

# Narratives of Zimbabwean female teachers' experience in South Africa

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## Abstract

*The violent political situation and economic meltdown in Zimbabwe at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that saw a mass exit of Zimbabweans to other countries served as a catalyst for this study. Female teachers were among the historic outflow to neighbouring South Africa. Thus, this paper examined the experience of Zimbabwean female immigrant teachers in South Africa. Empirically, narrative interviews, were used together to elicit data. The author who was amongst the immigrant teachers gave a narration of her story. The interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed using the feminist critical discourse perspectives. The key findings speak to female immigrant teachers as resilient professionals who were able to overcome the challenges of resettling in South Africa. Zimbabwean female immigrant teachers have challenged prevailing stereotypes for instance that male dominance. Therefore, the South African government needs to enact policies that improve the plight of female immigrant teachers.*

**Key words:** *male dominance, female immigrant teachers, women, feminist critical discourse, Zimbabwean*

## Résumé:

*La situation politique violente et la crise économique au Zimbabwe au tournant du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui ont vu une sortie massive de Zimbabweens vers d'autres pays, ont servi de catalyseur à cette étude. Les enseignantes faisaient partie des exodes historiques vers l'Afrique du Sud voisine. Ainsi, cet article a examiné l'expérience des enseignantes immigrées zimbabweennes en Afrique du Sud. Empiriquement, des entretiens narratifs ont été utilisés ensemble pour obtenir des données. L'auteur qui faisait partie des enseignants immigrés a raconté son histoire. Les entretiens ont été enregistrés électroniquement et retranscrits mot à mot. Les données ont été analysées en utilisant les perspectives du discours critique féministe. Les principales*

*conclusions parlent des enseignantes immigrées en tant que professionnelles résilientes qui ont réussi à surmonter les défis de la réinstallation en Afrique du Sud. Les enseignantes immigrées zimbabwéennes ont remis en question les stéréotypes dominants, par exemple la domination masculine. Par conséquent, le gouvernement sud-africain doit adopter des politiques qui améliorent le sort des enseignantes immigrées.*

**Mots clés :** *dominance masculine, enseignantes immigrées, femmes, discours critique féministe, Zimbabween*

## Introduction

The aftermath of the Zimbabwean mass exodus in 2000, was followed by an increase in research on mass exit of people to other countries (Adelowo, Smythe and Nakhid, 2016; Chaumba, 2015; Crush and Tevera, 2010; Chereni, 2014; Hurst, 2017; Johnson and Whitley, 2016; Manik, 2012; McDuff, 2015; Morreira, 2010; Pasura, 2013; Ranga, 2015a). The most recent literature (Manik, 2012; McDuff, 2015; Morreira, 2010; Pasura, 2013; Ranga, 2015a) has cited several circumstances that perpetuated the Zimbabwean mass exodus as being hinged on political and economic issues. The economic situation in Zimbabwe deteriorated at the hands of the violent farm invasions that started in the year 2000. The country was still recovering from white colonial regime in 1980 (Pasura, 2013).

Notable studies, for example Manik (2015) and Manik (2014), have highlighted the increase of teacher migration in the aftermath of the Zimbabwean economic meltdown. Therefore, employment of foreign teachers in South Africa increased because of teacher mobility. McDuff (2015) has researched Zimbabwean women's migration, this study explores female teachers who have migrated from Zimbabwe and settled in Gauteng in South Africa. Most importantly, while the studies like Crush and Williams (2010) highlight that women are phenomenally increasing in the migration patterns although studies that focus on female teachers are scant. There are less narratives on view points of immigrant female teachers. Likewise Boyd and Grieco (2003) allude to the scarcity of information on women's migration activities, to stereotyping of sex roles as well as social constructs.

Recent research, for example Chaumba (2017), Chereni (2014), Hurst (2015) and McDuff (2015) have taken interest in the movement of skilled migrants precipitated by economic and political currents from Zimbabwe. The studies have not addressed the professional immigrant experience in South Africa. More than this, African female skilled and unskilled migrants have been categorised homogeneously. Women are viewed as dependants that migrate to accompany their husbands (Adelowo, Smythe and Nakhid, 2016). There has not been an acknowledgement of Zimbabwean female immigrant teachers' experience in South Africa. This study explores the experiences of Zimbabwean immigrant female teachers in South Africa. In addition, the literature cites

challenges faced by immigrants in South Africa for example xenophobia, discrimination, police harassment, unemployment and lack of basic services (Manik, 2012). While significant studies have principally focused on the negative push factors of immigration, our claim is that female immigrant teachers from Zimbabwe have experienced challenges as well as gains in South Africa.

