to the nation at large. It is against this back ground that I took an interest in the gendered experiences of informal cross-border women traders as a result of the feminisation of poverty.

Being a black African woman feminist, with a heterosexual background, and privileged to have been educated up to university level and a student in the African Gender Institute located at Africa's top institution of higher learning, naturally positions me in the class of privileged people. My world view was bound to differ considerably from that of the participants I was researching on. My social position vis-à-vis that of the informal cross-border women traders who participated in my research, was bound by the way I thought and talked about issues. As I conducted this research, my experiences as a privileged black woman no doubt had an effect on this research. In order to minimise the influence of my background and class position, every effort was made to remind myself of this reality. In my research, I interviewed women, so I was aware of Patai's observations that when researching, one is likely to find oneself in circumstances where one is more powerful, more affluent and has greater access to a range of resources than the resources of those being researched (MacDowell, 1992: 408).

Apart from my social position in relation to that of my respondents, I also thought about the fact that my research site, Harare, in Zimbabwe, is my home city and this situated me in an ambivalent position, I became an insider as well as an outsider. To begin with, as a woman who has been travelling frequently by bus between Zimbabwe and South Africa

(albeit for different reasons), sharing the same nationality, language, identity and cultural values with the respondents, located me appropriately in the world of my respondents. Also, being able to speak their language, located me very well in the world of the subjects. However, merely telling them that I was researching on gender, let alone doing a Masters' degree at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, accentuated my privileged social position thereby making me an outsider. Mentioning the word gender alienated me from my respondents because they became sceptical about my motive, particularly in the context of the conservative and patriarchal society that Zimbabwe is. Given the entrenched patriarchal values in the Zimbabwean society, mentioning the word "gender" raised some eyebrows. Women, particularly married ones, became suspicious about my reasons for wanting to interview women only and not their husbands. This is because the issue of gender has been politicised so much in public spaces such as the church and the media. However, revealing that I was married helped to soften their scepticism, and made me an insider again.

This meant that throughout the research process, I was an outsider, an insider both an insider and outsider (Mullings, cited in Sultana, 2007). Although most of the places I visited during my field work were familiar (Harare and Bulawayo), some of the participants treated me with suspicion, wanting to figure out if there were no hidden political motives behind my research, particularly in view of the fact that a national election was looming. Conducting interviews in Bulawayo made me either an outsider or an insider as I could not speak the first language of the respondents Ndebele but we all identified as Zimbabweans. As I embarked on the field work, I reflected on possible ways of overcoming the above obstacles, tensions and challenges.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When I went out for field work as a feminist researcher, it was important for me to take into consideration all ethical procedures that inform a feminist research. Ruane (2005) argues that when carrying out research, it must be the researcher's priority to abide by standards of professionalism and honesty, with the aim of earning respect and trust from the public in general and the participants in particular.

Ethics are principles and guidelines that govern ways of conducting research, and ethical issues raise concerns, dilemmas and conflicts that may arise in carrying out a proper

research (Christian, 2003). The fact that in my research I was dealing with human subjects, namely, cross-border women traders was enough to pose some ethical challenges and dilemmas on my part as a researcher. Watts (2006: 386) points out that the main ethical issues when carrying out research are to do no harm, do good and an acknowledgement by the researcher of the right to self-determination on the part of subjects. This leads to three guiding ethical research principles, namely consent, confidentiality and conduct of research.

My research was, therefore, guided by the need to secure the informed consent of the respondents, confidentiality and to conduct the research in a professional manner. I was aware of the fact that I needed to do good and not to harm the participants in my research. To that end, I took time to secure the informed consent of my respondents and as well as to explain the objectives of my research to make sure that their participation was voluntary and not out of coercion.

I was also aware of the fact that it was not enough to get the respondents' consent, than they were obliged to know what they were expected to do and that it was their right to withdraw from the interviews at any stage if they so wished. I also requested permission to audio record them by making them sign consent forms, and I adequately explained that this was to facilitate easy transcription. I also explained to the participants that they were free to withdraw from the recording at any time if they felt uncomfortable. One respondent terminated the interview saying she was not comfortable with the recording, further adding that she could be arrested by Mugabe's people if it was discovered that it was her. I just laughed and left. In order to ensure confidentiality, participants were requested to have the interviews in places where they could speak freely.

In addition, I assured participants that transcribed data would only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor only. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, their names were omitted in my findings. Instead of using their actual names, I used codes like Cross- border trader 1 (cbt1) to represent their views and names were completely excluded.

As a researcher, I was guided by moral principles. Even if the participants were unaware of their rights or were not concerned about them it was my duty to draw their attention to them. I was also aware of the fact that my moral challenge was not only to attend to ethical considerations, but also to empower them by making them actively involved in the research and by giving them some form of control to decide the time and place to meet for the interview (Christian, 2003). This is in line with Oakley's argument that the unequal power

relationship is in conflict with the feminist moral obligation to treat women as one would want to be treated (Oakley 1998: 711).

It was imperative to ensure that there were no potential risks to participants, and that if there were any potential benefits of the research, these needed to outweigh the risks, and that measures were to be taken to minimize those risks (Ruane, 2005).

The risks were mostly on issues of anonymity and how I would handle the recordings of my interviews. Being guided by the moral issue of confidentiality, my interview transcripts were accessed by my supervisor and myself only. Throughout the research, I was guided by the moral obligation to be as honest as possible in my endeavor to represent the views of cross-border women traders pertaining to their experiences at the Zimbabwean/South African Beitbridge border.

3.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Burns and Grove cited in Oosthuizen (2009: 88), “the design of a study is the end result of a series of decisions made by the researcher concerning how the study will be conducted”. In this section I have outlined the research design of this project and how I conducted the research process step by step. The sampling procedures, in-depth interviews and data analysis are discussed in detail.

3.8.1 SAMPLING

Cohen *et al.*, (2007) argue that good research is not always a result of using appropriate methods and the use of correct instruments, but it also depends on how suitable the sampling strategy is. Esterberg (2002) adds that the qualitative method is interested more in grasping details about cases. Therefore, the choice of the appropriate sample was crucial in ensuring that border experiences of Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders were obtained. The aim of the study was not only to generate findings that could be generalized within the population being studied, but also to obtain insights on the experiences of cross-border women traders so as to facilitate a conversation on the plight of cross-border women traders. The study deployed a snowball or chain sampling strategy, which is a non-probability

sampling strategy. This strategy enabled the researcher to access participants who are competent in articulating the issues at hand using the most cost effective means.

According to Patton (1990:183) a snowball sample “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is good examples for study, good interview subjects”. The practical difficulties of accessing cross-border women, who are scattered all over the country and the need to select participants who were not only willing to participate in the study, but also competent in articulating issues in a manner that enabled the researcher to obtain rich data, necessitated the use of snowball sampling procedure. Thus participants were selected using the referral system, whereby the researcher relied on her networks and personal contacts to access initial participants who would be requested to refer her to “others like them”. The selection and interviews went on until the researcher was satisfied that no new perspectives about the issues at hand were emerging. The researcher interviewed 11 informal cross-border women traders in eight in Harare, two in Bulawayo and one in Cape Town. Seven (7) of the respondents were interviewed during my first trip to the research site. After discussing with my supervisor and advising me that I needed more data I managed to interview one respondent in Cape Town before going back to the research site again. This time around, I decided to focus more on the specific experiences of cross-border traders at the border. I managed to interview one more woman respondent in Harare before leaving for Bulawayo, Zimbabwe’s second largest city, to attend to a family social problem. In Bulawayo, I managed to interview two more respondents, bringing the total of the respondents to eleven. My last interview was held on the 10th of September 2013.

As mentioned above, interviews were conducted mainly in the home setting to enable participants to talk freely and answer questions without feeling that they are being put under pressure. Only one participant (the one in Cape Town), was interviewed outside the home setting because it was convenient for both the researcher and the participant to meet in the Cape Town central Business District because of the distance involved. However, the problem was that there was a lot of noise and distractions because the place was an open space, which is partly why the home setting was deemed more suitable for conducting the interviews. The feminist research perspective advocates for sensitivity on the part of the researcher and conducting interviews in a setting that suits the participants is part of this sensitivity.

The idea behind having a small sample such as the one used in this study is that the goal of qualitative research is not representation, but a generation of insights on a particular issue or phenomena. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007:247) advise that “sample sizes should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data” was the main guiding principle in this research. Although snowball sampling has been criticized for being biased, it is the best when one wants to access populations that are scattered throughout the country, such as informal cross-border women traders. Using probability sampling procedures to access such populations would not only be impractical, but also an extremely expensive as well as time consuming under taking.

3.9 INDEPTH INTERVIEWS

This study employed the qualitative methodology, in order to obtain empirical data. In particular, the study utilised in-depth interviews with eleven (11) cross-border women traders. All the respondents (except one), were interviewed in their homes which is consistent with the advice of feminist scholars that interviews should be conducted in a relaxed environment.

Bogdan and Biklen (cited in Scheurich, 1997:61) define an interview as a “purposeful conversation, usually between two people.... that is directed by one in order to get information”. The in-depth technique helped me to delve deeper into the experiences of cross-border women traders than any other method of data collection would have allowed me. Tyler (2006:110) notes that in-depth interviews facilitate immediate responses to questions and can allow both the researcher and the respondents to explore issues in a manner that can resolve any ambiguities as well as providing conducive platform for data collection. In-depth interviews accorded the respondents an opportunity to express their views and feelings and to tell their stories as freely as possible. Patton (cited in Esterberg, 2002) supports this view, noting that not all aspects which we really would want to know about are observable. Thus, at some point, people are interviewed to gain some insights on how they perceive life from their own point of view.

The exploratory nature of the study lends itself well to the use of interviews as a way of obtaining data. Gray (2005) argues that interviews offer the researcher an opportunity to delve into subjective meanings about issues in a manner in which questionnaires would not be able to achieve. Women cross-border traders were able to elaborate on their experiences at

the border, through the researcher's probing. I could also revisit some issues which had not been satisfactorily addressed, in order to bring about clarity. I was able to obtain direct quotes on the experiences of cross-border traders.

Talking to Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders, face-to face and recording their stories in their own words came closest to constructing the experiences of cross-border women traders at the border. Getting their perspectives on their experiences through self-reported stories is extremely important in feminist research.

Although the interview technique is regarded as the appropriate technique for gathering data in feminist research, there were challenges linked to time, costs and elements of personal bias. Tyler (2006) notes that interviews are time-consuming and also prone to bias. In addition, engaging in the multi-tasks required in interviewing such as taking down notes, asking questions, probing and listening at the same, time was challenging on my part, especially in the first two interviews, however my skills improved with practice. Another challenge, but an interesting observation, was that each interview was unique, posing different challenges from the previous one. This resulted in me having little control of the interview process as I could not plan ahead for the next interview. This required me to be skilful and to think about how best I could negotiate my way to ensure a fruitful interview. Roulston *et al.*, 's (2003) observation that unanticipated and disconcerting events can happen prior and during interviews, resulting in unexpected participant behaviour, is quite valid and poignant.

Similarly, I experienced challenges of unexpected participant behaviour in that some respondents stopped the interview to attend to their babies. In such situations, I was forced to stop the interview to allow for the mother to attend to the baby who would be crying uncontrollably because of prolonged lack of attention. Others ate during the interviews after apologising that they had gone for a long time without eating and that, if I didn't mind they could eat whilst having the interview. Another challenge was that I was asked questions by the respondents, some of which I could not readily answer. There were moments I was made to feel uncomfortable as I could not predict what I would be asked in the course of the interviews.

Although I initially meant to conduct my interviews at the Beitbridge border post, after discussing with supervisor, we agreed that the border would not be a convenient place since cross-border women traders would be too busy and racing against time. I later on

decided to do the interviews in a place such as home setting where the women would be in a relaxed state.

Harare was chosen because it is the capital city and also because it has the highest number of buses that go to South Africa. It was also suitable because it was the home of the researcher. As I embarked on the journey to Harare, I really looked forward to having the interviews since it was my first time to conduct interviews. When I got to Harare I asked my friends and relatives if they knew any cross-border women traders going to South Africa. A friend of mine introduced me to a certain woman who was involved in cross-border trading. She was young and very friendly. We agreed on the day and time we could have our interview. My first interview was on the 17th of June. Before the interview, I was nervous about what was going to happen. Armed with my notebook and audio-recorder, I went to the women informal cross-border trade's house. As I was probing, I jotted down some notes, Taking notes made it difficult for me to listen to the story attentively and at times missed out on aspects that needed further probing. I also kept checking on my recorder just in case it had stopped recording. I just had this feeling that probably the recorder might not be recording. My interview guide, however, helped me a lot to remain focused and to keep up on track.

My first interview made me realise that when we were learning about interviewing during our Research Methods module at Africa Gender Institute, it appeared very easy, but the practice turned out to be very different for me. The consolation was that my interviewing skills got better with each interview that I conducted. I also realised that my interviews were not immune to Claire's observation "on the complexity of the interview process" (cited in Roulston et al 2003:644).

Another significant point to note relates to the timing of the interviews. My interviews coincided with the country's 2013 harmonised elections. In Zimbabwe, when it is time for elections, people are very sensitive about whom they talk to and what they can talk about. People tend to be very suspicious of strangers, let alone people who claim to be doing research. Because of the country's history of political violence, people are not very free to discuss issues, let alone entertain strangers. Because of the polarisation mentioned above, some respondents wanted me to disclose my political affiliation (although they did this in a subtle way) so as to guarantee their safety but I however avoided political issues by emphasising the academic nature of my work.

Because of the political climate, I knew that before the interviews, I should be prepared to answer one or two questions before getting into the actual interview itself. Although I did not have much to worry about because my research was for academic purposes, I did not anticipate questions about enrolling in South African universities and fees, but I tried as much as possible to answer them to the best of my knowledge and ability. Thus, before the interviews, I was prepared to engage in some dialogue of some kind as a way of gaining entry into the actual interview.

Another challenge I faced, was that I did not anticipate that some of my respondents would fail to honour appointments for interviews. I realised that cross-border women traders were very busy people. Although they did not have any problems in participating in the interviews willingly, their busy schedules sometimes made it difficult to fulfil appointments.

The common household work for any women, plus the cross-border work, of selling their merchandise and collecting money, consumed most of their time. Someone would just send a text message to me saying “Sorry an unexpected business matter arose, so I had to rush somewhere” or “I thought I could go out and come back on time but unfortunately I couldn’t make it”. There were also times when I needed to go more than twice to their homes, but what this meant is I ended up missing other appointments.

Contributing to the women cross-border traders’ busy schedule was also the problem of a water shortage for weeks in most of Harare’s high density suburbs. Most women were out queuing for water at the nearest borehole. This also affected me personally as I had also to go and fetch water as well. Most of the interviews were carried out Shona, which is also my mother language but others were done in English. However, I realised that some respondents who opted for English were not articulate in narrating their stories unlike those who opted to use their mother language. The two interviews conducted in Bulawayo were done in English because I am not fluent in Ndebele, the mother language of the two cross-border traders I interviewed there. In the end four interviews were carried out in English.

The interview guide helped me to remain focused, especially after being immersed in the narratives of the women to the extent that by the time the respondent finished relating her story I would feel that I had really been taken on board. The interview guide, therefore, helped me to revisit those questions, which I felt had been left out or had not been covered adequately. In order to capture as much detailed information as I could, and also to make sure

that the views of the respondents were represented accurately, I audio-recorded the interviews. I took notes as back-up in case technology failed me.

A clear advantage of the in-depth interviews was their flexibility in the sense that respondents were able to tell the stories in their own words. This is what feminist research advocates for. Respondents exercised some form of power as they were in control of the proceedings of the interview.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

3.10.1 RECORDING AND TRANSCRIPTION

The data analysis process started the moment I began collecting data during the interview process. As I have already mentioned, I voice-recorded all the interviews while at the same time taking notes. This process entailed some form of data analysis in a way because I took note of emerging thematic patterns. After the interviews, I transcribed them. It was an exciting experience to realise that writing down a conversation is different from listening to it as a result writing proved to be a tiring experience for me, I tried as much as possible to write down what transpired in the recordings and to make my transcripts a true representation of the recorded interviews. I also observed that no matter how hard I tried, there are some aspects of recordings which disappear with the transcription. In the end the effort was however worthwhile.

