Mobile Women: negotiating gendered social norms, stereotypes and relationships

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Introduction

> *You women from Zimbabwe, one can always identify you. Even if you change the way you dress and look like the women here [in South Africa]...you cannot disguise who you are. Your [self-effacing] comportment weighs on you and the dignified manner in which you carry yourself is evident[1] ...*

Changes in the Zimbabwean political economy in the last decade have resulted in shifts in the character of migration from this country to its neighbour South Africa, with increasing numbers, more diversification in terms of who migrates as well as shifts to more extended stay. Included in this current wave of migrants to South Africa cities are an increasing number of women who unlike the historically more visible Zimbabwean female cross-border trader are often locating in this host space for indefinite periods.

In this paper I focus on young Zimbabwean migrant women who are part of the post-2000 wave of migration, exploring their negotiation of 'community' and identity as they attempt to find and secure homes in Cape Town's socio-economically marginalised peripheries. Drawing from narratives derived from qualitative research focusing on Zimbabwean migrant women, combined with some insights that emerged from previous research conducted with young Zimbabwean men in Cape Town[2] as well as fromhistorical literature I consider in the ways in which migrant women are constructed and positioned within the new social environment they are located, pointing to the assumptions, gendered expectations and stereotypes which govern this current wave of Zimbabwean women's experiences as then negotiate households, neighbourhoods, and community in the 'working class' townships on the Cape Flats[3]. I discuss the ways in which 'community' and within it, social gendered norms are produced and reproduced, exploring in particular how young women position themselves within these socio-cultural structures and the implications for their day-to-day interactions and

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[1] Young man indicating to one of my informants that he had identified her as Zimbabwean even before he had heard her speak in Shona, 14 May 2009.

[2] Matshaka, N.S. 2007. Marobot neMawaya- Traffic Lights and Wire- Migration Experiences and Gendered Identities: The Case of Young Zimbabwean migrants living in the city of Cape Town (Unpublished research project for partial fulfilment of BsocSc Honours degree) African Gender Institute: University of Cape Town.

[3] The term Cape Flats is used to refer to the former dormitory suburbs of Cape Town, areas which Salo (2006) describes as the "black periphery" of the city.

overall migration experience. The paper attempts to situate and analyse gendered negotiation not only of physical spaces but of discursive spaces as well, in the lived experiences of mobile women.

To contextualise this discussion on, I begin by situating these mobile women who are part of this post-2000 migration wave from Zimbabwe to South Africa. After a brief discussion on the methodology, I go on to paint a picture of the dense networks of everyday life which make part of the 'community' of Zimbabweans located the urban periphery spaces of Cape Town. These networks are fostered by proximity, shared backgrounds, and multifaceted, multi-purpose migration networks. In discussing this community, I point to what it enables as well as constrains, focusing on the complicated relationship between reproduction of 'community' and the construction of gendered migrant identities. I then discuss the dominant images of mobile Zimbabwean women and notions of normative femininity that are simultaneously perpetuated and challenged within this context. I point to the implications of these images and constructions of migrant femininity for the young women's everyday negotiations of access, gendered identities and relationships particularly with heterosexual partners. In the next section I point to some of the ways that the notions of female respectability and decency are reinforced, reconstructed, and reinterpreted in the periphery spaces of Cape Town for Zimbabwean women to embody. I also consider how respectability is policed and the ramifications for the gendered identity and migration experiences of this group of young migrant women. I argue that these realities dictate day-to-day rules of behaviour, shaping women's concerns, capabilities and their relationships. The latter part of this paper thus substantiates how migrant women in practice negotiate these expectations and stereotypes in home and neighborhood contexts as well as personal relationships with men.

Background: Situating Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa

Reflecting changes in the political economy, over the course of its long history, dating back to pre-colonial times, the character of migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa has evolved in terms of who migrates. For example, in the first half of the 20th century it was "virtually a rite of passage for young men from colonial Rhodesia to have had a stint working" as contract mine workers or migrant workers on commercial farms in South Africa, a pattern that decreased after Zimbabwe's independence (Sisulu et al 2007:554, also see Dodson, 1998). A survey in 1997[4] on migration in the region by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) showed the largest number of cross-border migrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa to be women who oscillated between the two countries as informal traders (SAMP Public Opinion Survey Project, 1997 in Dodson, 1998). In addition to this regular flow of cross-border traders, migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa has also been described in waves. The first wave in the late 1970s and early 1980s, included white emigrants fleeing from the war for independence and later from the establishment of black majority rule referred to as the 'white flight' (Crush 2000; Muzondidya, 2008:5, Sisulu et al, 2007; Pigou, 2004). This was followed by a wave of political refugees fleeing from the state sponsored violence between 1983 and 1987 that mainly targeted members of the Ndebele ethnic group in the south-west provinces of the country (Sisulu et al, 2007:554; Pigou, 2004).