Given the desperate economic and political situation in Zimbabwe, professionals were amongst the large numbers of people fleeing Zimbabwe. Further amongst the professionals were female teachers who migrated to South Africa.

## Reflection

I was one of those who migrated to South Africa in 2007. My decision to migrate from Zimbabwe to South Africa was because of the economic meltdown. Due to inflation, my salary was reduced to \$1.5. I could not fulfil my role as a breadwinner for my two children, my mother and my late sister's daughter. It was the most difficult decision to leave my children who were 5 and 10 year old. The time of settling in South Africa was characterised by unspeakable suffering. I blamed myself for migrating and I was sad every day. Gradually, I settled and managed to overcome some of the challenges and because of my achievements, my migration has turned into a golden opportunity. I have achieved things that I could not have achieved in Zimbabwe. I have acquired life improving skills and moved from being a teacher or a disseminator of information to knowledge production through research.

## Theoretical framework: African Feminisms

Women's liberation struggle is at two levels (or in two fronts): intellectual, in terms of theorising society and women's place in it as well as researching women in society, and, politically in terms of political activism. African feminisms are not adopted from the western countries but indigenous theories contextualised within African cultures to promote gender equality (Nkealah, 2016). As is, the theoretical framework for this study is underpinned by the African feminisms focusing on the Zimbabwean immigrant teachers' experience in South African. African feminisms are feminist epistemologies that have facilitated the validation of African women's experiences and its origin from Africa against the mainstream feminist discourse (Goredema, 2010). Pailey (2016) argues that Africans have always produced knowledge and they have not been heard and in some instances deliberately silenced. It is clear that those who produce knowledge gain considerable control over it. Women undermine their contribution to knowledge mainly because of what Mikell (2010) terms 'patriarchal' communities where African women live amongst their husbands; families and work on behalf of their kin groups.

Women must be empowered to be conscious of their gendered subjectivity and stand up to forces of domination that are threatening their voices of global feminism (Nkealah, 2016).

African feminisms seek to globalise consciousness about African women. Equally important, Goredema (2010) enlightens that African feminisms do not only concern themselves about the rights of African women but also includes those who are living outside their native countries many of whom have contributed to the literature. Hence this study is not limited by the geographical location of women under study. Mikell (2010) articulates that women's sexuality and reproductive role should not determine their access and mobility. Female teachers migrating from Zimbabwe to South Africa must not be viewed as going against the African norms and traditions. African feminisms seek female agency and autonomy to be able to transform society from marginalising women to treating them as full citizens in all spheres of life.

## **Background to the study**

Migration facilitates information sharing as well as the exchange of cultures. More precisely Voulias (2015) observes that there are untold stories of migrants who are lecturing in universities and doctors who are saving lives in South Africa daily. Tacit knowledge of professional and cultural experiences has been used to innovate products (Loo, 2011). Additionally, Rushubirwa, Ndimande-Hlongwa and Mkhize (2015) acknowledge that immigrants in South Africa bring critical skills and hence contribute immensely to the country's economy. The most valuable assets any organisation can possess include intangible assets, for instance the value of employees' knowledge, research, brainpower, knowhow, processes, consultancy, skills and attitudes (Mercier-Laurent, 2005). The key sectors of the economy are more reliable on knowledge generation and dissemination than in the past (Powell and Snellman, 2014).

It is against this background this study seeks to present narratives of female teachers' immigrant experience in South Africa. We present evidence of the positive negative aspects of migration of female teachers and inspire prospective immigrants who have been discouraged by fear of the unknown. As earlier mentioned in the introduction, migration has largely been analysed according to causes perpetuating departure as well as the factors that attract migrants, or 'push/pull factors' (Quarthey, 2006). It is imperative that an in-depth understanding be accorded to the positive aspects of migration especially to female teachers.