3.10.2 THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

The data was analysed using qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is one way of analysing data founded in Berelson's ideas of a method of research that looks at documents. Cavanaghs notes that "Through content analysis words are distilled into fewer content related categories.. it is assumed that when classified into the same categories, words,

phrases and sentences which share the same meaning” (Cavanaghs cited in Elo and Kyngas 2008:108). Content analysis seeks to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis are categories describing the phenomenon with the intention of building up conceptual categories. It is concerned with meanings, intentions, consequences and context (Downe-Wamboldt cited in Elo and Kyngas, 2008:108).

The first level of data analysis started the very moment I began transcribing my interviews. Gray (2005) argues that in analysing data, the researcher seeks to find consistency in the themes and patterns so that generalizations can be made relating to the theories or the relevant body of constructs. Transcribed data was coded thematically in the form of narratives and descriptions. From the narrative descriptions, recurring themes were identified and analysed using the interpretive approach.

Using thematic content analysis helped me to do the process of analysis using the following stages: preparation, organizing and reporting. After transcribing the data, I identified recurring themes from the data as a whole, I organised my data, and after making sense out it I started analysing. I open coded the data by writing headings on the data that supported a particular theme. I rigorously went through the data several times to try and describe every aspect of the content, I wrote as many headings as I could to make sure that I did not leave out important themes recurring in the transcriptions. As I identified my themes, I grouped them together and it is during this process that I realized some themes were similar and needed to be collapsed under one theme. Those which were different stood distinctly.

As I categorised my data I observed an important point made by Dey (cited in Elo and Kyngash 2008:111) that creating thematic categories is not a question of grouping together similar observations or those which are related, but it is about classifying data that belong to a particular group together. These categories became thick data that I used to describe a phenomenon (Cavanagh in Elo and Kyngash 2008: 111). The recurring themes I identified form the data were grouped under the following categories as indicated in below:

THEMES

THEME	Comments
Opportunities	- A livelihood; economic independence/autonomy; a source of employment for women.

Vulnerabilities	<p>- Vulnerabilities of women in terms of their business at the border: delays; confiscation of goods; restriction of goods; exposure to corruption by officials through regulatory obstacles.</p> <p>-Vulnerabilities of women at the border as a result of their embodiment: harassment by police, custom official and immigration officials-verbal, physical and sexual abuse, thieves, mugging, crime, lack of sanitation.</p>
Strategies of sustaining the cross-border trade.	<p>-strategies of sustaining cross-border trade and suggestions by cross-border women traders respectively: sharing of goods among women cross-border traders to avoid duty payment, paying bribes to facilitate smuggling, having good relationships with bus crew members, being confident.</p> <p>-sustainable strategies and suggestions that could redress the above highlighted vulnerabilities; women cross-border traders pointed out that there was need for responsible authorities to address their concerns and there was need for an organization on of women cross-border traders to represent their concerns,</p>

Since the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, the credibility of the methods of data collection and analysis would largely depend on my competence and thoroughness in explicating the themes and interpreting the data based on the theories informing my study.

3.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed my methodological considerations in my journey of capturing the narratives of Zimbabwe cross-border women traders. I examined the feminist theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform my research project that is the feminist epistemologies, and how they guided this research process. I also engaged with approaches and the research design underpinning this study, by focussing on the realities and practicalities of the sampling procedures and how the indepth interviews were conducted as a means of collecting data. I reflected on my positionality, and how I consciously negotiated the issues of power dynamics between the researcher and the participants and the ethics that guided my research. I also discussed how the data was coded and analysed using thematic

content analysis. In the next three chapters I present any analysis of the findings of the study by focussing on the main themes which emerged from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR:

INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE: OPPORTUNITIES AND REWARDS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the key findings emerging from the interviews with informal cross-border traders. The theoretical premise of this thesis is that there is tension between theories that suggest that cross-border trading offers opportunities to cross-border women traders, but at the same time, that the trade poses unsustainable risks and hazards for cross-border women traders. The analysis of the material, thus, works with themes arising from both these theoretical positions, in order to explore further the dynamics of the tension between gendered ‘opportunities’ and ‘risks’ for women.

The first analytic chapter focuses on the participants’ representation of their opportunities. It develops sub-themes grounded on these representations. While the representation of experiences of the Beitbridge crossing-point was my original focus, the sub-themes which emerged during the interviews on these experiences went beyond the immediacy of a concrete ‘crossing point’

As I have already mentioned above, this thesis explores the tension between two theories, the theory that suggests that cross-border trade is helpful to women is discussed in this chapter while the theory that suggests that cross border trading is harmful to cross-border women trades will be discussed in the next chapter In Chapter 6 I explore the tension between opportunities created by informal cross-border trade and the challenges faced by women in their day-to-day experiences of crossing the border. Empowerment is, thus, been discussed under the prism of opportunities and rewards that informal cross-border trade offers to women in this chapter.

4.2 CROSS BORDER TRADING AND THE POLITICS OF SURVIVAL

“Before I started the cross-border trade business I was lodging a house, the finances were not balancing, my husband’s salary was not enough but after I joined cross-border trade our life started improving things started getting better”. (cbt7)

The above statements show that Informal cross border trading, as a livelihood strategy has unlocked a number of opportunities for women in Zimbabwe, particularly in the face of the debilitating economic crises facing the country. All the respondents pointed out that Informal cross-border trading had brought immense economic relief in their lives. One respondent had this to say:

“When I started participating in informal cross border trading things were really tight if not tighter. The situation was so bad that I had to do something”. (cb2).

All cross-border women traders interviewed reported that, due to cross-border trading, they were now able to meet the financial obligations of their families, which they could not do before they started the cross-border trade business. Most of the respondents in the study indicated that they are now able to meet most basic needs like buying food stuffs, groceries, clothes, paying rentals and water and electricity bills, paying school fees for their children, and furnishing their homes. The range of opportunities availed to women through informal cross-border trading are clearly shown by the statements below:

“Yeah, cross-border trading, is very helpful to women because it makes it possible to buy your groceries, you can buy clothes, everything for the kids, and for myself, even furniture. Recently I was buying building materials. I am building a house there in Ushewokunze, so most of the building material I bought it using that money”. (cbt3).

“The salary my husband is getting is not enough to feed his family so I use my money from cross-border trading to help buy food, pay fees for my son and also to buy household furniture, like I have bought myself a fridge, television and a television stand” (cbt11).

“Last year I managed to put a prefabricated wall around this house out of the proceeds of the cross-border business. This I could not have done if it was not for the profits. And also I can afford to buy groceries for my children at their schools. Of course the father has been paying fees here and there but I also chip in. I also help him to buy uniforms and food like this time I am the one who paid the fees for my last born. The first born is in South Africa where he joined a soccer academy and I can manage to send for his fees on a monthly basis”. (cbt5)

“Some of it I use for rent because I am a lodger. I also use some of it for bills, food, fees. I always make sure that I have enough left to go back and buy more goods”. (cbt6)

“I use it for different purposes, like fees for my children, food, and fuel and servicing of my car”. (cbt4)

Apart from the provision of other necessities of life, informal cross border trading has improved the food security situation in the country in the sense that women are able to bring all kinds of food stuffs from South Africa. This is also consistent with the observation made by Crush *et al*, (2005) that informal cross-border trade is crucial for the transfer of goods and commodities in the Southern African region, thereby guaranteeing food security to the region, and, consequently, the alleviation of poverty in general. Rugube and Matshe (2011) concur with this view, pointing out that informal cross border trade creates regional markets for goods and services which improve the livelihoods of Africans on the continent.

However, it is worth pointing out that, although food insecurity arising from the economic crisis has been the major motivation for women cross-border traders, findings from the study show that their accomplishments have gone beyond the provision of basic family necessities. For instance, some respondents reported that they have been able to venture into developmental projects such as building houses, acquiring stands, and putting pre-fabricated walls around their houses and other projects that improve the structures of where they live.

Proceeds from cross-border trading have also enabled some of the respondents to take up responsibilities that were previously preserved for men, such as buying housing stands, or building houses. Two of the respondents said that they had ventured into projects of building houses using proceeds from informal cross-border trading. One respondent, (cbt3), above, mentioned that she was in the process of building a house in one of the high density suburbs in Harare. Regarding the new responsibilities assumed by women, one respondent said she had to step into the shoes of her husband after he had been retrenched from his job. She had this to say:

“I am now the breadwinner because my husband is not working. As you know very well when a company close, a person will leave without anything. So from the time that my husband lost his job I managed to build two more rooms and extended my bedroom and lounge. And, also, I am sending my child to a boarding school. I pay his school fees and also groceries”. (cbt7)

This shows that cross-border trading has enabled women to transcend the limits set by society and the economy. It is, however, important to note that, although women have assumed responsibilities that are traditionally the preserve of men, they still view themselves

more as helpers than principals. This is clearly shown in my conversation with some of the respondents written below:

“Yeah, I am there to assist, because at times with food stuffs, it won’t be really enough, after paying rent, after paying the bills, you need transport, you need this and that, so I have to chip in here and there”. (cbt2)

SE: So can we say now you are sharing financial responsibilities with your husband or you have taken over the financial burden yourself?

CBT4: We will just be helping one another. If there is anything that needs money we just work together. I cannot take the husband’s responsibility and make it mine. If I did that God will punish me.

However, by stepping into the shoes of their husbands, women are not necessarily challenging the position of men, but rather complementing it. The statement that “if I did that God will punish me”, (cbt4 above), shows how patriarchy is naturalised through discourse and religion in the sense that women still view the position of men as breadwinners as God ordained.

Thus, their narratives are often characterised by discourses that seek to incorporate men rather than challenge them. This is consistent with the observation by Deustch (2007:110) who says that even where women make an important contribution to the economy, women still view themselves as “helpers to their husbands”. These hegemonic gender beliefs which are embedded in culture and everyday practice have the potential to undermine alternative beliefs about gender. Ridgeway (2009:150) clearly underscores this view when he says that the content of these hegemonic “...gender beliefs, while they purport to be universal depictions of the sexes, in fact represent most clearly the experiences and understandings of gender by dominant groups in society-those who most powerfully shape our institutions.”

Although the majority of respondents view themselves as merely complementing their spouses, there are some who, due to circumstances such as divorce, have assumed the principal role of being a breadwinner in the absence of the husband. One respondent who said she was a divorcee and a foster parent, said she was able to augment her meagre salary. She had this to say:

“My first marriage failed, that was in Chipinge, then I came back here in Harare and right now, unfortunately, I don’t have kids of my own but I am a foster parent of three children”. (cbt3)

Another respondent who said that her husband had deserted their matrimonial home for another wife, said that life became difficult for her after the husband left and she decided to join informal cross-border trading to augment her paltry salary. She explained thus:

“Yeah, like things were really tough for me, financial constraints coupled with social problems. The salary was no longer adequate. My husband had moved out to stay with another woman. Then I decided to venture into cross-border trading”. (cbt5)

The above statements suggest that women have become much more than breadwinners as they are disaggregating the work of ‘breadwinning’, and placing that work within the narrative of gendered family negotiations, in which the ‘men’ and ‘children’ play different roles. However as a result of divorce, cross-border women traders are now forced to carry out the duties of the ‘father’ and ‘mother’, an arrangement that subverts the traditional family set up, whereby women and men perform different roles, thus leaving women more burdened, rather than empowering them.

4.3 FINANCIAL AUTONOMY

Informal cross-border trade enabled some interviewees to become financially independent as they are no longer dependent on their husbands for everything they require. Some respondents said that their dream of becoming financially independent had been jeopardised by their husbands who were influenced by the stigmatisation of informal cross border traders who were labelled as prostitutes. She had this to say:

Initially my husband was very sceptical about this cross-border trading business because there are stories about cross border women being prostitutes and stuff like that. (cbt2)

One respondent pointed out that she has always had a desire to do something that would generate income for herself and her family, but this desire was jeopardised by her husband who would not allow her to venture into cross-border trade. The moment her husband allowed her into cross-border trading, it was a dream come true for her and an opportunity to show her potential and capabilities as a woman. The following statements are enlightening in this regard:

“Things were getting tight in Zimbabwe that was in 2002. In fact before that I had always wanted to but my husband would not allow me. He is a truck driver but still I managed to get myself a passport. It was after things were getting tough in Zimbabwe, when we survived on black tea with mealie rice that one day he just came and said I have had a second thought about you going to South Africa and also if I die then it means you won’t be able to survive with your children so I think it’s better you start something else. At first I wanted to refuse but after getting advice from friends I felt it was a great opportunity for me to show my capabilities as a woman and I really wanted to show him I had potential and for sure I did. The other time he came back home after being away on business he found drastic changes in the house I had painted the house inside and outside put tiles on the floor. For sure he was pleased and could not believe it was my work from cross-border proceeds. I wanted to prove a point that I was capable as woman. From there after, my husband is always encouraging me even if I don’t have enough money he will always assist”. (cbt9)

It is ironic that some women gained their economic independence due to worsening economic hardships after economic hardships compelled their husbands to let them join cross border trading. All married respondents concurred that they no longer depended on their husbands’ incomes for personal and family needs. It could also be argued that economic hardships challenged the dominant masculine identities, whereby men are constructed as independent, powerful and breadwinners with a stable income. While economic hardships may bring about financial autonomy to women, men may, as argued by Matshaka “experience a disjuncture between the dominant patriarchal discourses which construct them as bread winners with access to a steady income in their lived experience” (Matshaka, 2009:72).

The emasculation of women by economic hardships means that they have to defer some of their traditional roles, which confine them to the domestic sphere. Through cross-border trade, women have been drawn to the public domain where they have gained financial autonomy. Thus, all married participants indicated that they no longer depend on their husbands’ incomes for personal and family needs, and one cross-border trader had this to say:

“Yeah, for some things yes, you don’t have to depend on someone, like if I want to do my hair I don’t have to wait, I will just take the money then go to the salon if there are functions like wedding contributions at church you don’t have to ask anyone, you just take the money you have and pay” (cbt10).

Most respondents pointed out that they have been able to venture into big projects in their own right such as building houses, and some respondents are proud that they have acquired house hold property in their names for example furniture like stoves, television sets, refrigerators which they buy from South Africa. This respondent had the following to say;

“..... like I have bought myself a fridge, television and a television stand. I really feel good”. (cbt11)

Some respondents said, through informal cross border trading, they were able to raise their fashion tastes and those of their children with nice smart and fashionable clothes from South Africa.

“Our children also enjoy the benefits of fashion clothing from South Africa. We also bring clothing for them that raise their fashion tastes and they like it so everyone in the family is benefiting from cross-border trading”. (cbt9)

“As we will be travelling to Musina we also buy ourselves nice and fashionable clothing”. (cbt8)

It is instructive to note that informal cross border women traders view their business as not only bringing about financial autonomy, but also a way of enhancing their upward social class mobility seen in the fact that they are able to raise their standard of living above that of the average Zimbabwean household.

It is, however, important to note that even though some women are enjoying financial independence as a result of the informal cross border trade this autonomy is regulated by gendered power relations in the sense that their choices in terms of how to use their money are determined by family needs rather than by personal choices and preferences. One respondent had this to say in relation to this point:

“If it wasn't for the economic hardships maybe I would be really be independent. Maybe I would be able to use my money for as I please. You know I need this type of plates, I need this type of kitchen unit, this type of stove. I need to change my stuff. But you can't really do it with these hardships. Not that he says you have to do this but personally you feel like this is my family even If I don't chip in, in a way, who am I fixing. I will be fixing myself”. (cbt2)

Thus, economic hardships are denying women independence on how to use their proceeds from cross-border trading This statement is a also a critique of women's financial

autonomy, particularly married women, in the sense that their economic independence only goes as far as complementing the duties of their husbands, who would have been 'emasculated' by economic hardships in a capitalist economy.

What is instructive to note is that the interviews suggest that the financial autonomy that married women have gained as a result of participating in cross-border trade revolves around the domestic sphere. One respondent below mentioned how lines are drawn for her by her husband, in order for her to participate in cross-border trading, an indication that although women's interests are served through their participation in economically empowering activities, it is men who stand to gain the most. As long as women's financial independence is confined to the domestic, home and family, it means that even if women venture into economically empowering activities, their husbands, directly or indirectly have control on how the proceeds should be used. Women are still subordinated to men in the sense that their participation in the informal cross border trade is at the mercy of men who, in some instances, are the ones who draw the lines in the sand. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

SE: Did you face any resistance from your husband when you wanted to venture into cross border trading?

