CHAPTER 7

Life Beyond Merrivale Farm
Preparation for and Trading in South Africa

Despite its importance, female migration has been hidden from research, history, and policy. Through the new land that we have been given by our government, I have been going to South Africa to sell vegetables, mopane worms, bambara nuts, and round nuts. My life will never be the same again.

Conversation with one of the women traders, Merrivale, August 2010

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the link between women's access to land and the social creation and shaping of markets through transitory mobility to South Africa. I elucidate how women shape their livelihoods through transitory mobility\(^1\) to South Africa. I illustrate this process with evidence on the merchandise that women sell there, the transport logistics involved, how border formalities are negotiated on both the Zimbabwean and the South African side of the border. Social networks are an important facet of these trips to South Africa, hence I give them primacy.

The question of women’s identities in the market place is complex because women’s activities range over households and workplaces, rural and urban environments, and ethnic and social divides; and they operate in spaces where local, national, and global divisions but are blurred by the circulation of people and commodities (Gudeman 1986, Seligman 2001, Dodson 2008, Peberdy and Crush 1998). “The best-documented form of migration by temporary workers is from surrounding African countries in such sectors as mining and agriculture; less well-known are the migrants and new immigrants who have established themselves in the informal and small enterprise economy” (Rogerson 1997:1). I explore relationships between the women and South African and other foreign traders in the light of temporary mobility.\(^2\) The issue of the threats and risks

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1 Morreira (2010), in a study of undocumented Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, notes that migration is about permanence and mobility is non-permanent.

2 I use this term because these women became engaged in trading trips to South Africa to provide a livelihood for themselves and their families when Zimbabwe was grappling with economic, social, and political upheavals that destabilised farming in the nine years from
that the women face is also addressed to elucidate how these transitory mobile trips work. In addition, the business practices adopted in conducting trade and the contribution of the trading to the women's finances are explored in both the South Africa and Zimbabwean settings.

Characteristics of Female Traders from Tavaka Village

Twenty women from Tavaka Village are engaged in trade to South Africa. They are a disparate group. They comprise young women, middle-aged, and the elderly; 15 are married, two are widows, and three are single. The married women range in age from 28 to 65 years, the widows range between 40 and 55 years old, and the single women are all 23 years old. The two women from the polygynous households in the study were among those involved in trading trips to South Africa. Table 7.1 profiles the women's educational levels.

All the women have at least enough education to read and write. Trading trips contribute significantly to the livelihoods of the women and their families; the money and goods imported from South Africa acted as safety nets in the early 2000s. The same is currently true since Zimbabwe’s economic crisis persists. The next section gives an example of the budgetary decisions made by the women about how to use their income.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Educational level attained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s data, 2009–2011.

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2000 to 2009. After the installation of the power-sharing transitional government between the MDC and ZANU-PF in March 2009, there were signs of economic normality again.

3 What should be understood is that the Zimbabwean crisis has economic, political and social connotations that ought to be viewed holistically as all these facets affect the citizenry's economic well-being.