## Immigration phases -Pre refugee

### Economic factors

Several researchers acknowledge the increase in the number of women crossing the Zimbabwean boarder into South Africa, for example McDuff (2015) and Crush and Tevera (2010). Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera (2012) comment on the movement of Zimbabweans to South Africa as far back as the first wave in 1990, and then subsequent waves in 2000 and in 2005. Economic meltdown is amongst the circumstances that perpetuated the mass exodus. Zimbabwean female teachers were amongst those who left the country to settle in South Africa. Zimbabwean economic problems became severe in 2000 leading to total economic collapse in 2008. The study carried out by Chaumba (2015) concluded that 56% of the research participants left Zimbabwe to search for better remuneration across the border. Along these lines, Penson and Yonemura (2012) observe that teachers are not adequately remunerated in many countries and therefore they are among the worst affected by economic woes triggering large population movement. The consequences of economic meltdown were high inflation, shortage of basic goods and collapse of service delivery (Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), 2008).

In order to understand the magnitude of the Zimbabwean female teachers' migration, it is important to explain the economic meltdown and the increase in political instability and how it has perpetuated the mass exodus. According to Lucas (2005) migration rises with the gap in earning opportunities between the receiving and home countries. This study focused on the experiences of Zimbabwean immigrant female in South Africa. Other researchers for instance Ranga (2015a) explains the extent of political push factors to teachers' migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa as having been fuelled by the profound economic meltdown. According to a study by Sibanda and Sibanda (2014), Zimbabwean migrants constitute the largest number of economic migrants in South Africa.

The growing unemployment and economic hardships prompted people to migrate. Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera (2015) assert that the 1999 chaotic land reform led to violent farm invasions which by and large, caused the economic meltdown. In this parlous situation, Garatidye (2014) observes that during the Zimbabwe economic crisis, women suffered the most because of their traditional low social status which is hinged on, for instance, lack of empowerment due to the consequences of patriarchal culture. Amid the continuing political uncertainties in Zimbabwe, the high inflation, shortage of all essential goods, rocketing unemployment, as well as lack of service delivery were the push factors of continued economic meltdown (Centre for Development and Enterprise

(CDE), 2008). The inflation led to the collapse of the economy. The period between 2007 and 2008 saw critical food shortages in the country, hence it is unsurprising that Zimbabweans top the list of migrants in South Africa (Crush and Williams, 2010). The next section explains the political pushing factors.

## **Political factors**

The Zimbabwean crisis, as it has come to be known, has its roots in the political disaster giving birth to several problems including corruption and absence of rule of law (Ranga, 2015a). In general, research has emphasised that migration of skilled personnel has been aggravated by political instability that is referred to by Morreira (2010) as undeclared civil war. The movement of many Zimbabwean migrants and asylum seekers was influenced by violence and human rights violations. Zimbabwean female teachers were amongst the large numbers who migrated to South Africa for professional development and better working conditions. Thus McDuff (2015) mentions that the period from since 2000 in Zimbabwe saw almost two decades of intense political turmoil and physical violence. These political conditions pushed female teachers to be among the increased number of women migrating to South Africa from Zimbabwe.

Further Ranga (2015a) stresses that mass exodus of Zimbabwean teachers from the year 2000 was due to politically motivated violence with teachers being readily identified as members of the opposition parties. Chagonda (2016) cites the Zimbabwean Teachers' Union (ZIMTA) and the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe as having placed the numbers of teachers who left the country due to political and economic crisis at around 45000 which is almost half of the total number of teachers in public schools - 100000. However, this study focused on the female teachers that migrated to South Africa which resonates with Ranga (2015a) who posits that the bulk of the Zimbabwean teachers found refuge in South Africa and because of the relaxation of the South Africa's control of Zimbabwean immigrants as compared to other destination countries. It is possible that some teachers entered South Africa without work permits (Chagonda, 2016). Political factors were the primary cause for migration that peaked from 2002-2005 (Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2015; Moyo and Perumal, 2018). The scholarly work of Crush et al (2015:13) further confirm that the land reform programme turned into 'an all-out assault on opponents of the Mugabe government'. The situation aggravated the harsh economic conditions causing the massive outflow of the Zimbabwean population.

## **The actual flight and resettlement**

The scholarly work of Crush, Chikanda and Taodzera (2015) alleges that Zimbabwe lost teachers to its neighbouring country South Africa. People tend to move from

high labour abundance and low wages to countries that are labour scarce with higher wages, hence migrants are motivated by the increased welfare from higher incomes and wages. Before the actual flight, potential migrants estimate the benefits and costs, expected net returns, factor mobility and wage differentials (Enigbokan, Edkins and Ogundele, 2015). Migrants also consider social effects of migrating to foreign countries. Networking before and after migration has increased and it has been further enhanced by information, communication and technologies.