CBT2 No, but for my husband to allow me to do that we had to set some rules.

SE: So you really follow the rules?

CBT2: Yeah, for one to stay married. That's why I just follow the rules because, you know, if you want to stay married, you have to follow the rules.

The above excerpt is testimony that narratives on women's financial autonomy are measured in so far as it is regulated by gender power relations whereby women are subordinated to their men and their choices are defined by the elasticity of patriarchal control.

Apart from financial autonomy, cross border trading has also created opportunities for women to network. For instance, some respondents pointed out they were able to save money from cross border trading by joining clubs which are commonly referred to as "round table money clubs" in these clubs they give each a fixed monthly contribution every month and rotate until everyone has had a chance to be given money. The success of these clubs is a clear demonstration that cross-border trading has been beneficial to most women. The following quotation demonstrates the financial opportunities created by proceeds from cross-border trading:

“We run a money club called a round –table. We give each other money on a rotational basis. You go to South Africa you buy your stuff and come and sell and at the end of the month out of the money that you make each one of us gives one member of the money club USD200 and we rotate like that. We used to be 12 but now we are 5 others dropped out. So a person gets USD1000 including her USD200 after 5 months”. (cbt1)

“I do clubs and also next year I would like to do a Higher National Diploma so I am saving for my fees next year. I contribute about 100 dollars a month but may be next year I will go to a bigger one as I am hoping to generate more income”. (cbt10)

The money clubs are a powerful investment for the women club members, as they provide opportunities to develop the ‘business’ of cross-border trading collectively. Thus the power of trading with more money can only happen in a collective manner. Cross-border women traders are able to save and invest large amounts of money into the business and this yields good returns in profit, and, in the end through collective effort, they will each be handling large sums of money, which allows for larger investments.

Apart from enhancing their businesses, money clubs also promote networking among informal cross-border traders. Networking enables women to help each other in times of need or exchange and share ideas about their ‘business’ of cross- border trading. Some respondents revealed how, through their networks they have helped each other to avoid paying duty by sharing goods at the border. One respondent had this to say:

At times I stick to the permitted value of goods and at times I pay duty so it just depends with the orders I will be having. But at times even if I exceed I don’t pay duty because there will be other cross-border traders in the bus so we just exchange I give my other pairs of something to someone then I get her hand bags if I don’t have any. We help each other and there is unity and cooperation among cross-border traders. That’s how we do it and easily cross with goods exceeding the value of R2500. (cbt10).

However, it is important to note that the value of networks created through interactions in the informal cross border trade business goes beyond simply helping one another in their business. They also become handy in other spheres of life. One respondent mentioned that, through the cross border trade work, she was able to interact and get connected to people from diverse backgrounds to such an extent that she was able to submit her Curriculum Vitae for a job through such connections and networks and was fortunate to get the job. She ended up working as a result of connecting with the “right people through selling”. She said that:

“ Also if you are into the buying and selling business you get to know people, like this other time I was looking for a job and I was asked to submit CVs and I ended up working as a result of connecting with the right people through selling”.(cbt8).

This statement shows that informal cross border trading has created opportunities that are beyond the realm of their business operations through networks and relationships. It is worth noting that motives for entering into the cross border trading business are multi-determined and, vary from economic hardships, entrepreneurial drive and the long term professional experience of informal cross border traders in the family. For instance, two respondents said that making money was just in their blood and because of their entrepreneurial skills that run in their families they found themselves participating in cross-border trading, not that they had ever slept on an empty stomach. They had this to say:

*“I just felt that as a woman, I cannot just sit at home doing nothing. And also, where I come from we have been taught to work hard. We grew up buying and selling. All of us, I have six sisters one of whom died soon after the day you came and I told you I was rushing to the hospital. So it is in my blood”.
(cbt7)*

Some married respondents indicated that financial woes and poverty motivated them to participate in cross-border work, while others said they had a passion for cross border trading. Respondents who claim to have a natural flair for informal cross-border trading position themselves as different from the rest of the pack who are spurred into cross border trading because of economic hardships. The statement below is illustrative:

“Just to keep myself busy because I can’t say I have slept without food. My husband provides but it is a way to generate some income for myself”. (cbt10)

“I am doing this because it’s in the family. My mother was a cross-border. My husband’s mother is still a cross-border. My husband grew up in a family of cross-borders so he understands the business. He knows the situation and knows how helpful it is”. (cbt1)

What is clear from the narratives of informal cross border women traders is that although they were motivated to join the informal cross border trading by different circumstances, the common thread running through their narratives is the emancipatory possibilities brought about through engaging in informal cross border trading. Most respondents said that due to the informal cross border trade, they are always liquid. Some respondents had this to say:

“You never get broke. Of course there is this challenge that at times I sell the goods on credit and people do not pay but still you never get broke. One has the advantage of having money throughout the month” (cbt8)

“Cash is always flowing even mid- month when you will not be expecting anything. Even if it means like you over spend but I will have at least something to go back with and buy some other stuff. So you see even like I am waiting for my husband to send me something but really I can’t say no I don’t have margarine my kid is starving, she doesn’t have milk at least I will be having something as back up”.
(cbt10)

“I really feel satisfied and it shows the work is worth trying, it’s better than just staying at home”.
(cbt11)

What is clear from the above discussion is that cross border trading is now an outlet for most respondents to escape poverty as they feel that they are financially better off than they were before they started engaging in informal cross border trading. These statements show that financial autonomy underlies a host of other opportunities such as business networking, the capacity for economic expansion through new relationships, opportunities to renegotiate what is ‘normal’ in class terms, such as the acquisition of particular kinds of material goods, and accessories, and the ability to support family members.

Through cross border trading, women gain agency in the sense that they become masters of their destinies. They no longer have to wait for someone else to initiate opportunities for them. By assuming greater family responsibilities than their prescribed roles as wives and mothers, they are also able to relocate their identities. This view ties up with the observation by Muzvidziwa (2012) noted that informal cross-border trade in Zimbabwe has in resulted in the shifting of women identities. Women have now been transformed from dependent and domesticated beings to an independent and mobile class of people involved in long distance trans-border business.

4.4 CROSS-BORDER TRADING AS A SOURCE OF EMPLOYMENT

Apart from being a livelihood strategy for many families, informal cross-border trading has become an alternative source of employment in Zimbabwe. It has become a ‘job’ for those who would never have dreamt of getting one, because of the economic crises in the country, and to many women informal cross-border trading has become a ‘job’ they were

prepared to learn more about. Due to the shrinking economy, which has resulted in the closure of some industries cross-border trading has become an alternative source of employment, particularly for women. The following statements demonstrate this:

“It was mostly because of economic hardships in our country, most industries had closed. As a result it was difficult for one to get a job. Then I just decided to do something that could generate some income for me”. (cbt11).

“I had no other means of surviving because there were no jobs since for a long time I had failed to get one. So I did it because it was the only option for me to survive”. (cbt8)

The statements above suggest that women participated in cross-border trading as a livelihood strategy and some of the women who participated in it had seen ‘successful models’ where they had learned from. The statements below illustrate this:

“It was women I fellowship with at church who motivated me and also they encouraged me to participate in cross-border trade as they were doing, since I had a passport already, they were also of the opinion that just sitting at home was a none starter so if I could just start selling goods from South Africa even at a very small scale and increase if I see that it’s profitable.” (cbt11).

“It was a friend of mine who introduced me to the business. She almost goes every week I wonder how she is doing it but she is doing very well”. (cbt2).

“I saw others who were doing it. I have got a friend who encouraged me to venture into the business and I realized that it was fruitful. And also I realized that things were working out for her”. (cbt6).

It is evident from the interviews that many women find it easier to engage in informal cross border trading not only because there are no formal qualifications required, but also because there are visible and successful ‘models’ of cross-border trade as a form of survival’. One of the respondents said that the cross-border trade was the only viable work she could partake in because she did not have any professional qualifications or the academic requirements to be employable in Zimbabwe.

“Yes. Since I did not have a professional qualification to enable me to get a job I decided to venture into cross-border trading. What else can you do when you don’t have a professional qualification”? (cbt2)

This statement shows that informal cross border trading may be viewed as a sector for the uneducated or unemployable in Zimbabwe. However, this view is contradicted by the fact that some of the respondents in the study were professional people, three of them being on full-time employment, and some approached the ‘new profession’ of cross border trade as one they were very willing to explore. The following statements are illustrative:

“Things were really tough for me, financial constraints coupled with social problems. The salary was no longer adequate. My husband had moved out to stay with another woman. Then I decided to venture into cross-border trading”. (cbt5)

“Yeah- you have to squeeze some of the time at work so that you cope with your other business. But if everything is well, the weekend is enough for cross-border trading. The week-end is enough. You can go on Friday evening then you come back on Sunday morning then you rest the whole of Sunday then come Monday you go to work”. (cbt3).

“The salary was too little. It was not enough to pay fees for children, food, I can say financial constraints everything”. (cbt4)

The statements above show that cross-border trading is a source of employment for women from different categories and social status, including, unemployed women without professional qualifications, employed women who wish to augment their incomes through informal cross-border trading, and unemployed professionals who fail to secure jobs in their chosen professions.

Thus, in the context of Zimbabwe’s economic crisis cross border trading cannot be regarded as a domain for the uneducated or unemployable women, since it brings together women with and without formal jobs. The above findings contradict findings by Ndlela, (2006) who found that informal cross-border trade is a domain for the uneducated. Ndlela also found out that cross-border trading was dominated by women, mainly due to their low levels of education and low literacy levels because of their historically disadvantaged status in terms of access to education and formal employment (Ndlela, 2006:24). It is clear that the economic situation has changed a great deal between 2006 and the present owing to the worsening economic crisis in the country which reached its peak in 2008. The crises eroded the incomes of many professional people, thereby forcing them to join the rank and file of the uneducated in the informal sector, of which cross-border trading was one of them.

Those with formal jobs try to balance the demands of their formal job with those of informal cross border trading as a way of augmenting their incomes. An interesting observation from the study was that some respondents with full-time professional jobs were not willing to part with their jobs for informal trading because, although their jobs were not paying them enough, they offered them security, which informal cross border trading did not provide. For example, one of the respondents who had a professional job, indicated that she valued her profession, and said she gave her formal job first priority, but sacrificed her weekends for cross-border work in order to supplement her income. She said that her salary cushioned her in times where the cross-border business was not doing well.

“I would have gone there on a Friday knowing very well that on Monday I have to be on duty for I need that basic salary. It’s important because even if a trip fails to pay me well and if I incur a loss that basic salary can put back into business”. (cbt4)

However, not everybody finds the security provided by a formal job to be attractive enough. For instance, one respondent reported that she traded her formal job for informal cross border trading because she thought informal cross border trading was more lucrative than her formal job. She had this to say:

“I was working. I used to work at Morris Depot. I decided to leave the job I found that this business was paying more than what I was doing”. (cbt6)

This statement shows that informal cross border trading has been increasingly becoming a lucrative form of employment in that some people can now trade their professional jobs for the informal cross border trade. However, it must be pointed out that even where professional women leave their jobs to venture into cross border trading, this cannot necessarily replace the advantages of formal employment. No matter how lucrative cross-border trading maybe, some women, particularly the educated ones, engage in it as a last resort. This clearly came out through a statement by one respondent who, as a holder of a Masters’ Degree had this to say:

“Cross-border trader work was to me painful because I just thought as educated as I was I would do a better job than this. I didn’t enjoy the work. I just did it for survival and as a last resort. So, in other words half-heartedly”. Cb8.

This statement shows that as a form of employment, cross border trading is frowned upon by some respondents who engage in it reluctantly, an indication that, if given another alternative they would leave it. This shows that some of the participants do not consider informal cross-border trade as employment. This shows the class prejudice and perceptions underlying definitions of employment or a job. This prejudice is clearly shown in the statement below by a respondent who is a holder of a College Diploma:

“No like myself if I can get employment here, I think I can always stop going there. If I can get something to generate income here, I will always. The job is a bit hectic and difficult”. (ctb10)

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the notion of cross-border trade as a form of employment is not only complex but also contentious in the sense that it is located in multiple discourses. While the informal cross border trade has become a source of full-time employment for some women, others consider it a form of supplementing their incomes, or an occasional form of employment. Others see it as a form of self-employment which is differentiated from being offered a job by others. In cross-border trading, one has the leverage to determine how much one will earn without negotiating for a salary or wage increase. As a form of self-employment, informal cross-border trading requires negotiation in terms of the value, status or longevity of the work. The implications for this are that employment per se, as an opportunity, is flexible and accessible to the agency, of the women in the sense that they employ themselves.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the opportunities and rewards offered by cross-border trading to Zimbabwean women. It was observed that cross border trading is a means of survival for women, a source of employment, and that it financially empowers them. The varied opportunities unlocked by cross border trading have reconfigured gender power relations in a fundamental way. Women’s contribution to the economic well-being of the household welfare through proceeds from cross-border trading means that they are now able to influence decision-making in the family. This ties up with earlier scholarly findings which show that women feel economically empowered by engaging in informal cross border trading because they become part of the decision-making processes in their homes (UN Women, 2008).

As a result of the financial autonomy, women have been able to renegotiate traditional gender roles in the sense that, rather than depending on their husbands, they have become breadwinners. However, the shift in gender roles and identities is rather nuanced and complex in that the new found independence of women does not necessarily negate their old roles, neither does it result in them completely taking over the roles of men. In addition, the cross border trade has created opportunities for women, to make a contribution to the national economy, thereby enhancing their status. The narratives of participants in this study show that the varied opportunities created by the cross border trade have an empowering impact on the lives of women.

The next chapter focuses on the theory that suggests that informal cross-border trade is harmful to cross-border women traders. It explores the vulnerabilities faced by informal cross-border women traders at the border. These vulnerabilities are discussed as challenges. Chapter 6 synthesizes the main arguments in Chapter 4 and 5, extending the path 'beyond' the tension of opportunities and challenges.

As already indicated earlier, the thesis focuses on the experiences of women informal cross-border traders at the Zimbabwean/South African border. I chose the border as an interesting zone of concern to explore the experiences of cross border women traders for my thesis because I felt that what happens at the border controls, and shapes the cross-border trading business in a fundamental way. I also felt that the border was crucial in shaping women's experiences, in that it has great potential to promote or hinder the informal cross-border business. I also felt it was important to explore coping strategies women employ at the border, as a result of the challenges they face at the border. I found it worthwhile to explore these coping strategies in order to further illustrate how women go out of their way to ensure that they survive, and, through these strategies it is possible to understand the ways in which tensions between 'opportunities' and 'challenges' are negotiated in the day-to-day life of cross-border traders.

CHAPTER FIVE:

VULNERABILITIES: TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF WOMEN INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADERS AT THE BORDER

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the various challenges faced by cross-border women traders in their day to day operations. The challenges mainly relate to their own sense of vulnerability in terms of their business operations, as well as through their embodiment as ‘women’. In this chapter, such vulnerabilities are thematized in terms of the narratives of the interviewees at the border. The border was chosen as a crucial site to explore the experiences of Zimbabwean cross-border women traders because earlier research suggests that the interactions between people at the border-crossing itself have the potential to either promote or harm women cross border traders’ work. The meaning of the ‘border-post’ itself deserves in-depth exploration from the perspective of women traders.

5.2 DELAYS AT THE BORDER

Respondents interviewed for this study unanimously pointed out the challenges which damage their business operations. Delays at the border (both on the Zimbabwean and the South African side of the border), but more commonly on the South African side were a consistent theme throughout the interviewees. All the respondents mentioned that they spent several hours at the South African side of the border in queues just to have their passports stamped to enter South Africa. The statements below are instructive in this regard:

The issue of delays is the only one that worries me. Once you arrive in the South African fence you will start dreading”. (cbt6)

Oooh! SA side is the problem. The Zim side is OK. At the SA side, it’s like they are always on a go-slow of some sort. You can’t really understand what the problem is. Since February there is no change. You just have to join the queue and you spend hours. You can actually spend the whole day before your passport is stamped for you to cross the border into South Africa”. (cbt5).