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[4] The Public Opinion Survey Project, of 1997, was carried out in Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

The patterns of migration from Zimbabwe have however, altered significantly over the12 years, with Zimbabweans from all levels of society joining the post-2000 wave of migration to South Africa and other regional and international destinations. These changes reflect the widespread multi-layered crisis, an intersection of domestic national political and economic instability that has dogged Zimbabwe since the late 1990s. Following the commencement of the fast track land resettlement programme in 2000, experienced a shrinking economy, hyperinflation, widespread shortages of goods as well as local and foreign currency[5] as well as intimidation and violence during elections. The politicisation of the crisis makes it difficult to distinguish between economic and political motivations for migrating. Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa now include overlapping categories of those fleeing from the effects of the economic down turn and those fleeing politically motivated organised violence and torture in the post-2000 period[6] (Sisulu et al, 2007:553; Muzondidya 2008:6, also see Pigou, 2004). Although, there are no reliable figures for the current number of Zimbabweans migrants in South Africa[7], there can be no contestation about the increasing numbers and increased degree of longevity in settlement patterns[8]. A significant fraction of this current wave of migrants to South Africa are young women who are moving to the South African context in larger numbers and for more prolonged periods than previously recorded post-Zimbabwe's independence (Makina, 2007).

Due to different backgrounds, motivations and other variables such as gender, age, education, social class, and migration networks among other variables the current wave of Zimbabweans are positioned differently in the South African context in terms of legal status (documented and undocumented); skills levels;and location of residence in South Africa. They occupy different residential spaces ranging from the affluent suburbs or city centres, dilapidated inner city spaces, as well as 'working class' township and informal settlements of South Africa[9] which are characterised largely by a mix of formal and informal often crowded housing, high unemployment and poor basic services. Masade considers how "migrants sometimes find themselves once again on the peripheries

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[5] In consequence, many Zimbabwean businesses have closed, leading to retrenchments, which has contributed to an increasing high level of unemployment, and the increasing impoverishment of the Zimbabwean populace.

[6] Heightened politically motivated violence and political repression during election periods of 2002, 2005 and 2008, have been associated with peak migration waves in media and other reports.

[7] Given the circulatory migration process, the high level of undocumented and 'unauthorized' cross border entry, as well as the reliance on deportation figures. The media and advocacy group estimates of three to five million people, contrast with the approximately one million legal and illegal migrants suggested by the few scientific studies that have been carried out (see Makina, 2007), as well as with the estimate that three to four million Zimbabweans have left the country in the last decade for different destinations (Sisulu et al, 2007).

[8] The signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) in February 2009 and its subsequent consummation through the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) in Zimbabwe, as well as the suspension of the Zimbabwe dollar and introduction of the multi-currency system has also contributed to the shaping of the pattern of migration from Zimbabwe into South Africa. However, there has been no systematic study in regards to this.

[9] Home to local South African citizens and migrants from across the borders of the country who are living on the margins of urban centres.

of rich economies in conditions just as insecure if not more so, as those they had left at home" (Masade, 2007:104). This is the result of a combination of multiple processes which include migration policies, limited formal job opportunities as well as limited access to networks necessary to access the economic and social 'centre' of the host society. Due to limited access to the South African political economy a significant proportion of the post-2000 migrants have been noted to have struggled to gain entry into South Africa legally, relocating to the geographical and social margins of South African cities where they negotiate housing and livelihoods through social networks and private arrangements (Muzondidya, 2008:7). This is the situation which the mobile Zimbabwean women, who are the focus of this paper, find themselves in.

Empirical literature looking at gender and migration in different contexts has pointed to the complex ways that gendered norms, relations and identities are negotiated in the 'new' spaces migrants occupy. For example, looking at how gender relations and expectations evolve during the process of migration for Mexicans migrating to the United States of America, Parrado and Flippen (2005) point to how "the reconstruction of gender relations within the family at the place of destination is a dynamic process in which some elements brought from communities of origin are discarded, others are modified, and still others are reinforced"(Paraddo and Flippen, 2005:606). Historical work like Barnes (1999) and Bozzoli (1991) have pointed to shifting definitions of broad female respectability, particularly the emergence of urban female respectability and the shifts in definitions overtime (also see Hungwe, 2006). By looking at the constructions of and renegotiation of migrant femininities and broader definitions of social norms and respectability within contemporary cross-border migration, this paper attempts to contribute to understanding the complex gendered dynamics of this particular historic moment.

Methodology

This paper draws from evidence from field research carried out with a sample of young Zimbabwean women located in the periphery of the city of Cape Town which is combined with some insights that emerged from previous research conducted with young Zimbabwean men in Cape Town[10] as well as historical literature. The research was grounded in an epistemological framework that sees the value of exploring the experiences of these mobile young women, from listening to their perspectives and from observing their actual situations, practice as well how they are constructed by others around them (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The qualitative approach was therefore used for data collection and analysis to explore the nuances of these gendered negotiations and reproduction of community, identities and relationships. Fieldwork for the research on young Zimbabwean migrant women and the previous research with young Zimbabwean men in Cape Town[11] made use of ethnographic data collection tools which relied on the informants' narrative accounts obtained primarily through key

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[10] Matshaka, N.S. 2007. Marobot neMawaya- Traffic Lights and Wire- Migration Experiences and Gendered Identities: The Case of Young Zimbabwean migrants living in the city of Cape Town (Unpublished research project for partial fulfilment of BsocSc Honours degree) African Gender Institute: University of Cape Town.