While some migrants seek temporary refuge, others remain in the country to build lives (CDE, 2008). Whilst they settle to build lives, some generate and circulate knowledge, some slot into the job market and mobility becomes part of life. They gradually get over their challenges and they fulfil roles of supporting their families. Evidence cited by Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera (2015) confirms that some migrants have been able to take advantage of migrating abroad by furthering their studies and obtaining additional qualifications. Teachers that could not slot into the job market accepted jobs in other sectors where they had not professionally trained in.

Teachers leave their countries in search of economic opportunities and stability and more and more female teachers are leaving Zimbabwe in search of work which has been male dominated until the last decade (Crush and Tevera, 2010). As purported by Edkins and Ogundele (2015), migrants decide whether to move or stay depending on network links, wealth and availability of economic opportunities and prestige. These incentives offered by the host countries have been referred to as pull factors. The costs of travelling and visa processes of the over-seas countries could be the main reason why migrants in Africa favour cheaper and closer destinations like South Africa. In the African continent, South Africa is able to attract migrants from low income African countries.

## **Challenges faced by immigrant teachers**

Several researches have articulated challenges that have been experienced by migrants. Life is not as good as expected in South Africa (Manik, 2012). Immigrants have suffered alienation. They have not been able to speak the local languages and they have been labelled as 'makwerekwere' a South African term for foreigners who speak languages not known to the citizens (Morreira, 2010). It is not all immigrants that are and/or received with empathy and sympathy. In addition Ranga (2015b) maintains that immigrants were challenged by accommodation as well as fear of the unknown and language barriers. Language proficiency also plays a part in unemployment for instance in South Africa where there are eleven official languages. These languages are officially used for instruction in schools.

As put across by Penson and Yonemura (2012) immigrants constantly face challenges, citing teachers as being more vulnerable to exploitation in foreign countries. Skilled

immigrants experience de-skilling (Pasura, 2013) in the receiving countries. Equally important, Chaumba (2015) maintains that 42% of Zimbabwean migrants who had university degrees were forced to retrain or acquire recertification in order to obtain jobs in their areas of specialisation. In addition, immigrants go through challenges like applying for work permits whilst waiting to get employment. There is a category of immigrants that did not manage to get jobs because they failed to transfer educational credentials (Chaumba, 2015). Indeed, failure to establish networks with the various professions as well as discrimination contribute to unemployment amongst immigrants.

Further evidence provided by McDuff (2015) argues that xenophobia in South Africa has, to a large extent, made it difficult for immigrants to access public services. More than this, Pasura (2013) remarks that immigrants settle in communities that are marginalised already and located within racially demarcated economic geographies. In the same vein, Hurst (2017) accentuates that the 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa saw the loss of 62 lives with 35000 people forced to leave their homes. Manik (2013) warns that xenophobic behaviour is evident in South African schools thereby creating a sense of social and professional disconnection amongst migrant teachers. This has exacerbated the challenges of integration for foreigners who have been viewed as unwanted people (Crush, 2000). Moreover, society also views women who migrate alone as deviants (Ranga, 2015b). Intolerance of foreigners and other higher level of hostilities lead to great human suffering. Immigrants feel empty and lonely without family and friends leading to loss of social security.

## **Benefits of female teacher migration**

Although it is difficult to obtain quantitative estimates of the personal gains of migration, Zimbabwe-South Africa migration of teachers have contributed to the knowledge capital and have improved their lives. When migrants are integrated into the labour market, competition for existing jobs intensifies (Mohapatra, Ratha and Scheja, 2010). The same scholars report that immigration increases gross domestic product (GDP) of the receiving country without impacting on average wages or labour productivity. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2009) makes an appeal that immigrants are willing mostly to take up jobs in which citizens are no longer interested. As reported by Gott and Johnson (2002), the first generation of migrants was found to be doing well economically and contributed to the fiscal growth. Migrants add value to the receiving countries' production and economic growth and subsequently to the net gain of the country. The CDE (2008) postulates that immigrants' different skill levels have significantly contributed to the economy of South Africa and further recommend the enactment of a well-managed immigration policy to enhance the contribution.

In his study of the Zimbabweans' immigration, McDuff (2015) asserts that women attain the highest level of change in independent migration taking over the role of breadwinner. The struggle towards the liberation of women includes theories, methodologies and epistemologies as well as activism movements that are aimed at eradicating oppression and subordination of women. African feminisms are not adopted from the western countries but indigenous theories contextualised within African cultures to promote gender equality (Nkealah, 2016).