“Yes, like at times, when you are going there, (SA side) I don’t know whether they will be on a go-slow or strike. At times you spend the whole day at the South African border. When coming back, the Zim side is OK, there is no problem. When going, I have encountered a lot of problems of delays at the South African side”. (cbt2)

“Ah..Let me say that challenges, they come in two ways. Firstly, when you are going there, (SA) the border again it’s a problem because, especially nowadays because there are long queues, very long queues at the border. At times you spend about 8 hours at the border because of long queues, then you stamp your passport, you get in”.(cbt3)

“At times you go there and you arrive at 9p.m until 1a.m in the queue up to that time they will be just doing it slowly, I don’t know what will be happening whether they will be doing it deliberately or its on purpose you never know”. (cbt10)

These statements suggest that delays trigger multiple interpretations among the respondents and also engender different feelings. Delays can trigger feelings of despondency, worry and stress. The long queues can also bring about feelings of helplessness among the women, since they realise that there is nothing that they can do about the situation.

The above quotations also suggest that delays cause a lot anxiety and uncertainty among cross border women traders, and women worry about the long queues, ‘restless’ crowds under stress and surveillance, helplessness, or being kept in the fence. This suggests that informal cross-border women traders feel that they are at the mercy of immigration officials. Delays are more than simply a form of inconvenience to the informal cross-border women traders in the sense that the feeling of helplessness and desperation makes them amenable to ‘cutting corners’, thereby exposing them to corruption This could involve crossing without having their passports being stamped as will discussed in the subsequent chapter. The quotation below illustrates this:

Let's say you are in a queue and you are pushing and shoving, some jumping the queue. Some will be shouting "bhoramberi" (lets go without having our passports stamped) because it will be too late for them. The police do really beat people with sjambooks". (cbt6)

Although some respondents were not sure about the causes of the delays at the South African side of the border, others attributed the delays mainly to attitudinal factors, primarily the poor work ethics of South African immigration officials, and 'hatred' of foreigners in general (xenophobia). The following statements are instructive regarding the respondents' perceptions about the poor work ethics of the South African immigration officials:

"You can get there while they are on a go slow. You can get there at 8pm, like last time we arrived at 8pm but we left the border around 1am after we had arrived there at 8:00 in the evening. Like they would take your passport and then start talking amongst themselves, looking at each other. Ah South African side they don't work. Like the last time I was there, there were very few buses but we were delayed a lot, and you will be forced to stay awake the whole night. (Laughs) that's our greatest challenge". (cbt7)

"They might just start talking to each in their own language, whilst they will be holding your passport, and at times they laugh in such a way that is so offensive to the extent that you feel as if they are laughing at you. They twist and turn fiddling with their mobile phones, chatting on WhatsApp while you are standing there. You can stand in the queue for 12 hours really seeing that there is no movement in the queue, enduring all the pain but them they will be laughing and enjoying seeing us suffering. What can you do? We don't have anywhere to report and also we won't be having the time. cbt9).

These statements are significant in so far as they underscore the sense the Zimbabwean traders have of being stigmatized by South African officials. They equally criticise the inefficiency of the South African systems and work ethics. This raises interesting contradictions – 'South Africa' is represented as a country in which money is to be made and useful goods acquired. However, South African cross-border officials are characterized as "not working", fails to match with the other better, better in terms of South Africa as country. This is clearly shown in a statement by one respondent who said that:

"If it's possible the management at the South African side must change or pull up their stockings or they can change the staff I don't know what's wrong because honestly things are not well at the border post. Going to South Africa is exciting but if you think of the border you really think twice, it's really a nightmare. If there was a way to jump you would just jump and find yourself in South Africa". (cbt10)

Besides the perceptions of the poor work ethic, the interviewees also perceive delays at the border to be a result of South African Immigration officials' prejudice towards foreigners, particularly Zimbabweans. The following statements demonstrate how deeply this perception is entrenched among the respondents:

“Me I think... to me I think to be honest I think amaSouth Africans (South Africans) are just tired of us. That's what I can just say. South Africans are tired of us. They are just tired of us so there is nothing they can do”. (cbt10)

“I don't know. Maybe they are xenophobic or maybe they are like I don't know or maybe they just hate Zimbabweans I think. But even if you look or you have been at the border and if you go to that green tent the way they like twist, freak their faces and you stand in the queue and they are busy talking about you laughing, I don't know maybe they just hate us”. (cbt8).

“Ah, at the border personally the way I see it, South Africans hate us Zimbabweans. They just don't like us but us Zimbabweans we don't give up easily. We are treated like dogs or people who are not normal and if you treat yourself as a normal being you won't come back to the border again. As a result you just pretend as if you are not normal, knowing full well that you have your own goal to accomplish. I don't think they are aware that we are responsible people and mothers who command respect from our families, especially South African women immigration officials. At times its better when you are served by a man. The bottom line is they are just fed up”.(cbt9).

While the delays, particularly at the South African side, are linked to attitudinal factors rather than logistical factors, these statements indicate that the respondents feel 'othered' and disrespected, in the sense that they are viewed as not normal, like dogs, low class and frowned upon by the very people who are supposed to be serving them. This collective stigmatization of women cross border traders positions them as second class beings or a nuisance and the job that they do as equally inferior.

However, it is worth noting that informal cross-border women traders construct and assert positive identities about themselves, in order to counter-balance their stigmatisation by the South African immigration officials. Thus, they can 'pretend not to be normal' while at the same time being able to accomplish their goals' and also project themselves as "responsible people and mothers who command respect from their families". This suggests that informal cross-border women traders view themselves as people who are strong, resilient

and respectable beings. The assertion of a positive self-identity by informal cross-border women traders is clearly demonstrated by the following statement:

“We rarely get tired, we are very strong, we have metal bodies. Even hunger is secondary. We don’t feel hungry. We don’t eat up until 7:00 pm, that is when we buy fresh chips and drinks and it will be the first time to sit down in our hotel room”.

While women are perceived as weak, cross-border women traders, through their narratives show a lot of physical strength and aggressiveness in their work. It is also worth pointing out that, although most of respondents associate delays with the South Africa side of the border, a few of them also pointed out that delays are also experienced at the Zimbabwean side, especially when going back to Zimbabwe. Unlike at the South African side where delays are mainly by immigration officials, at the Zimbabwean side, delays are caused by the ZIMRA officials who search travellers.

When probed whether there were also delays at the Zimbabwean side of the border one respondent replied that:

“Yeah, Zim side is also a problem for sure, when coming back. Imagine taking out a whole bus luggage outside. Everything is taken out for search, and considering that it won’t just be one bus we can be there overnight as well”.(cbt9)

The operation of the informal cross-border trade business entails a range of issues, which span the personal needs of the traders for accommodation and subsistence to the demands of the trading *per se*, such as where to buy goods, and from whom, when, how to manage the loads of goods and ensure their safety, and how to get the most useful micro-local information about new goods, cheaper prices, and/or variation in the relationships established in previous trips between buyer and sellers.

Most of the respondents disclosed that they prefer to travel to South Africa during the night because this cuts accommodation costs by reducing the number nights spent in South Africa. Spending more days and nights in South Africa also meant an extra cost on food and accommodation expenses. Those participants who preferred Musina as their shopping destination, usually spend a day in South Africa before going back to Zimbabwe in the evening. However, because of the delays at the border, those respondents who go to Musina

may have fewer hours of shopping because most of the shops would be closed for business by the time they complete immigration proceedings. Not having enough time for shopping means that they will be forced to buy whatever is easily available and may not have time to look for better ways in which to fill their orders. At times, they are forced to look for accommodation and also spend unbudgeted money on food since they have to spend an extra night in South Africa. These extra expenses on accommodation and food severely cut their profit. This concern is revealed by the following respondents:

“Like there is a time when you want to go and come back, you will be forced to sleep over because at times the bus gets to Joburg at five in the evening and all the shops will be closed when in actual fact you were expecting to be in Joburg at 9am in the morning”.(cbt2)

“Like in May ,I spent two days in South Africa because we arrived there on Saturday around 4:00 in the morning and our passports were stamped around 1:00 in the afternoon on Saturday and when we arrived at Messina all the shops were closed and we had to look for accommodation. We slept at a lodge. We did our shopping on Sunday and we arrived back in Harare on Monday. It means you are forced to spend more days in South Africa and this has got financial implications since we have to find accommodation and buy food. All because the immigration officials will be on go slow. April, May and June have not been a pleasure to go to South Africa I tell you”. (cbt5).

“I was going to Messina and was delayed for up to like 9-10 hours because I remember we were saved at 12 noon. So I had 3..less than 2 hours to buy because I just got into one shop where I just took jeans usually I used to sell jeans”. (cbt8).

“The delays are a big problem. Especially the....it’s a big problem especially these delays these days its’ getting worse, One, you don’t have enough time to go and buy your goods. So you are restricted. And most of these shops close early. So if you are delayed it means you are no longer going to buy the stuff that you needed. So you are left with no choice but just to buy anything that comes your way. And again the family issue. For instance, last time I went to Musina and I was supposed to come back here in Zimbabwe on Sunday morning, but I only came back on Monday and I have got a little boy, about three years now. I had hired somebody to look after that child and when I was delayed at the border she was complaining because she wanted to go back. So it affects the family as well. It affects even the business itself. For instance, last time, I wanted to buy this winter clothing in one of the shops, Jet, Pep, but by the time we got to Musina these shops were closed so I had to come back with my money”. (cbt3).

The delays impact arrangements made at home to ensure that the trader's domestic environment is stable. Making such arrangements are part of her 'labour' as a woman. Thus, delays at the border do not only disrupt the business operations of informal cross border traders but they also destabilise the family arrangements back home and the women's traditional roles as mothers and wives since men (for those who are married) are unprepared to take up the women's responsibilities in their absence. As mentioned earlier, delays at the border play havoc with women's dual roles as mothers/caregivers and as business women in the sense that when they are delayed at the border, their roles as mothers and housewives back home get into disarray. This shows that the impact of delays at the border on the informal cross border traders is gendered and delays at the border exert an extra burden on women's labour, as they are forced to juggle the demands of their business and the domestic environment. This is clearly shown in the statements below:

"It's difficult in that you spend time out. When I am out there everything will be waiting for me here at home, washing, cleaning etc. My husband just comes and cooks. Even the dishes will be waiting for me. If you go out for three days when you come back you will find the dishes waiting for you. Dishes for three days from the day you left will be there. You start cleaning the day you arrive from South Africa. You will be doing cleaning, you will be doing laundry, you will be doing everything. Uniforms for the child, everything will be waiting for you. That's the most difficult thing about this job." (cbt1)

"The pressure here at home. You will be thinking; what is my husband doing? The fact that you leave your husband here that alone is a problem. And the children also you have to find someone to look after your children so it's really problem when we are delayed at the border". (cbt1)

Delays also have far reaching implications in that they are altering migration patterns, in the sense that, in order not to jeopardise their traditionally prescribed gender roles as mothers and wives, some informal cross-border women traders are now opting to go to nearer destinations such as Musina rather than further destinations like Johannesburg because of their family obligations. The statements below are illustrative of this:

"I go to Musina but at times I go to Joburg, I prefer Musina because I have a baby, so if I am leaving the baby, I go to Musina I know I that I will come back as soon as possible but if I go to Joburg I have to go with the baby." (cbt10)

The statement above clearly highlights the tension between women's dual roles in the domestic and public space.

The connection between delays at the border and compromised business operations, is for the respondents clear, particularly given that they already suspect the border officials of

deliberate gendered, and xenophobic attacks as described in the earlier theme. This reinforces the link between the traders' gender, the influence of border controls, and the work of cross-border traders as a challenge.

Apart from destabilizing the business operations and paralysing the family arrangements of informal cross border women traders, delays at the border also expose women to sexual abuse, particularly if they cannot afford decent accommodation. As will be observed in subsequent sections, sexual harassment/abuse, in its various shades is a common thread which runs through the vulnerabilities discussed in this chapter.

In the context of delays, sexual harassment results from the fact that because of the delays at the border, informal cross-border women traders are forced to sleep in the open, thereby exposing themselves to sexual violations. This clearly shows that delays are a double blow to informal cross-border women traders. This sentiment is shown by the statement below:

“We were sleeping at the Taxi Rank in Musina because there is no accommodation in Musina. The accommodation which is there is very expensive, such that women cannot afford it. So women resort to sleeping at the Taxi Rank or at the Total Garage. So when you sleep there, the tsotsis may come and search you. By the time you wake up (laughs) you realise you do not have some valuables such as the cell-phone or any money”. (cbt3)

This statement shows that because of respondents' embodiment, informal cross border women traders who sleep in the open because they cannot afford proper accommodation, become easy 'prey for thieves' and all manner of risks. One respondent (cbt3) narrated how one day she and colleagues were rescued by the South African Police Services (SAPS) officers based in Musina after they were nearly attacked by thieves while sleeping in the open in Musina. The police took the women so that they could sleep at the police station and later advised them to look for proper accommodation next time because it was very risk to sleep in the open in Messina. This incident clearly underscores the serious nature of the impacts of delays at the border and the multi-faceted nature of the women vulnerabilities in their day to day operations.

Although I have briefly touched on the issue of harassment/sexual harassment above I intend to address it as a separate sub-theme in greater detail later on in the chapter since it

pervades other discussions concerning delays, restrictions and many other challenges cross-border women traders face at the border.

5.3 RESTRICTION OF GOODS

Apart from the problem of delays at the border, cross-border women traders said they have to grapple with frustrations arising from restrictions of goods at the border. According to the interviewees, although the restriction of goods is a problem faced at both the South African and the Zimbabwean side of the border, this phenomenon was more associated with the Zimbabwean side than the South African side of the border. Most respondents reported that they worry so much about the value of goods upon entering Zimbabwe, because the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) restricts the value of goods entering the country to US\$300 per person per month. One respondent had this to say:

“At the border, they restrict the quantity of commodities one can bring into the country. They will not allow us to bring an item which is worth more than USD300. So if you want an expensive item, you will be forced to understate the price of the item so that you do not pay duty. That is the main challenge. You cannot bring into the country an expensive item valued more than USD300. If it exceeds this value, then you have to pay duty. If the authorities could at least increase the rebate from the current USD300 to say USD1000, it would be much better (pauses) and also the duty for electrical, which is currently 40% is too high. That is almost half the price of the product”. (cbt5).

In addition, the authorities also limit the number of items to four per commodity. These restrictions also impact negatively on the business of informal cross-border women traders, in the sense that it reduces their profit margins. The statements below illustrate this:

“You cannot travel all the way to South Africa to bring four pairs of jeans. You cannot travel that long to bring four pairs of tracksuits. You won’t make any money. So you must bring (laughs) a lot of goods. Although it’s not allowed, we will have to do it if we are to make profit”. (cbt6)

“Imagine going to South Africa to bring 4, 4 items is not enough and also at times you will be having orders that exceed four, so this alone is a major set-back in as far as our work is concerned. In most cases we end up cheating to meet the demand and also it’s difficult to maximise on profits from 4 items of each”. (cbt11).

“At times you are forced to exceed because you want to make profit out of those goods. If you exceed you pay duty, meaning that you won’t make any profit. You are not going to make any profit at all.”
(Cbt2)

The above statements highlight the fact that the restrictions on goods at the Zimbabwean border, erodes profitability of the informal cross border business. If cross border women traders exceed the limit on the value or prescribed quantity of the goods permitted as ‘duty-free’, they will be required to pay customs and excise duty but if they adhere to the limit, their imports will be too small to deliver any profit. If the latter happens, they will simply become ‘trade-donkeys’, carrying goods across the border for others, rather than business-women looking for profit for their own labour.

Findings from the interviews also reveal that due to the restrictions on goods women informal cross-border traders end up exposing themselves to activities that set them on a collision course with the law, in the sense that they may be tempted to flout the regulations on restrictions of goods. For instance, some respondents disclosed that, due to the restrictions on goods, they had to resort to understating the value of their goods, hiding some goods or simply failing to declare some of their goods. Narratives of informal cross-borders women are filled with chilling stories of traumatic experiences, intrigue, cheating, bribery and narrow escapes from the long arm of the law as they battle to circumvent the stringent restrictions on goods. The following statements are illuminating in this regard:

“Your main worry will be crossing the border. You will be just praying to God so that you cross the border because you will be having a lot of goods. You will be afraid that they will be confiscated. And when you cross the border you will find someone heaving a sigh of relief”. (cbt7).