As is, the theoretical framework for this study is underpinned by the African feminisms focusing on the Zimbabwean immigrant teachers contributing to the South African knowledge economy. African feminisms are feminist epistemologies that have facilitated the validation of African women's experiences and they originate from Africa to distinguish against mainstream feminist discourse (Goredema, 2010). Pailey (2016) argues that Africans have always produced knowledge and they have not been heard and in some instances deliberately silenced. It is clear that those who produce knowledge gain considerable control over it. Women undermine their contribution to knowledge mainly because of what Mikell (2010) terms 'patriarchal' communities where African women live amongst their husbands, families and work on behalf of their kin groups. Women must be empowered to be conscious of their gendered subjectivity and stand up to forces of domination that are threatening their voices of the African continent feminism Nkealah, 2016).

African feminisms seek to intensify consciousness about African women. Equally important, Goredema (2010) observes that African feminisms do not only concern themselves about the rights of African women but also include those who are living outside their native countries many of whom have contributed to the literature. Hence this study is not limited by the geographical location of women under study. Mikell (2010) motivates that women's traditional sexuality and reproductive role should not determine their access and mobility. Women are negatively affected by the grid of patriarchal power, social, political and economic injustices (Mama, 2002). African feminisms add a layer of support and empowerment in times of globalisation as women are among the flow of immigrants in search of life improvement opportunities. Women, and amongst them teachers, take advantage of immigration to liberate themselves from being regarded as second class human beings who are silenced from male oppression and dominance and to give themselves a voice (Fwangyil, 2011).

Subsequently, global knowledge economy is developed precisely through mobility (Raghuram, 2013). Furthermore, the academics and teachers learn historical knowledge by making encounters with immigrants (Raghuram, 2009). Increase in global migration has brought about mobility of women leading to their empowerment and exposure to new cultures and life-styles thereby asserting new freedom and capacity to make decisions independently (Lucas, 2005). Likewise Ranga (2015a) contends that it increases women's autonomy. It is in this context that Doré, Hawkins, Kanyeze and

Ndlela (2010) envisage that in the Johannesburg sample of their study, participants had acquired additional qualifications and training in various disciplines in South Africa which had enhanced their opportunities of acquiring gainful employment. The aforementioned research makes an appeal that Zimbabwean migrant population living in Johannesburg was relatively well-educated as compared to the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC) countries. Living in foreign countries forces Zimbabweans to pick up new skills and to accumulate capital. Among other things, they are able to acquire best practices in governance. Zimbabweans are prepared to take home unique experiences of living in free societies and they contribute immensely to development of strengthened governance.

There is a link between individual education and level of earnings and education is likely to enhance individual's productivity at work (Sives, Morgan and Appleton, 2005). The same research explains that the receiving countries benefit from cheap labour into the economies and the cross-fertilisation of cultures. The work of Quartey (2006), adds skills transfer, investment, brain circulation and diaspora networks to the list of benefits of migration. Also diversification of economic activities when migrants and their families begin to invest in education. There is investment in human resources when knowledge is transferred and produced. Exposure to advanced countries presents immigrants with opportunities to acquire new skills, experience and knowledge. Sives, Morgan and Appleton (2005) equate the high economic growth to a stock of educated workers and an expansion of education to meet the ever increasing needs of the economy. On a more fundamental level, Enigbokan, Edkins and Ogundele (2015) declare that South Africa has benefitted from skilled and semi-skilled immigrants. Accordingly, Hammerstad (2011) concludes that South Africa has benefitted from the influx of the Zimbabwean high skilled professionals into its formal economy thereby alleviating the shortage of skills.

## **Research design and methodology**

Qualitative data was gathered via narrative interviews Rubin & Rubin (2012) and observations conducted in the Gauteng province. An in-depth understanding of Zimbabwean female teacher immigrants was constructed through narratives of migrant teacher participants who have lived in the province for not less than five years. Interviews that were conducted with 12 Zimbabwean female teacher immigrants detailed their immigrant experience in a foreign country. We used networks that we have built over years as a female migrant teacher. The networks provided very important data for the study. Ethical issues were addressed by seeking participants' permission before interviewing and observing them as well as explaining what the study was about. Interviews were carried out in the homes of the female migrant teachers. This made it

possible to observe the living conditions of the teachers and determine the extent to which they had changed their lives. The Zimbabwean female migrant teachers were selected using snowball sampling technique Creswell (2012) whereby the participants who were known to us were asked to recommend other Zimbabwean female migrant teachers to interview. All the participants were willing to recommend other possible participants and this increased the number of participants. It also widened the diversity of participants in terms of demographic profile. The participants were interviewed more than once and the interviews lasted between one to two hours. The first interview session focused on the circumstances that perpetuated (pre-refuge) the migration and why they chose South Africa amongst all the neighbouring countries in Southern Africa. The second interview session focused on experiences of the actual flight and settlement.

In this study, we considered ethical issues (Tracy, 2010). Teachers' participation was based on informed consent (Yin, 2012) and emphasis that the data was going to be used for academic purposes only. In cases where the participants chose not to participate, referrals were sought from within the participants' networks. In order to guarantee anonymity, and confidentiality pseudonyms were used to protect identities (Tracy, 2010). The questions asked in the interviews sought to understand motivating factors that pushed the migrants away from their home countries. The questions not only helped to uncover the individual reason for migrating but according to Goredema (2010) also gave the chance for the voices of the migrants to be heard as against views of the host nation's perspectives which are often heard the most (Swing, 2011). Questions entailed the need to know the specific reason why migrants left their home country and the specific motivator for choosing to migrate to South Africa.

All the interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed verbatim before analysis. Data were analysed using the feminist critical discourse analysis that interests itself in how gender ideology and gendered relations of power are reproduced and narrated in social relationships in texts and talk (Lazar, 2007). In addition, Terry (2015) gives an explanation that feminist critical discourse analysis does not only deconstruct texts and talk but seeks to analyse and change issues effecting social change, and most importantly has effect on groups of women in specific communities.

## **Findings and discussion**

The words of female immigrant teacher participants are quoted verbatim and are italicised. The themes have been constructed from the data analysis and are interpreted with reference to the feminist critical discourse conceptions and the literature reviewed. Throughout this section, numbers (1-12) would be used to identify the 12 participants.

## Female teacher immigrants transforming stereotypes

Mikell (2010) articulates that women's sexuality and reproductive role should not determine their access and mobility. Zimbabwean female teachers living in Gauteng have been able to break the traditional practices that restrict women from moving freely. Most of the observations expressed by the female teacher participants in this study reflected common experiences of having migrated to South Africa alone. Even those female teachers who were joining their husbands travelled the long journey alone. This is evident in what teacher 12 expressed:

There were now a variety of reasons, firstly it was the economy itself and South Africa's rand was strong so if you had a few rands and change it then you would get a lot.

Teacher 10) who is not married shared this:

*I decided to leave for South Africa. I packed my bag and embarked on the journey leaving my eldest child to look after my other two children.*

The excerpts of married and unmarried female teachers showed that they have gained autonomy and independence and par becoming significant income generators through foreign employment. They have gained full respect from their communities. Women in migration have ushered in new gender perspectives, identities and relations enough to transform the norms on gendered roles of women and men in society. While research has concluded that the reason for migration is to search for life improvement opportunities, it is without doubt that female teachers have used and are using the opportunity to break themselves away from social injustice and other patriarchal set ups (Ranga, 2015a). Female teachers have proved to be strong women who have left Zimbabwe because of challenges and yet landed in South Africa to face challenges and eventually have been able to survive. Zimbabwean female teacher immigrants' stories portrayed strength and resilience in terms of deciding to migrate and overcome the challenges of a sometimes unwelcoming host nation. Migration has been embraced by teachers as the greatest opportunity to use their freedom of making decisions, not only influenced by better remuneration but holistic approaches to their rights and agency.

Society views women who migrate alone as deviants (Ranga, 2015b). The efforts of female teacher immigrants in South Africa have broken strict gender norms whereby men have always functioned as breadwinners while women stay at home as dependents as observed by teacher 6:

I paid for my siblings' university fees and also sending [sic] money for their upkeep until present.

Another teacher 1 said:

I would visit my family back at home with my savings and started changing the life of my family. They were also visiting me during their school holidays.