“The regulation at the border is that they only allow four items per commodity. But sometimes even if you have the stipulated four items per product, some still harass you. They will be saying this that... this is too much. No! They are too many. And when you try to explain that you have the stipulated quantity of goods the person will insist that these ones are for the flea market so you must pay duty. If you argue that this is the stipulated quantity by law the person will still say these ones are for the flea market so go and pay duty”. (cbt7)

“Surely when people go to South Africa it’s mainly for business. So If I bring four pairs of sandals what is it that I would have gone there for? When I spend the whole night at the border and when coming back in the evening my legs would be like logs because of swelling all that pain to bring four items ahh...No .At the border there are endless queues. I would have left my children back here. It’s tricky. That they must consider honestly”.(cbt4)

The above statements show that the restrictions on goods at the Zimbabwean side of the border expose informal cross border women traders to both physical and emotional stress linked to the restrictions on goods which can be brought into the country. The emotional stress is further worsened by the fact that lack of compliance with the regulations may result in their goods being confiscated. This is discussed in greater detail below.

5.4 CONFISCATION OF GOODS

Participants' interviews suggested that one of the major consequences of applying the policy on goods restriction is the confiscation of 'surplus' goods by revenue authorities at the border. As mentioned earlier, goods are usually confiscated when one fails to pay the required duty if traders exceed the stipulated limit or when the good is not for rebate. Although the restrictions on goods are applicable on both the South African and Zimbabwean sides of the border, most of the respondents associated the confiscation of goods with the Zimbabwean side of the border, while the South African side is synonymous with queues. This is supported by one respondent who said that:

"Let me say that challenges, they come in two ways. Firstly, when you are going there (SA) the border again it's a problem because, especially nowadays because there are long queues, very long queues at the borderAnd when you are coming back, the main challenge is the restriction of goods (Zim side) So when you are going the problem is the queues and when you are coming back the problem is restriction of goods. And now they are not allowing some commodities in Zimbabwe from South Africa. For example, eggs. They no longer want eggs, they no longer want meat, and they no longer want blankets. If you have blankets, you pay duty, no matter you have one or a small blanket, you have to pay duty. (cbt3)

At the Zimbabwean side, reasons for confiscation range from exceeding the statutory rebate threshold which is US\$300 per person per month, but not having money to pay duty, non-eligibility for rebate and the importation of goods that are classified as 'banned imports', such as eggs and some agricultural commodities, like potatoes.

Some respondents said that the confiscation of goods is every informal cross-border traders' nightmare because of its potential to kill the business. When goods are confiscated, business capital would be completely lost and it may mean that one has to start all over again. Therefore, having one's goods confiscated is one of the most dreadful experiences that

informal cross-border women traders can go through. As a result, informal cross-border women traders will do anything possible to ensure that their goods are not confiscated. Some respondents indicated that, sometimes goods are confiscated not because they do not have the money for duty, but because the calculation of duty by the ZIMRA officials would be unfair. The confiscation of goods poses a serious dilemma to an informal cross-border women trader, in the sense that coming back to claim the confiscated goods means a double expense. The following statements from some respondents underscore this sentiment:

“If you don’t have money to pay for the duty you just calculate the expense of coming back to collect the goods against the profit the goods can give you. If it doesn’t give you much profit, you just leave the goods because there is also bus fare expense to consider as well. So when goods are taken away by officials for most women, they rarely come back to reclaim the goods”. (cbt9)

“Yes it’s true rarely would women pay duty especially with food stuffs. It’s like paying for the item twice”. (cbt8).

These statements highlight how the confiscation of goods by ZIMRA officials has the potential to paralyse the business of informal cross-border women traders. What is worse, is that, as the interviewees explain, even when someone’s goods are confiscated by ZIMRA officials and the owner comes back later to claim the goods, there is no guarantee that one will get the goods due to, among other factors, the bureaucratic procedures to be followed. The procedures involved in claiming back the goods are tedious to such an extent that most informal cross-border women traders forfeit their goods. One respondent narrated how her friends’ goods were confiscated by ZIMRA officials at the Zimbabwean border after she had exceeded the statutory limit for rebate. When she came back to claim the goods and to pay duty for the confiscated goods, she was told story after story. She died before she managed to claim back her goods. The respondent narrated her friend’s ordeal thus:

“When she arrived at the border her goods were confiscated. We came back now to Beitbridge border post on a Friday, of the following week with a form indicating the quantity of goods that had been seized they were just saying what, what, and said a lot of things not quite clear. It was unfortunate that my friend eventually died before we got the confiscated goods and it even became more complicated when I tried to have the goods back after her death. I took the receipt with me and I told them that my friend had died but the officials said they needed a death certificate so in the end I got tired of going there and probably it’s the kind of goods they end up auctioning”. (cbt8)

What is clear from the above ordeal, is that the confiscation of goods by ZIMRA officials is a great cause for concern for informal cross border women traders as much as it brings with it untold emotional stress as well as a potential threat to the survival of the businesses of informal cross-border women traders. As will be discussed, below the confiscation of goods also has great potential to promote corruption since women informal cross-border traders will be devising ways of circumventing the stringent regulations on imported goods.

5.5 CORRUPTION

As pointed out above, the stringent regulations on imports and the confiscation of goods have the potential to expose informal cross-border women traders to corruption. This corruption is cross cutting as it involves immigration officers, revenue authority officials and other public service workers at the border. A number of the cross-border women traders interviewed for this study mentioned that sometimes revenue authority officers ask for bribes so that they can bend the rules for easier entry into the country. This also adversely affected the manner in which the officials delivered their service. Most of the respondents mentioned that officials from both the Zimbabwean and South African sides of the border accepted bribes at some point and the common phrase used by officials to explain their performance, or “a go slow”, implies that financial ‘incentives’ from the waiting traders could speed up the process.

Some of the respondents reported that they had personally bribed public service officials at the border in return for a service. Respondents also mentioned that sometimes the situation at the two sides of the border is brought to a complete halt if officials are not bribed because they want to make life difficult so that people become desperate and pay their way.

“And also there is corruption emanating mainly from those who transport women to and from Musina. We normally use small trucks to cross the border. So using those trucks if you don’t give them money you can spend the whole day at the border as officials will be on go slow. So for us to be served quickly, we have to give the driver some money like R20. If we don’t give them money, problems that cause delays will be countless. So these guys whom we give money always make sure they have milked you of your hard earned money. They will tell you that if you don’t give us money, you will sleep at the border. So, they are the ones who pay the officials on both sides of the border, but on Zim side they are the ones who declare our goods but I don’t really see how it helps just because the money that the guys ask will be a lot”. (cbt4).

A common corrupt practice that informal cross-border women traders were exposed occurs when bus crew members ask them to pay R20 each before they get to the border. According to respondents, the money is given to ZIMRA officials so that their buses are not vigorously searched, and that those who have exceeded their rebate limits are not asked to pay for the extra goods.

“Yeah, corruption at the border is a common thing Officials are given money, like for instance, if you travel by buses, passengers contribute R20 each. It is known as border fees, so from that it is clear that officials are given money. The border fee is meant to lighten the searching and the officials won’t be too strict”. (cbt11).

One respondent said that it was easier for the drivers to pay the bribes on their behalf because they see each other on a daily basis, meaning that they are more familiar to one another. To use her exact words, she said:

“With us, it’s quite difficult to be connected to the ZIMRA officials. We don’t have much personal contact with them. I don’t think there is room for that, but with the drivers it’s easy because they see each other almost on a daily basis. The drivers and conductors cross the border on a daily basis so they have a certain relationship with these officials”. (cbt2).

What is clear from the above statement is that respondents see corruption at the border as common, and also present themselves as people working extremely hard, in order to survive, people who are simultaneously exploited and exploitable by corrupt officials, at many different levels. While at one level, their collusion with the corruption is represented as consensual and willing, at another, their narratives are clear about the individual’s vulnerability as a cross-border trader.

“Yes, they ask R10, R20. Yeah, this money is for ‘buying time’ so that you won’t get delayed at the border. If you get to the border they just give the ZIMRA official that amount I don’t know how much it would be R20 times 75 passengers. It’s a lot of money. They just give it to the ZIMRA official I don’t know whether it is given to an individual or the team that will be on duty that particular day”. (cbt1)

“Personally I think they do give them money. It’s not very clear how they do it but at times you will see the difference on the time you will spend at both the SA side and Zim side. This is also to the bus’s advantage because if you spend less time at the border, then you will use the bus again but, before we used to pay R20 each to the bus crew members and I am not sure what stopped it”. (cbt9)

The women's narratives suggest that corruption at the border has become so 'normalised' to such an extent that they acquiesce to the idea that it is in their best interest to pay bribes as long as they are guaranteed that crossing the border, either into South Africa or Zimbabwe would be made easier. The following excerpt clearly illustrates this:

SE: But what do you think about the R20? (bribe)

CBT11: To me I just contribute so that we make our life easier at the border as a cross-border... What I have observed is that most women just pay the money so that we maintain a good relationship with our drivers and also as a way of solidarity in as far as our work is concerned.

While on the Zimbabwean side, bribes are paid mainly to minimise delays and also to ensure the stringent regulations on goods are not enforced, on the South African side, they are paid to ensure easy entry into the country. Some respondents said that, sometimes, South African immigration officials usually use fault finding tactics, mainly to do with passports in order to elicit bribes. Informal cross-border women traders who go to Musina, were particularly more vulnerable because they cross on foot rather than by bus. One respondent said that travellers to Musina were usually kept in 'a fence' before they were served.

"When in the fence after spending hours in the queue, we can give South African immigration officers R20 or R50, depending on the length of the queue. If the queue is not long we can give them R20 then we pass without having our passports stamped. We can then have them stamped when we come back. I have personally done it. But it is risky because you can come across police on the road-block who may request to see your passport stamps. If you don't have they will deport you". (cbt6)

As a result, some speak of being forced to bribe immigration officials and the police so that they can enter South Africa without having their passports stamped. They would then have their passports stamped on their way back. Entering South Africa, without fulfilling immigration proceedings, further expose informal cross-border women traders to the risk of deportation if they are caught at roadblocks usually mounted along the road to Musina. In order to avoid this risk and also to ensure that they arrive in Musina early, informal cross-border women traders pay bribes to immigration officers. The following statements by some respondents are enlightening in this regard:

"Yaah South African officials are very corrupt. Mostly when you see them harassing you for some of the petty issues I have mentioned, it's because they will be after money. Like that issue I was telling you about when I almost failed to board a bus, such issues are solved by money. But on that particular day the drivers of the bus pleaded on my behalf but if it were just the two of us I would just place a R20 in

the passport and the amount varies depending on the offence. Even the bosses, if I remember well there is a time when it was said cameras were being introduced. It's the very same time the service got worse. Every-time it was go slow may be it was a way of protesting the introduction of cameras or expressing discontentment". (cbt9).

The fact that interviewees were so free to share their experiences about corruption with me, a stranger, does not only show that the culture of corruption has become endemic, but that is also highly normalized by cross- border women traders, as the victims of corruption now regard it as a way of life.

The stringent regulations on goods, particularly on the Zimbabwean, side are also implicated within the narratives of corruption, and the traders' collusion with corruption. As mentioned above, informal cross-border women traders, particularly those who use Malaichas (transporters), from Musina pay bribes in order to smuggle prohibited goods or goods above the stipulated limit. Some respondents interviewed for the study said they had, at one time or the other smuggled goods such as blankets, stoves, and fridges in order to evade duty. The statements below support this finding:

"Yes, corruption takes place at the border mainly because ZIMRA officials are given money by the young men who help people cross the border so that they facilitate the smuggling of goods that are not allowed in the country. The young men phone the ZIMRA officials informing them that they have certain goods which need to be smuggled and then they pay. The young men also phone the police manning the exit gate mentioning the goods that they would like to be smuggled". (cbt5).

"There are clearing agents based at the border. They are well connected to ZIMRA officials. If there is a person who wants to smuggle goods she will have to talk to these agents who will liaise with ZIMRA officers. Sometimes you won't really see it because they are well connected with one other". (cbt7)

This clearly shows that corruption is intricately interwoven into every phase of the informal cross-border trader's business journey, be it at the point of stamping of passports when entering South Africa, or when declaring goods at both the Zimbabwean and the South African sides of the border. Corruption, such as the paying of bribes, does not only expose women to risks of criminality, but also to sexual harassment.

Due to their embodiment, women are perceived as weaker than men and their rights are always trampled upon, not only in the sense of them being sexually harassed but because

of their inability to stand for their rights. Their roles and duties as mothers and wives put them at the mercy of corrupt officials because corruption provides an outlet for women to be able to juggle their dual roles. If women pay their way through the border to avoid delays at the border, they will be able to get back home to accomplish their domestic duties as mothers and wives.

Further, corruption exposes informal cross-border women traders to others risks like sexual abuse, whereby women who desperately need their goods to be cleared are forced to return the help rendered by Malaichas and other wheelers and dealers “in kind” because they won’t be having money. The respondents represented ‘other women’ as implicated in this kind of transactional sex, and spoke of these ‘others’ with disdain:

“I would like to talk about the behaviour portrayed by some women. They give us a bad name. You find someone behaving in a manner that leaves a lot to be desired. These women taint the image of other women. You then wonder what kind of home that person is coming from. They behave in a manner you just see its attention seeking. You know what these young women do. So it gives us a bad name as women. That’s why some men don’t want their women to engage in this cross-border business. It is because of the immoral behaviour of some of the women. Some of the behaviour by women is really bad. And also when coming back the men who help us cross the border are quite young but you will find a very elderly woman, granny, seeking the attention of these young men. You wonder what that would end up in. It’s a disgrace”. (cbt5).

This statement suggest that the potential for informal cross-border women traders being sexually abused is high, This vulnerability relates directly to the ways in which they are harassed as business-women, caught within the bureaucratic interactions of cross-national travel. The interviewees’ representation of their embodied harassment as ‘women’ is further explored in the following section.

5.6 HARASSMENT

Most of the risks and challenges discussed under the previous themes reveal the interviewees’ sense of their own vulnerability as economic agents running a business. Although some of these do involve the fact that the traders are women (such as their sense that South African immigration officials stigmatize them as “Zimbabwean women”), and their responsibility for managing their own domestic spaces even while they are travelling as

traders, the traders' vulnerability to the confiscation of their goods, delays at the border, and corruption was not specifically linked, in the narratives, to their sense of themselves as women, rather than men. However, the interviewees spoke of some challenges which are mainly linked with their gendered embodiment as 'women'.

Several respondents interviewed for this study reported that they were subjected to various forms of harassment such as physical, verbal, emotional and sexual harassment by officials at the border, and sometimes they attributed this to the fact that they were women. At other times, the stories of brutality which they told did not 'mark' their experiences as gendered, but simply as the experiences of people being humiliated and stripped of their dignity. Although these forms of harassment were experienced on both the South African and Zimbabwean side of the border, they were more prevalent in the former. According to the respondents, harassment on the SA side is mainly as a result of the South African officials' failure to cope with the pressure of people crossing the border into South Africa. Some respondents mentioned that the degree of harassment differed, depending on the time of the month.

"...if it's end of month when they will having a lot of pressure, they do harass us mostly on the SA side". (cbt11)

Another respondent added that:

"...if its November and December when there is a lot of pressure, that's when they use mboma or sjamboke to control people in queues. After the long queues and you are now inside, to have your passport stamped South African officials will always shout at you as a way of telling you if there is problem. in most cases they use their home language and you hardly understand what they will be saying and at times you feel humiliated and so much embarrassed and the way they shout draws the attention of every other person in the hall. They treat us like kids or worse still like dogs. You are not even given a chance to explain they just shout go back, "go back". We are not treated with humility and dignity at all. They just look down upon us so to them the South African officials we deserve the worst treatment. Even during the time for elections they didn't want people to go to South Africa but closing the border was not possible but we suffered the consequences. It would just take forever to have your passport stamped. They were on go slow. What I know is we are just forcing matters, but South Africans do not like us at all." (cbt11)

"The police. They really insult us. Even beating, they do beat us. Let's say you are on a queue and you are pushing and shoving, some jumping the queue. Some will be shouting "bhoramberi" (lets go without having our passports stamped) because it will be too late for them. The police do really beat people with sjamboke". (cbt6)

“Yes, I think it was on one occasion when I was coming from Musina and the queue was very long you can imagine people were pushing and shoving. That was the only time I saw someone being beaten by the police but I am not sure if that person was male or female, but all I saw was someone being beaten up. The problem was that there was a stampede and it was some way of restoring order”. (cbt10)“Yes, (acting) “move”. Maybe you were already about to be served, you are taken out forcefully from the queue and escorted by a policeman to the very end of the queue where you joined it, as far back as the Foot and Mouth checkpoint (this is the first call of entry into South Africa after crossing Limpopo River. ... And then you ask yourself, does this small issue warrant this kind of treatment. So the treatment is very bad. It’s only that as a family person you would be committed to your cause otherwise you would not take it. Otherwise the treatment that you get at the South African border is not all that good”. (cbt4)

They insult us quite a lot. You can hear an official saying “Hey you baboon.” (Cbt6)

“When you are inside the building having your passport stamped the person who will be serving you will behave as if he or she harbours a grudge against you, as if there is something that you have done wrong. ‘EhEh this, this, Eh, look at this, look at that....’ They will be busy finding faults. Sometimes the passport can actually be taken away. They can say the way you were standing there was not right or accuse you of having jumped the queue. So we are going to tear off the passport and for sure the passport can be torn while you look. And they know that here in Zimbabwe passports are not easy to get. You have to wait for another three months for another passport. But their intention will be to hurt you”. (cbt4).

“No! No! It’s just that they are too It’s just Hei! from the police HeiHei!.. verbal abuse yes because they shout at you like...you can’t say anything. Sometimes you just go there you are not sure about queue they shout heihei off there! off there! They are just ok fine; we are being taken as people that don’t think. Maybe doing cross- border trading to them is a last resort, its stooping so low. It’s a thing that to them... No these people have nothing. We are too poor”. (cbt8)

“Shouting at us and at times we are moved left right and centre especially if you are not using a bus. At times you are asked to stand in a queue for a long time while they serve those in buses and it is only after you try to cheat by joining the bus queue, if it so happens that they ask for a bus ticket and you are not found with one, your passport is then taken away and put aside if the official is cruel s/he can stamp departure, so you won’t proceed to South Africa (cbt11)

The above statements reveal that women are exposed to various forms of cruelty and harassment ranging from verbal to emotional or psychological abuse, bullying, physical abuse and other forms of “othering” which impair their dignity. It is clear that when crossing

the border, women suffer from stressful moments and are dehumanised. They view motives behind their suffering not simply as a result of the failure of bureaucratic processes but also as a result of political agendas as is evidenced by their suspicions that South African officials sometimes go on a “go slow”.

It is also instructive to note these quotations suggest that although violence is ‘normalised’ in that almost every respondent talks about it. Women totally reject that this violence is normal in the sense that they present it as shocking, traumatising, distressing and cruel. The manner in which women talk about violence is different from the way they talk about corruption, which is regarded as ‘normal’ and where the women themselves are sometimes complicit. Unlike corruption, which is ‘normalised’, they are very clear that violence is very wrong. They also suggest that both male and female officials are responsible for inflicting violence on them, and that this is condoned by the system. Language, weapons and processes are all used to batter the traders.

It is, however, important to note that, although respondents spoke emphatically about their experiences on verbal and physical abuse, they did not do so with regard to sexual abuse. Respondents were not very forthcoming when it came to the issue of sexual harassment as they chose to be evasive or simply feign ignorance about it. Some simply associated it with commercial sex workers. None of the respondents mentioned that they were ever sexually harassed, although they said that they were aware that some women were victims of sexual harassment at the Zimbabwean side of the border, particularly when they failed to pay the required customs duty. As noted in the previous section, they also spoke about instances some women were forced to offer sexual favours to Malaichas who would have carried their goods from Musina or helped them to clear their goods at the border. Some respondents also mentioned that some informal cross-border women traders offered sexual favours to truck drivers or the bus crew in order to avoid paying duty at the border or transportation fees. The statements below are illustrative of this:

“The advantage of buying from Musina is that we get assistance from the Malaichas. Joburg, eeh is a problem because you are supposed to declare your goods officially. To the extent that some women will be forced to get into sexual relationships with drivers (laughs) that’s how it starts now because they will be looking for ways of crossing the border without declaring their goods.”(cbt6)

“For those that I have witnessed I think they gave in. Personally I don’t think they were forced in to do it. I will be lying if I say they were forced into it. But you know this thing you don’t want to pay you

really want to make profit you don't want to pay for duty, what I think is that some of them gave in. Women who engage in these things I think they choose to" (cbt2)

"Yeah some women use trucks. But using trucks ends in sexual favours since the women do not normally want to pay. There are stories and people who have told their experiences of having sex in return for favours of smuggling her stuff easily at the border easily". (cbt2).

"Yes even at the border. Let's assume I don't want to pay duty for my goods at the border. I know I have to pay duty. Isn't it? When the ZIMRA officer comes I start saying "I don't have money for duty, what do you want me to do." He says "But mother you are saying you don't have money but you know you are supposed to pay duty. What's wrong with you?" The woman will say "What do you want me to do? What do you want me to do when I have already told you that I don't have the money?" The woman will be driving the ZIMRA official towards a sexual relationship. She will say "You can do what you want." At times you hear the woman telling the ZIMRA official "Do what you want" in full view of the public. The ZIMRA official will then say "take your goods and put them at the warehouse or otherwise you are going to delay others." Those are the people who will be sexually abused but they are the ones who would have started it anyway. Also among the passengers and drivers, sexual relationships are quite common". (cbt1).

"But there are stories about cross-border women being prostitutes and stuff like that. Personally, I just can't because I have noticed some ladies, women, or girls, are well known in each bus some of them no longer pay for their luggage, so I wonder how they pay for that luggage". (cbt2)

While these statements suggest that sexual transactions are part of the corruption within border-crossing processes, but that simultaneously, there are however, blurred lines between 'forced transactional sex' and a sexual liaison (for example, between a bus driver and a regular passenger). It is worth pointing, unlike with other vulnerabilities discussed above, all that the respondents talk about sexual harassment more as 'moral witnesses' rather than as victims themselves, thus giving the impression that incidences of sexual harassment at the border are low.

This contrast with the findings of earlier research, for instance, Tay (cited in Chiliya et al, 2012:3) found out that many cross-border women traders are forced to engage in transactional sex along the corridors, in order to obtain accommodation, transport and to get through the border. These findings are corroborated by Matakanye (cited in Chiliya et al., 2012:3) who claims that "on average, 10 women are raped on the South African border daily", translating to about 3000 women being raped every month. In my own data,

interviewees were willing to share stories about ‘other women’s’ sexual harassment, coercion, or abuse, but none spoke of her own personal experience of this.

Certain research suggests that women are reluctant to reveal personal experiences on sexual harassment, and even that this might be linked to taboos concerning open discussion about any forms of sexual experience which they have internalized. In addition, as Ige and Adelekele (2012: 6) add, “As a result of the embarrassment within society, many victims of harassment find it very difficult and highly uncomfortable to report their experience for fear of humiliation”. A more significant point to consider for my own research is the interviewees’ interest in discussing with me their lives as professional business-women and traders. Their positionality here may well have influenced the choices they made in representing aspects of their ‘private’ experiences. What the interviewees were willing to explore with me, as a researcher, was the ways in which harassment was woven into all levels of their work as cross-border traders. Although there were hints of the ways in which this affected them as ‘sexual beings’, their dominant concerns involved the public forms of humiliation and bullying, to which they were subjected.

5.7 RISKS OF MUGGINGS AND ROBBERIES

Apart from the various forms of harassment discussed above cross-border women traders are “easy prey” for thieves and robbers due to perceptions that they are physically weak and vulnerable people. Stories about women losing their handbags at the border to daring thieves or being robbed at gun or knife point while crossing the Limpopo River bridge on foot, were told by some respondents during the interviews. Almost every respondent interviewed for this study either had been attacked or knew someone or had heard about someone who had been attacked by thieves in South Africa. All respondents told numerous stories in which they personally encountered attacks by robbers while in Messina or Johannesburg.

The statements below shed some light on the risks of robbery and muggings that informal cross-border women traders are exposed to at the border and while in South Africa. As is shown in the quotation below, these risks can range from falling prey to confidence tricksters such as conmen to more life threatening encounters with robbers at gun or knife point. The statements below are illustrative of these:

“If for example you leave Harare to get to Musina you will find that there are a lot of thieves. That is the major problem. There is one time in 2011 in Musina when someone stopped me claiming that ...It just crossed my mind that somebody had told me about the trick and I walked away very quickly. This man said to me wait there, we want to change money. This lady is from Mozambique and cannot speak English so we need someone, a woman who can assist her. And then they said give us all the money that you have, let’s go to that corner. And I told them that I didn’t have any money. I don’t even have bus fare. I am looking for my sister-in-law. So conmen are there. They wanted me to give them all the money and then harass me before they run away. So that is the major challenge we face as women. In fact these thieves are mostly Zimbabweans”. (cbt5)

“My biggest fear was the Joburg part. People always say there are thieves, and surely they are there. My first time there, they stole my R2000. I was buying, it was my first experience as well. I really cried. I said to myself, what is this now. I was with this cousin of mine. She was really scared. There was this guy, I don’t know what he put in our handbags, so there was another lady who was watching and followed us. She said to us that guy put some ‘muti’ (concoction) on your handbags, so if you have money in there it is all going to vanish after some minutes. In order to avoid that you need to buy milk and wipe your money with it. So I was like we will buy the milk later but my cousin insisted that we should do immediately. The women offered to help wash the money with milk. My cousin dragged me and we went and bought the milk. We gave the woman all the money we had. Lucky enough I did not take out all the money because I had hidden some. The lady was like, you don’t have any more money on you and I said no. We put the money in a paper and she started wiping it with the milk. Another lady came to us and claimed that she also wanted her money wiped with milk because thieves had done the same thing to her handbag so she also gave her money to the same lady. So they told us to exchange handbags. We later on realized that the two ladies were together. She gave us back the money wrapped in a paper and then she said, when you get to that corner you spit.(Suka mini). I had this feeling that no, this is not it, we have been tricked but my cousin said the money was there. It was my first time, my father-in-law even laughed and said to me “it’s an old trick, you don’t know about it?” and I said no, I didn’t know. I have never heard about it. So we got to this shop where they sell handbags and I told my cousin that I don’t trust this. I don’t think there is money. My cousin said “the money is there. I saw it.” When she checked there was no money. Only papers. We were lucky because, at least we had bus fare. We had extra money that I had hidden. But for other Zimbabwean women who had fallen victim to the thieves, they had no money left, nowhere to sleep because all the money was stolen. So every time you go to Joburg you must make sure that your money is tight. But then I realize the problem is that it’s no longer South Africans who will be stealing from us, It’s our own people, because they can speak in your own language. So one has to be very cautious” (Cbt2).

The statements above show that the ‘conmen’ are highly sophisticated people who exploit societal stereotypes whereby women are viewed as people that are simple minded,

innocent, if not gullible. It is equally revealing that in the narratives, some of the ‘conmen’ are actually fellow women who work with thieves to ensnare other women because women regard fellow women as unlikely to be thieves. Women are stereotypically viewed as honest and harmless. While confidence tricksters may take advantage of women’s supposed lack of sophistry, in the interviewees’ representations, robbers exploit stereotypes about women’s embodiment. The quotations below are illuminating in this regard:

“You can lose your life or get robbed. Last year in September. I was robbed at gun point at Musina. We crossed the border very early in the morning. It was around past four in the morning then we arrived and waited where we normally wait. I was seated on the passenger seat in front of a small truck. I was seated next to a young lady with whom I had boarded a bus at Mbudzi Rank in Harare. She had asked me to go with her because it was her first time. She is young. Must have been born around 1987. She did not quite know South Africa. So we were seated next to the driver of this truck. There were others at the back behind us. The back was covered by a tent. A robber came wielding a gun and demanding money. He started with the driver. Those at the back were fast asleep. I was seated on the window seat. I had locked the door on my side but the driver had not locked his. Then the robber came to the driver and demanded money and the driver said he didn’t have any. The robber said to us, how about you ladies and then he looked at the young lady sitting next to me and then he realized that she was too young. And then he pointed at me, eyes bloodshot. And he said “We know you came to buy goods. Bring money before I kill you”. I just took out the money and gave him. I cannot say that I was searched. I just took the money myself and gave it to him. That is when he went to those who were sleeping at the back of the truck. But he did not get anything because by the time he went there people were already awake so everybody became alert. And also there were many people there. But at the front we were just the three of us. So I am the only one who was robbed” (Cbt6).

SE: What problems do you face when you travel to South Africa?

CBT7: Thieves. Ah ...And they are Zimbabweans. There are thieves. Zimbabweans. You can meet a thief who greets you nicely like “Mothers how are you?” And then you think it’s a child from home and then he says “Mother I am a thief. So can I have money for drugs? Give me money. I know that your money is hidden there. Give me money mother”. You will just take out the money and give it to him. He can choose to take all the money or leave some depending on the type of the person you are dealing with. We once came across such people and they said “Mother how are you?” and we said “We are well my child”. And then he said “We are thieves. We have been stalking you for some time. Give us money. Hundred Rand each”. When I wanted to run away he blocked my way. Then we screamed. And the he said “Are you not afraid of being stabbed by a knife?” We kept on screaming. The people started paying attention wondering what was happening. Then they ran away. They were a group”.

These stories, which represent thieves as “Zimbabweans” specifically targeting the women who are addressed as “Mother”, and who are direct about their own work, “I am a thief”, suggest that some of the risks faced by informal cross-border trading are life-threatening and women live in perpetual fear of paying with their lives each time they cross the border to do shopping in South Africa. This shows that the cross-border women traders are well aware of the dangers which they are forced to encounter. Their stories of the prevalence of crime and theft is supported by a study by Strategic Business Partnership for Growth in Africa (cited in Chiliya *et al.*, 2012:3), which revealed that crime was the most commonly mentioned problem “specifically the theft of cash or goods”. Respondents in the study also reported goods/and or cash being stolen whilst they were shopping, as well as at trading points and taxi ranks.

It is, however, worth highlighting that while most of the experiences discussed above primarily relate to places such as Messina and Johannesburg some incidences of robberies also take place between the Zimbabwean and the South African borders. The statements below are illustrative of this:

“There are thieves at the border. There is this other time, this lady, they stole her handbag. Unfortunately she had also put all her money in the handbag. Even the bus drivers they also tell you be careful here”. (cbt2)

“Yes the last time I went I heard that there are women who were robbed at gun-point coming from the Zim side at around 6p.m. They screamed for help but the soldiers were a distance away the soldiers ran to rescue the women but the robbers managed to flee”. (cbt11)

“Yeah as women. Yeah women are easy prey for tsotsis (thieves, crooks, cheats). They are easy prey as compared to men both at the border and in Mussina. Now there are these people who offer transport. Those people, umm.ah... some of them are crooks, but others are genuine. So as women we face some of these problems when crossing the border. There is no straight and secure transport which carries us straight from Harare to Musina so here and there one can become easy prey. Yeah at the border thieves snatch women hand bags when crossing to the South African side”. (cbt3)

“Tsotsis are there and they will be like at your neck. You need to hide your money because if you are not careful you will lose all your money. And the passport as well, you may lose everything. And yet we will be trying to look after our families, and to make sure that our children go to school”. (cbt4).

These quotations suggest that thieves and robbers (who are male) are callous and ruthless predators, and that the interviewees note women as a gender could no longer be trusted as they are part of the thieves' strategy. This is in line with Prentice and Caranza's observation that gender stereotypes are highly prescriptive and closely linked to "traditional social roles and power inequalities between women and men" (Prentice and Caranza 2002:269). It is these inequalities which in turn, shape the sense of embodiment whereby women believe that because of their weak bodies, they perpetually face the risk and threat of violence (Rivera, forthcoming).