This is a great stride towards achieving equal rights grounded in feminist ideologies. Besides the need to care for their families, women have aspirations that push them to take risks to achieve their dreams. The literature claims that women have long been discouraged by patriarchal culture and as underscored by Boyd and Grieco (2003), stereotyping of sex roles and social constructs have hindered women from realising their potential. The immigrant female teachers have changed the traditional practices that, as elaborated by Garatidye (2014), have put them at a very low status.

## Financial autonomy

Women attain the highest level of change in independent migration taking over the role of breadwinner as observed by McDuff (2015). The following statements are enlightening in this regard. Teacher 5:

I started supporting my family and children. Life changed and I fetched my two children who have since been going to school. I settled and we started applying for a home loan. It was approved in no time and we have since occupied our new house. I believe that could not have been possible in Zimbabwe.

All the female teachers in this study indicated that they have gained financial autonomy and at the same time enhanced their upward social class mobility because they have been able to rise above the standard of living of the average Zimbabwean household.

Teacher 9:

*I support my family financially. I have completed building a house for my parents back at home.*

Drawing from the feminist critical discourse analysis, teacher 12's narrative shows what Lazar (2004) refers to as masculinity encompassing hierarchies of oppression

affecting women. The structures of patriarchal society continue to empower men in their subordination of women. Teacher 12:

So then my husband decided to study in South Africa. He was actually saying I don't want to stay alone in South Africa I want you to come and join me here. So I had to come because I also wanted to consider the marriage because you know when the man tells you to come join them and you don't come they can do anything and then they will say "I told you but you didn't want to come" so I also wanted to save my marriage.

Financial autonomy may be regulated by gender power relations whereby women are subordinated to men and choices of women are defined by the elasticity of patriarchal control. Women are taking control over their lives. Nevertheless, their autonomy is still heavily affected by ideological forces that prescribe what is natural and desirable for their gender (Garatidye, 2014).

There have been great networking opportunities whereby female teachers connected with people from diverse backgrounds. Teacher 9 said she was able to submit her curriculum vitae and got the job. It is worth noting that although motives for female teacher migration are the same, the qualifications and professional experience have enhanced their opportunities and their contribution to the knowledge.

All the respondents show that migration has been a source of livelihood for example this excerpt from teacher 2:

*I am happy that my children are going to school. I left my daughter with a neighbour's daughter to finish her form four, I learnt that she stopped going to school. I had to bring her this side and finished matric. She wasn't academically competent or I can say not gifted and therefore she got passes that saw her being admitted into a nursing school. She has since graduated and she got a job. [On the day of interview, the girl was transported to her own place closer to where she was now working].*

They have been able to meet their financial obligations. The following excerpt shows one example of how an industrious and effective teacher has maximised her own earning potential while adding considerable value to the economy of her host community. Teacher 10:

*I give my grade twelve extra lessons during weekends and school holidays. I attend workshops and I have really been empowered. Because of the results that I have produced in the school, I was given classes to teach after work at SCI-Bono an organisation that supports learners in selected science. It was yet another opportunity for me to excel and be exposed to other levels of challenges. At the end of the day it is not about earning extra money but it's about contributing to one's growth.*

Teacher 11:

I am now well integrated at work, in the neighborhood and local community. Since settling I have networked with universities (UNISA and University of Pretoria) training organizations with NAPTOSA and departmental cluster groupings.

Alleviation of poverty has been evident in the female teachers' migration hence there has been improvement of lives. It is worth noting that although migration has changed lives, many of the migrants' accomplishments have surpassed basic family provisions. Participants reported that they have acquired home loans in South Africa and some built houses in Zimbabwe. These achievements have defied the norms as provision of shelter has traditionally been male dominated. They have been able to transcend the limits set by society.

### **Professional development and better remunerations.**

Research stresses that Zimbabwean immigrant female teachers expressed that they have taken advantage of being in South Africa to further their studies and obtain additional qualifications (Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2015). There is a wide consensus that acquiring additional qualifications and training enhances opportunities of acquiring gainful employment (Doré, Hawkins, Kanyanze and Ndlela, 2010). Accordingly, acquiring additional qualifications was highlighted throughout the data as highlighted by teacher 5:

When I got a job I have managed to attain a Bachelor's degree and an Honours degree and right now I am working on my Master's degree, something that I never thought I would achieve or was going to take me long if I was at home. If all goes well, I intend to leave South Africa with my PhD degree.