5.8 LACK OF SANITATION FACILITIES

According to the interviews, due to their embodiment cross-border women traders face acute problems due to lack of sanitation or poor sanitation facilities. Although respondents unanimously agreed that sanitation facilities on the South African side of the border were good, they attested to the fact that the same could not be said about the Zimbabwean side. Most of the respondents said that the Zimbabwean side lacked proper sanitation and user friendly facilities. This posed a health risk to cross-border women traders. Unlike men, women traders have no culture of public urination, and, although all traders, regardless of gender, are familiar with the need to eliminate "at the roadside" if necessary, this is not what traders would choose. It is especially not what women traders would choose, especially when they are responsible for personal luggage, where there are crowds, and where a trader is already within the environment of often humiliating and exhausting negotiations, in order to cross a border.

The interviewees cited the lack of adequate clean toilets and the shortage of running water and food outlets at the Zimbabwean side as a serious inconvenience for women. One respondent said that the toilets at the Zimbabwean side were blocked or did not have a flushing mechanism, resulting in women facing serious problems. One respondent said that there were times when women had to queue for one or two working and flushing system toilets because the rest were dysfunctional. Because of lack of proper working toilets, women are sometimes forced to try and suppress the call of nature. The lack of sanitation facilities was clearly demonstrated in the following statements:

"Aaah on toilets, Zim side needs a lot of improvement. Women queue for one or two toilets which will be working. The others would have been blocked and also water at the border is a major problem. At

times you are told there is no water so toilets are for urine only. Imagine if you have a running stomach you can see how difficult it becomes at times if you are really pressed you have to go and fetch borehole water with a bucket to flush. Lack of water alone poses a lot of health hazards to women and one's greatest fear is cholera with such unhygienic conditions. The South African side, their facilities are good and there are plenty of toilets and water is there. Everything there is up to standard, toilets are clean. The Zim side is also trying to maintain a clean environment. There used to be papers and rubbish all over the border but these days, there are people sweeping. Still more improvement is required especially dust. There is too much dust at the border. I also have a problem with some of the food at the border prepared on the open space. I have a problem with that I think they must put proper food outlets at the border. But as of now I make sure I bring enough food and water from Mussina", (cbt11)

".. But I have forgotten one thing. There is this problem of...At the border there is no facility which is for women to bath. For three days you are travelling there is no bathing which takes place. So for women this is very, very difficult. At the South African side they don't allow you even to wash your face. At the Zimbabwean side they don't allow you to wash your face as well. So, (Laughs) You have you three solid days with no bath". (cbt3).

"Everything on the South African side is better in terms of facilities but Zimbabwean side normally amatoilets are a problem they are fewer and usually not clean and at times they are not even working. We at times queue for one or two toilets. Others will be blocked, you can imagine how bad it would be if someone has diarrhoea, there will be no water in most instances. And also the water is sour I don't know what they can do but you can't drink water from the tap there". (cbt10).

"I have wondered why things do not change for the better at the Zim side. Toilets are a problem as and they are not enough and most of the times dirty. Mostly, when I use the toilet I just enter by the back because I can easily vomit. I can travel the whole journey vomiting, but to avoid the toilet is not possible because I would be pressed. But of late they are trying to keep them smart, but I think they should buy powerful disinfectants to kill the smell of urine". (cbt9).

These statements show that informal cross-border women traders are at risk of contracting diseases due to lack of sanitation facilities, particularly at the Zimbabwean side of the border. The lack of sanitation facilities exposes women to unhygienic conditions, thereby exacerbating the risks of contracting diseases such as cholera and typhoid. The predicament of women is further complicated by cultural prescriptions about what they should or should not do as well as general beliefs about a woman's body.

5.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the various challenges that cross-border women traders' interviews revealed. It was demonstrated that these challenges, namely delays at the border, restriction and confiscation of goods, and corruption relate to their vulnerabilities in terms of their business, while challenges such as harassment, thefts and muggings and lack of sanitation facilities at the border relate to their embodiment. Although these can be thematized separately, data show that vulnerabilities in terms of business and vulnerabilities which relate to embodiment interact constantly. The interviewees made it clear that opportunities for 'embodied harassment' are interlinked with every stage of the border-crossing process, which is open to practices (such as forced delays) which imperil their work as traders. In this chapter my contention is that all these challenges negate the empowering effect of cross-border trading in the sense that they make cross-border trading more dangerous and hazardous. It violates and is a risky undertaking which threatens the viability and attractiveness of the cross-border business. In a context of general economic coercion, women traders do not think of themselves as 'taking the opportunity', but that of 'surviving', and the 'challenges' they narrate are not separable from the 'business'; in a way they are the business itself.

The next chapter discusses the tension between 'opportunities and challenges which cross-border trade creates for cross-border women traders. Thus it synthesizes the representations of opportunities and challenges faced by the interviewees and according to the perspectives of cross-border women traders how the tension is created.

CHAPTER SIX:

OPPORTUNITIES OR CHALLENGES? THE AMBIVALENCE OF CROSS-BORDER TRADING

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the theoretical tension between opportunities created by informal cross-border trading and the challenges experienced at the border. It then focuses on the tension between the two theoretical ideas, that is, on one hand, that cross-border trade is helpful to women and, on the other hand, that cross-border trade is harmful to women. It then moves into an area which subverts the notion that ‘opportunities’ and ‘challenges’ can easily be dichotomized outside of a consideration of the interviewees’ representations of their own strategies for ensuring that their work is successful. The thematization of their approaches to engagement with ‘the business’ of becoming a successful cross-border trader deepens an understanding of tensions between ‘opportunities’ and ‘challenges’, by offering a glimpse of the traders’ own theorizations of how they create a sustainable zone of economic activity for themselves.

6.2 CONTRADICTIONARY IMPACTS OF CROSS-BORDER TRADING

Representations of cross-border women traders in Chapter 4 (opportunities) and Chapter 5 (challenges) reveal contradictory impacts of cross-border trading on women. On the one hand, cross-border trading creates varied opportunities in a context of economic crisis, while on the other hand, it exposes women to numerous challenges and vulnerabilities, which are detrimental to their business, as well as their lives. As suggested at the end of chapter five, the ‘challenges’ of creating economic sustainability as a cross-border trader are revealed in the material as, in many ways, the ‘job’ itself. The challenges women narrate cannot be separated from the business. They are part and parcel of the business. The experiences of women at the border and the manner in which they negotiate the Zimbabwe and South African border spaces, underscore the theoretical tension that I have alluded to, thus making the border a crucial zone for exploring these tensions. From the narratives of informal cross-border women traders, it becomes clear that crossing the border is crucial in

shaping and defining the cross-border business. Therefore, the border becomes an important zone of the cross-border trading work. The terrain controls the meaning of the trade for women, in that the success or failure of the cross-border business, hinges on what happens at the border. In the following section, I present the women's self-representations of what it takes to make this border-crossing, which is not in itself the 'point' of the trading (the exchange of goods is the point), however, in the current context of complex political dynamics between Zimbabwe and South Africa, the unhelpful and badly administered border control policy, and the economic climate of Zimbabwe, are 'the point' at which the meaning of cross-border trading for women can be powerfully illuminated.

6.3 STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TRADE

In order to cope with the various challenges and risks discussed above, informal cross-border women traders have come up with a number of strategies, in order to sustain their cross-border trade business. These strategies, for sustainable trade, relate to their experiences at the border, as well as their business in general. For instance, in order to circumvent the problems caused by the restriction on goods, informal cross-border women traders have devised ways of coping with these restrictions, be it on the South African or on the Zimbabwean side of the border. One way of doing this is hiding goods under the bus seat. Informal cross border women traders view restrictions on goods, not only as unjust, but also as prejudicial to their profits. One respondent described the paying of customs duty as a "rip off". Another respondent who used to go to South Africa with merchandise for sale described how she used to hide goods when crossing the two sides of the border. She has this to say:

"When we were going with our seat-covers and doilies we declared our goods. They put them on a scale; they told us the amount that we were supposed to pay. With me I haven't experienced any difficulties. As I have told you I used to go with my mother. My mother was a senior at the border. We used to hide a lot of stuff and the way we packed, we didn't put one item in one bag even if we had like ten bags like for 10 pairs of seat-covers, I put 2 in this bag, 2 in the other bag and so on. So when I go to the Revenue Authority officers I present one bag or two they give me my slip. When I get to the bus they ask for my slip and I produce one. And if they ask "where are your bags?" I tell them here are my bags. If the officer opens my bag to cross-check with the slip he will find that everything tallies with what is in my bag. If the officer sees me with another bag and asks to see it I will tell him it's my bag because everything is identical. They don't write the colour of your seat-covers. I just carried my bags with one slip. That's the South African side when I used to go with seat-covers and bed-covers. The Zimbabwean side had no problem at all. We used to pass easily. When we were coming back with

groceries, it wasn't difficult but when I started operating a Flea Market, the Zimbabwean side used to allow only four items. And if you are in business you might be having a box of shoes, or 10 bags, 10 pairs of trousers, 10 what, what. So the way we used to pack our goods was that, when you are packing, like the trousers, you pack them inside-out. The ZIMRA officers won't see the price tag. They won't see anything. You just tell them I have this I have that, but at the Zimbabwean side I never paid any duty (laughs). Why? They want someone who is confident. Just act as if everything is OK. You have your bag and everything. You open it before the ZIMRA guy comes. You open your bag. You open your bag. You even put out some of the things yourself. The moment he comes he will just see nothing suspicious because the bag is already open. (cbt1)

Another respondent narrated how she avoids paying duty by hiding her goods under the bus seat, but she was quick to point out that this was risk because if border officials found them, this would attract severe penalties. She said:

"I have noticed like if you talk to the driver, then you have to pay. So you put under the seat. That is if you are lucky because sometimes if they search them, you will be very unfortunate. Like what happened last time. They don't allow agricultural products into South Africa. I wanted to bring my cousin some sweet potatoes. The first time I managed to cross with them, but the second time I put them under the seat, they found them at the border and confiscated them."(cbt2)

The above statements suggest that the stringent regulations at the border predispose women to violating the law, which then exposes them to risks. The statements also suggest that women view the regulations as unjust and their behaviour as justified even if they will be violating the law. Their survival strategies can, therefore, be viewed as counter-hegemonic in that they seek to 'legalise' what is illegal and yet society views women as generally law-abiding people.

Another strategy used by informal cross-border women traders to ensure that they do not pay customs duty for extra goods is that of sharing the extra goods with fellow cross-border traders on the bus, so that they would declare on each other's behalf. One respondent had this to say in this regard:

"At times I stick to the permitted value of goods and at times I pay duty so it just depends with the orders I will be having. But at times even if I exceed I don't pay duty because there will be other cross-border traders in the bus so we just exchange I give my other pairs of something to someone then I get her hand bags if I don't have any, we help each other and there is unity and cooperation among cross-border traders. That's how we do it and easily cross with goods exceeding the value of R2500."(cbt10)

Apart from sharing goods with colleagues to declare informal cross-border women traders also get assistance from bus crew members to facilitate the declaration of goods. One respondent explained thus:

“Yeah, the Zim side is also a problem when coming back, especially if you have a lot of stuff with you. Normally we liaise with each other when in the bus and we assist each other by exchanging our goods and sharing them with those with fewer goods. One can also approach the drivers of the bus to tell them that they have too many goods or to say they don’t have enough money for duty, then they can help finding someone legible to declare your goods. We normally pay for duty after all possible avenues have been explored”. (cbt11)

Cross-border women traders also help each other in times of need. One respondent had this to say:

“When the worst comes to the worst, women help each other. I remember this incident I helped a certain woman who was going to Masvingo. I was touched when she was about to leave all her goods at the border, so I had this money which was being sent to someone else. I had to risk giving out that money, in order to help and when we got to Masvingo she was able to pay back the money”. (cbt9).

Another strategy women use is to maintain a good relationship with bus crews in order to get assistance. The following statements highlight the perceived advantage of loyalty to a particular bus:

“They help us a lot the drivers. We use the same bus. They know us very well. If you experience any problem at the border, like not having enough money to declare your goods, they will help you. And then you can phone people at home to look for the money and when you arrive in Harare you can give them at Road-port.”(cbt7)

“There is an advantage in that, if you run out of money and tell the drivers that you have run out of money but you can pay back when in Harare, the drivers will assist you if they know you. Your husband is allowed to buy you a ticket from the Harare office and phones to the drivers in Johannesburg to allow you to board the bus. Sometimes you can misplace your bag and if it has your name on it they will keep it for you. Even after arriving in Johannesburg and there is something that is urgently needed back in Harare, I will just buy it and give it to the bus crew who will take it with them back to Harare. But if they don’t know you, they won’t be able to help you or make such favours.” (Cbt1)

“One other thing I meant to tell you is that suppose you don’t have duty and you do not have money to declare, the drivers can assist you. They can give you money to pay for your duty and at the same time they ask you to phone home so that at least someone is by the bus rank when we arrive in Bulawayo with the money, but if there is no money at home that’s when you can leave your goods. At the same time, the bus drivers will tell you if you get the money, you can give them your passport and declaration form then they can assist by bringing the goods for you.” (cbt11).

These statements suggest that the challenges faced by informal cross-border women traders have not only strengthened solidarity among cross-border women traders themselves, but also given rise to new friendships, networks and relationships with those people who transport them between the two borders. Such relationships always come in handy on a rainy day, like when one does not have enough money to pay for duty or when their goods have been confiscated. The strategy of using the same bus creates a win-win situation between the bus crew and cross-border women traders in the sense that bus operators are guaranteed of customer loyalty while women get assistance. As a result of the cordial relationships, cross-border women traders do not normally resist if they are asked to pay R20 per person for bribing border officials, even if they are against the idea of paying.

“To me I just contribute so that we make our life easier at the border as a cross-border. At times you might think it’s not fair because we hardly know how much the officials are given and also it’s difficult to trust anyone in as far as money issues are concerned. It’s also possible that drivers have a share in that money. What I have observed is that most women just pay the money so that we maintain a good relationship with our drivers and also as a way of solidarity in as far as our work is concerned. Also if no one leaves her goods at the border and officers show leniency then we are all grateful”.(cbt11)

“Yes, they ask R10, R20. It’s for buying time so that you won’t get delayed at the border. If you get at the border, they just give the ZIMRA official that amount I don’t know how much it would be, R20 times 75 passengers. It’s a lot of money. They just give it to the ZIMRA I don’t know whether it is given to an individual or the team that will be on duty that particular day.” (cbt1)

These statements suggest that women are aware that they are being fleeced of their money, but they just pay because of the need to maintain a good relationship with the bus crew. In addition, the narratives in the interviews suggest a level of sophisticated surveillance the women have over the identities of the bus-drivers, and their habits, and an ability to capitalize on drivers’ vulnerabilities, even where those drivers are forcing them to pay extra money. The narratives reveal women traders’ use of variance in their own choice of strategic manoeuvres to evade taxes, or confiscation. There is also a sense that, while being ‘caught’ is frustrating, it carries in itself no shame.

Apart from bus crews, cross-border women traders, particularly those who buy their goods from Musina use transport operators commonly known as Malaichas as middlemen to declare their goods rather than interfacing with customs directly. The extract below gives

some insights into how these Malaichas help informal cross-border women traders to circumvent the paying of duty:

SE: Do you ever face problems when crossing the border?

CBT6: Sometimes we face problems but we get help from the Malaichas (transporters).

SE: How do they help you?

CBT6: They will make us pay money so that we can pass through the border without any searches. They will search us but not that much.

SE: Where do you get the Malaichas from?

CBT6: We get them from Musina. They will help us cross the border then we can go and take our buses from Beit-bridge.

SE: How do they help you?

CBT6: Yeah, we give them money so that they give ZIMRA officials.

SE: But you are satisfied with the help you get from them?

CBT6: Yes we are satisfied. It's good for us.

SE: Why do you prefer to give the Malaichas your money?

CBT6: We will be having too many goods which need to be declared at the border. You will now be looking at the money that you will be having and you may realize that if you try to declare everything the money won't be enough to pay duty.