More than this, one teacher, 9, reiterated that obtaining additional qualifications increases opportunities for higher earnings:

I sent my certificates for departmental evaluation and received a regret. They said they no longer evaluate diploma but only those with degrees. I took note of that and felt that I was supposed to upgrade myself. In January 2010 I had to register for ACE -Advanced Certificate in Education focusing on foundations of language teaching. I did it in 1 year and completed with distinctions. I was then geared to learn more. I registered for Honours degree in 2011.

Teacher 1:

As time went by, I realised I had to further my studies through networking with other Zimbabweans. I registered my B.Ed. Honours which I finished in one year and I have since registered for a Masters' in Education. I also completed the Facilitator, Assessor and Moderator courses. I have realised that I can move out from the class and secure a job in the currently trending mentoring and coaching.

Teacher 4:

My PhD journey was a thorny one and the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2017 the day I submitted my thesis for examination will live to be a memorable day as this day marks my greatest achievement. Some people who have achieved their doctoral degrees agree with me that to reach the stage of submission is one of the greatest achievements for a PhD candidate. Now I know that I would not go back to Zimbabwe empty handed as I patiently wait for my results.

Teacher 12:

Upon arrival, I registered for my PhD in Education which I have since attained. Currently I am doing my post-doctoral fellowship, so for my job I am a researcher because post-doctoral fellows are researchers.

## Generating and circulating knowledge

It is envisaged in the literature that global knowledge is developed precisely through mobility and encounter (Raghuram, 2013). The encounter facilitates exchange of historical knowledge and culture. Gradually as they are absorbed into the job market, female teachers from Zimbabwe have been empowered through exposure to new cultures and life-styles thereby asserting new freedom and capacity to make decisions (Lucas, 2005).

Teacher 4:

I developed extensive research skills from my PhD studies which I will proudly take back home, I also learnt to speak Zulu from the people whom I interacted with, I also managed to work in multicultural environment that is interacting with different races which was very good and productive.

As shown by Quartey (2006) there is skills transfer, investment and brain circulation. When knowledge is transferred and produced, there is investment in human resources. Pailey (2016) argues that Africans have always produced knowledge and they have not been heard and in some instances deliberately silenced. Here is what Teacher 3 explained:

My knowledge has made a difference because there has been a shift in attitude in my colleagues with regard to commitment. I have also been given to cascade my knowledge to my colleagues through workshops and they regularly consult me for information on how to assist students.

Teacher 5:

I have managed to understand people are different, accept individuals as they are. Apart from being a rainbow nation, South Africa has a lot other nations. I have managed to part with my knowledge. Be it with the learners and even colleagues...the other teachers.

Teacher 12:

We managed to get the tutorial jobs and we did very well and the students liked us so much and I ended up being the tutor coordinator for the language, teaching and learning where I was coordinating 10 tutors.

Teacher 10:

As an accounts teacher, I tried my best and produced the best results in the district. My contract was continuously renewed. I realised the potential in me that I wasn't aware.

It is widely stated in the literature that South Africa has benefitted from skilled and semi-skilled immigrants (Enigbokan, Edkins and Ogundele, 2015). Hammerstad (2011) concludes that South Africa has benefited from the influx of the Zimbabwean high skilled professionals into its formal economy thereby alleviating the shortage of skills.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the empirical data showed that the Zimbabwean female immigrant teachers living and working in South Africa are gaining some level of change in independent migration taking over the role of breadwinner. Their qualifications and professional experience have enhanced opportunities for gainful employment. The female teachers are surpassing the limits set by the social injustices in Zimbabwe to seek safety in South Africa. Their journey has seen them exposed to new life-styles and cultures resulting in new freedoms being asserted. The challenges of migrating and settling in a foreign land have failed to deter the female immigrant teachers from Zimbabwe to transform stereotypes in their native country. They have gainfully improved their lives.

Women strive to achieve total emancipation and unearthing their potential to reduce and globally eradicate the unequal treatment of women in political and economic spheres, societal beliefs as well as norms and values. Female teachers migrating from Zimbabwe to South Africa must not be viewed as going against the African norms and traditions. They have been able to transcend the limits set by society. The feminist movement advocates for female agency and autonomy to be able to transform society from marginalising women to treating them as full citizens in all spheres of life.

Therefore, the South African government needs to enact policies that improve the plight of female immigrant teachers who for a long time have been struggling to defy the norms of male dominance. The citizens of South Africa need to be educated about globalisation and migration through which their nation is benefitting economically.

## Declaration of interest

There was no conflict of interest.

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