It is, however, important to point out that some respondents feel that Malaichas are “wolves in sheep’s clothing’ as they are viewed as crooks, wheelers and dealers, who are out to fleece innocent cross-border women traders of their money. This view is captured in the words of one respondent who said that:

“And also there is corruption emanating mainly from those who transport women to and from Musina. We normally use small trucks to cross the border. So using those trucks if you don't give them money you can spend the whole day at the border. So for us to be served quickly, we have to give the driver some money like R20. If we don't give them money, problems that cause delays will be countless. So these guys whom we give money always make sure they have milked you of your hard earned money. They will tell you that if you don't give us money you will sleep at the border When coming back to Zim, we give money to the drivers and the drivers claim that they will give it to the officials. What these guys normally do is that when they go to the officials they will declare some goods and not

declare others. But I don't really see how it helps, just because the money that these guys are asking for these days is too much." (cbt4)

In spite of the risk of being ripped off by the Malaichas, informal cross-border women traders still opt to use the Malaichas because they do not have any choice. Informal cross-border women traders, thus, have to weigh their options carefully as they are trapped in-between the greedy Malaichas and the 'insensitive' regulations on importation of goods. This shows that these coping strategies are not a solution in their own right, but they only enable cross-border women traders to survive rather than sustain their business.

As a way of coping with the difficulties experienced at the border some women, particularly those who cross the border on foot, pay bribes ranging from R20-R50 to South African border officials so that they can cross the border without having their passports stamped. One respondent has this to say:

"We have several coping mechanisms. Sometimes we can board buses that will be going to Johannesburg then we give the drivers R50 and they issue us with tickets because those who use buses are the first to be served. Or we can give South African immigration officers R20 or R50, depending on the length of the queue. If the queue is not long we can give them R20 then we pass without having our passports stamped. We can then have them stamped when we come back. I have personally done it. But it is risky because you can come across police on the road who may request to see your passport stamps. If you don't have them, they will deport you. So you have to make sure that your passport is stamped". (cbt6)

This statement suggests that the women's approach to negotiating the border crossing exposes them to arrest, and yet, they present this risk as a calculated one, transforming the intransigence of 'illegality' into a more flexible terrain in which, while they may 'lose', they may also 'win.'

Also, as a way of beating the delays at the border, informal cross-border women traders who buy their goods from Musina spoke of buying tickets from buses going to Johannesburg so that they can be served together with those using buses. The South African Immigration officials give first preference to those who will be using buses and going to Johannesburg than those using other modes of transport. This details another instance of 'using the system to beat it.'

In order to minimize the risk of robberies and thefts, as well as sexual abuse, women informal cross-border women traders who cross the border on foot in the evening walk as a group. One respondent had this to say:

“..Crossing from the Zimbabwean side to the South African side, that place is dangerous because you will be aiming to beat the long queue at the South African border. But at least if you are many it’s better, than when you are alone”. (cbt4)

Crossing the Limpopo river bridge into South Africa at night, as a group, is not totally secure. However, it is one way to try and deter robbers. The statement below from a respondent sums up this risk:

“Sometimes you may be unfortunate because sometimes even if you are many, like 10, you may not know each other. If one of you were to be attacked you may find that no one will stop to help. People won’t stop. They will run away leaving you to face the wrath of your attackers. It just depends on whether God has blessed your journey or not.”

This suggestion raises questions about the women’s own self-representation of life, and what it means to be “blessed by God”. The interviewees often invoked religious phrases and, although this particular research did not explore the traders’ own spiritual and political beliefs and values, this is clearly something crucial to understanding their strategies for engaging with such a difficult a ‘job’. It is also worth noting that the strategies of which they speak, force them into a series of ‘moment-by-moment’ negotiations, rather than a way of providing a permanent solution to challenges. Their narratives, however, are replete with references to what they believe to be more comprehensive interventions to addressing these challenges. I now turn to their ideas about such interventions.

6.4 ALLEVIATING THE PLIGHT OF CROSS-BORDER WOMEN TRADERS

A key aspect of theorizing sustainability in their work involves the traders’ thought about how to improve their situation on a long-term basis. This thought often focused on activist and policy-based strategies, and given that none of the traders would have described herself as ‘political,’ but all is done in good faith to make the cross-border trade business viable.

Cross-border women traders feel that the challenges they face at the border could very well be eased if they had an organisation which represents their interests as a group. Most respondents mentioned the need to have a cross-border trade association to voice their interests. The following statements are examples:

“Just to give us proper water and proper sanitation because the situation at the border puts a lot of women’s health at risk. At times you choose not to use the toilets at all being afraid of putting your health at risk. And also at the garage where we sleep, should I say there is only one bathroom and at times there will be 4 buses, 4 buses using one bathroom so you can imagine but to be honest you end up not bathing at all because you think it’s better not to bath than to risk catching diseases”. ?(cbt10)

“I think maybe on our side we should have an association for cross-border traders to lighten things up, maybe it’s there but I don’t know how to join it or something like that” (cbt2)

“The other problems that we face are that after being harassed and abused at the border and when we get to Masvingo, we find another ZIMRA roadblock. The bus will be full to the brim. We will be sleeping, tired of lifting heavy loads, with swollen legs then the ZIMRA officials will ask us to disembark from the bus so that they inspect our goods for the second time one by one. Then we start off-loading again. Imagine after arriving at the border at past 8 in the evening and then leaving at 3 am. After spending sleepless nights you are asked to offload again in Masvingo. When you think you are supposed to rest. It’s so stressful. The government must do something about this”. (cbt7)

The statements above suggest that informal cross-border women traders view their challenges they face at the border as embedded in institutional practices and culture, and that they require the re-alignment of policies by the two governments, in order to transform these practices. . This is supported by the statement of one of the respondents below:

“I don’t know, can’t they talk to each other, is it not possible for the two governments to negotiate so that some of these problems can be addressed so that at least officials at the South African side can improve their pace so that there are no delays. So that officials can serve people the way those on the Zimbabwean side do. Because sometimes you find someone drinking tea while serving people, stopping to do other things and so on while the queue will be very long and yet time will not be on our side. So the issue of long queues is the major problem”. (cbt6)

This statement suggests that informal cross women border traders think that all the challenges mentioned above can be only addressed if governments put in place policy changes that holistically transform their experiences at the border so that the cross border

trade is brought back to its status as a business as opposed to a survival strategy, which is currently the case.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter revisited the theoretical interest of the study. It explored the ambivalence of informal cross-border trading. I have argued that although informal cross-border trade is empowering to cross-border women traders, especially in terms of transforming their economic lives, the challenges cross-border women traders face at the border transform the meaning of 'trading' into the meaning of 'becoming able to trade sustainably'. In a context riven with corruption and complexity I, however, argue that this dichotomous view is limiting in that cross-border women traders do not necessarily view their participation in cross-border trading as an 'opportunity', particularly in the context of the debilitating economic conditions prevailing in Zimbabwe at the time, but rather as a matter of building an economic platform for the survival of themselves, and usually, their families as well. Their own strategies for developing ways of managing contexts which consistently demean, harass, and frustrate their work, constitute, my analysis, the grounds from which a critical understanding of cross-border trading for women should be developed.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I sought to explore the tension between theories that suggest on one hand that informal cross-border trade is empowering and on the other hand that informal cross-border trade is harmful to women. This was achieved through an exploration of the experiences of Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders at the Zimbabwe/South Africa Beitbridge border post. In this concluding chapter, as I reflect on my research journey, I present key arguments from the findings of the study, the limitations of the study and also suggest areas for further research.

The study focused on the experiences of Zimbabwean informal cross-border women traders at the border in the context of a debilitating economic crisis that has witnessed millions of citizens voting with their feet in search of a better life. I found the border to be a suitable space for this exploration because the border shapes the cross-border business in multiple ways, and even through their narratives, women interviewed for this thesis, revealed that experiences at the border can make or break the informal cross-border business in Zimbabwe.

As I reflect on the experiences of the cross-border women traders, this thesis presents the narratives of women using thematic content analysis. Empirical data gleaned in this study supports my original theoretical argument that informal cross-border trade is both empowering and harmful to women, and this tension plays itself out through zones of optimism and pessimism exhibited in the narratives of informal cross-border women traders.

I have argued that informal cross-border trade unlocks a number of opportunities through the creation of employment, thereby making women financially independent and able to sustain their families from poverty. The varied opportunities created by informal cross-border trade position women in such a way that they become significant players in household decision-making because they are able to contribute to the economic well-being of the family through the proceeds from the informal cross-border trade. These findings strengthen findings from earlier scholarly works that have concluded that women feel economically empowered by engaging in informal cross-border trade because they become important players in the

decision-making process (Muzvidziwa, 1998; 2012; Ndlela, 2006; IOM, 2010; Kiwanika and Monson, 2009; Peberdy, 2002; Ndiaye, 2008; UnWomen, 2008). Financial autonomy enables women to re-negotiate gender roles, in the sense that, instead of depending on their husbands, they themselves have become breadwinners; a duty previously reserved for men.

In this study, I, however, argue that the shift in gender roles is nuanced and complex, in that, the new found independence of women does not necessarily result in them leaving their traditional roles of mothers and wives nor does it result in them completely taking over the traditional roles assigned to men by society. If anything, the reconfiguration of gender roles disadvantages women, in the sense that, venturing in the public spaces originally occupied by men means that, women become over-burdened. They have to combine their traditional duties as mothers and as wives with cross-border trading. Informal cross-border trade immerses women in a matrix of dual roles, thereby undermining the liberation gained through participation in informal cross-border trade. Women's participation in informal cross-border trading and the approximation of 'masculine' identities do not necessarily make them feel that they are taking over the responsibilities of men. A careful examination of the narratives of women interviewed for this study shows that they view their participation in informal cross-border trade as a way of complementing their husbands, rather than taking over their duties.

Married, women still lack agency in the sense that they still view themselves as appendages of their husbands. They view their participation in informal cross-border trade as a way of helping their husbands who have been emasculated by the economic crisis prevailing in the country. This 'collaboration' is clearly shown by the fact that informal cross-border women traders view themselves as being engaged in a 'smart partnership' with their husbands, whose masculinity and position as breadwinners has been undermined by the festering economic crisis. However, such 'partnership or collaboration is not genuine, in the sense that, to a great extent, men set the ground rules in the informal cross-border trade, and they prescribe the moral benchmarks for their wives. As has been observed in the narratives, some women's participation in the informal cross-border trading business is subject to the approval of their husbands. Even when the approval is granted, they have to sign an 'unwritten' pact with their husbands that they will have to conform with certain codes of ethical behaviour while they are away from home or else their participation will be refused.

In addition, men either as border officials or public transporters (*Malaichas*) or law enforcers, set the parameters of public discourses in informal cross-border trading, in the sense that they are the ones who determine who will cross the border without much pain, thus demonstrating the currency of patriarchal hegemony in the informal cross-border business. I also argue that the freedom, independence, financial autonomy and the appropriation of masculine values and traits such as courage, endurance and ‘toughness’ in both mind and body and group solidarity (Donaldson, 1993: 645) gained by women through participation in informal cross-border trade, are eroded by the fact that women are still subservient to the patriarchal system that prescribes the terms of the cross-border business.

The other form in which the ambivalence of the cross-border trade manifests itself is that women interviewed for this study do not necessarily view the benefits of the informal cross-border trade as ‘opportunities’, neither do they regard informal cross-border trade as a business per-se. The numerous challenges impinging on their business and their embodiment are some of the vulnerabilities women have to grapple with at the border. These negate the opportunities and rewards offered through cross-border trade. Thus, delays at the border, restrictions on goods, confiscation of their goods, corruption, harassment, muggings, and lack of sanitation facilities, do not only make the informal cross-border trade less attractive to women, but a dangerous undertaking, a violent and a life threatening endeavour, which make women more vulnerable in their experiences as cross-border traders. The agony and pain women go through at the border against the backlash of economic crisis back home makes the informal cross-border trade a “survival” rather than a business trade. In the face of these vulnerabilities and challenges which women face while undertaking the business, some then reconsider their participation in the informal cross-border trade as ‘not taking an opportunity’ but rather a question of ‘survival’. As a result, cross-border trading loses its essence as a business, as survival becomes the ‘business’ itself.

The survival imperative exposes cross-border women traders to a plethora of risks and hazards. Their collaboration in the corruption and other unethical practices emboldens negative aspersions about the authenticity of their trade as a ‘real business’ and themselves as genuine and moral people. Women are torn between the irresistible temptation of subverting border rules and regulations so that they survive and being labelled unscrupulous, taint their image as well. As a result of these negative constructions of the cross-border business, women do not regard themselves as engaged in a ‘business’ but as merely surviving. Neither do they regard cross-border trading as a job. Women celebrate the fact that they are able to

afford certain material things, which they could no longer afford due to the inflationary environment, while at the same time they lament the dangers of the trade.

The contradictory effects of migration have been observed by Jolly and Reeves who contend that migration can bring both gains and losses (Jolly & Reeves, 2005:20). According to Jolly and Reeves, migration “entails a complex, often contradictory class positioning, whereby a migrant might experience social upward mobility *vis-a-vis* the place of origin but social downward mobility the host environment” (Jolly & Reeves, 2005:16. In the specific context of this thesis, the material accomplishments of informal cross-border women traders discussed in chapter 4 suggest that informal cross-border women traders have enjoyed some form of social mobility, for example, back home. However, the multiple hazards and risks in the form of physical and psychological violence, xenophobia and all manner of ‘Othering’ downgrade women’s social status. As a result of this down-grading, the perception that the informal-cross border trade is not a ‘job’ is entrenched. Thus the cross-border trade is perceived as something which one can do in the absence of any ‘better’ alternatives. Cross-border trade connotes failure as much as it connotes success. Cross-border trade is life, but it is also death. It is an escape from hunger, but it is also a form of imprisonment.

The women interviewed for this study, therefore, imagine and hope that one day the Zimbabwean economy will ‘rise’ again from its fall, so that they can get jobs in the mainstream economy. In the context of Zimbabwe’s economic crisis, cross border trading therefore, occupies an ambiguous position in the sense that it is both a source of life as well as well as a source of embarrassment. But more tellingly, it is a vector of a multitude of life threatening hazards.

I have argued, in this chapter, that, cross-border women traders find themselves at the cross-roads *vis-a-vis* their trade. Their narratives about the border vacillate between hope and fear, pessimism and optimism. Cross-border trade takes them out of the stifling domestic sphere into public spaces where they are able to challenge the established gender regime. From the representations of cross-border women traders, I also argue that their continued participation in the trade cannot be attributed only to the livelihood that informal cross-border trade creates but also to the tangible gains and strides of progress cross-border women traders have made in their day to day lives. At the same time, the odds are stacked against them in the sense that they are faced with a plethora of challenges which impinge on their business and their embodiment.

At the border, how cross-border women traders manoeuvre and reconstruct survival strategies, in order to negotiate their business spaces do not only demonstrate their agency but also their mental and physical aptitude to the job at hand. The aggressiveness cross-border women traders portray against the difficult, dangerous and life threatening business operation, challenges the social construction of femininity in which women are viewed as weak, soft, passive and fragile beings (Wood; 2007). Informal cross-border trade has brought about new gender identities, thus reconstructing the social construction theory of gender.

I, however, argue that against a backlash of a myriad of challenges, and difficult circumstances, which women operate under, the gains and strides Zimbabwean cross-border women traders have made in their lives through the cross-border trade is a glimpse of how far women would go in alleviating poverty in their families and in contributing to the economies of their countries, if only their operations were deemed important. It is therefore, imperative to address the concerns of cross-border women trade and give women's work the value it deserves for the betterment of not only their welfare, but the whole nation.

Research's respondents seem more optimistic than pessimistic about the informal cross-border trade and the experiences of the border, and their suggestions on possible policy interventions suggests that they view their experiences at the border as essentially embedded in institutional practices and culture. This calls for a re-alignment of policies by the South African and Zimbabwean governments. Their perception that problems at the border can be addressed if the two governments put in place policy changes that holistically transform their experiences at the border, underscores this optimism.

Although my decision to confine the focus of this thesis to the border enabled me to gain deep insights on the experiences of informal cross-border women traders at the border, there is need to broaden the scope of cross-border women traders beyond the border, in order to have a full understanding and the meaning of cross-border trade in its totality. Confining my study to the border meant that experiences that happened outside the terrain of the border were excluded and, yet, not all the experiences that impinge on the informal cross-border trade happened at the border. Future studies could broaden the scope of the study by including the experiences of informal cross-border women traders in the host, as well as the home country so as to have a broader understanding of the meaning of the informal cross-border trade business. Such a study could also be based on a bigger sample, which is not only representative in terms of geography, but also in terms of class.

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