[11] The formal fieldwork period for the research focusing on young Zimbabwean migrant women stretched between October 2008 and July 2009 while field work for the previous research on gender, migration and masculinities was carried out in 2007

informant interviews, informal conversations, complemented by participant and non-participant observations in homes and the neighbourhood[i]. This qualitative approach has allowed me to engage with the fluid and transformative nature of the lived experiences and gendered identities of these mobile women.

Although fieldwork for the research with Zimbabwean women who have lived for varying periods in townships located on the Cape Flats included 'research encounters' with several women and men, I worked regularly with twelve Shona speaking women. The 12 key informants fell in the age range of 20 to 35 years old. Like many other Zimbabwean migrants, the young women that took part in this research are in South Africa due to a combination of motivations. They were a mix of women who have never married, were once married or are currently married. At the time of the research, they were currently living or had recently lived in the 'working class' townships on the Cape Flats, such as Philippi, Eersterivier, with the larger number being located either in a section of the Harare area or in Litha Park, sections of Khayelitsha Township which became the primary field site. This post 2000 wave of mobile Zimbabwean women are distinguished from cross-border traders who oscillate between South Africa and Zimbabwe. The women were engaged in a range of livelihood activities which included vending, hair dressing, domestic or restaurant work, as well as one who worked as a secretary. However, for most of the women these activities were not stable.

In the remainder of the paper I discuss the production of 'community' and gendered social norms among Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, considering the ways in which these mobile women are constructed and positioned within the social environment they are located. I not only look at 'community' in terms of the spatial grounded place of the neighbourhoods where the women are located but also discuss 'community' as the "non-place based association of people", defined in this case by the common identity as Zimbabwean nationals (McDowell, 1997:13). In discussing the experiences of my informants, pseudonyms are used.

Zimbabwean Social networks: The production of 'community'

On one of my early visits to Harare, Khayelitsha, as I stood by the station walkway[12] where I had been introduced to women I could potentially work with, it seemed to me that every other person who was selling along the concord or passing by was speaking in Shona[13]. When I commented on this to my two companions, Precious who was acting as my guide, responded by saying, "Ahh *kuno kumusha chaiko, this* place is really [like] home*. It's really Harare (making parallel between Harare in Khayelitsha Township to Harare, the Zimbabwe capital)". She added, "there are loads of us [Zimbabweans] here in Harare. If the xenophobia[14] is to start again we will be the first [targets]".

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[12] Along which vendors line up and display their wares to people who have disembarked from the trains or are leaving the adjacent Khayelitsha shopping mall.

[13] This surprised me, as this was not my usual experience of Cape Town. Sisulu et al. (2007) point to how in the last few years there has been a change in the ethnic composition of the Zimbabwean 'community' in South Africa with a massive increase in Zimbabweans of Shona ethnicity. A few years ago, it was not common to hear Shona being spoken in many South African cities. Nowadays it is rare to move around without hearing snatches of conversation in Shona.

[14] Referring to xenophobic attacks similar to those they had experienced in May 2008.

Another informant Vongai summed up the neighbourhood experience when she recounted how on first arriving in Cape Town she tried to be inconspicuous so as not to be identified as a foreigner and attract the attention of law enforcement agents since she did not have the required documentation to regulate her stay. She was however taken aback when her sister gave her a boisterous welcome at the station "like we would do at home" (Vongai, Casual Conversation, 4 October 2008). When they got on the train to Khayelitsha, she was even more surprised to observe many Shona speakers comfortably conversing[15] in their language. Zimbabweans are present and visible in the space of Harare, Khayelitsha, with, as Vongai described; "music systems blasting out Zimbabwean hit songs ".

In the predominantly black, Xhosa speaking 'working class' townships and informal settlements on the Cape Flats such as Khayelitsha, Philippi, and Nyanga[16], informants shared not only their living quarters but the wider township space with fellow Zimbabwean women and men. Attesting to the visible presence of a 'community' of Zimbabweans described above by Precious and Vongai in this part of Khayelitsha where I spent most of my time during fieldwork, I observed several Zimbabwean-led Zionist churches referred to as *Vapostori*[17] conducting their fellowship meetings in the open spaces of the township as well as quite a few Zimbabwean-operated informal ventures such as hairdressing salons. As I came to know some of the Zimbabweans in this space and charted their relationships, I found that these compatriots lived in clusters, often with immediate and extended family, friends, acquaintances or fellow workers. It is not uncommon to find a number of people from the same neighbourhood areas back in Zimbabwe living in proximity with each other, an aspect which I found to be the case for many of my informants[18]. Concentration in these areas may be attributed to the presence of earlier migrants who offer newly arrived migrants a place to stay or help them find accommodation (see Polzer, 2008). Even after they settle and set-up on their own, migrants often choose to settle in the same areas which they have become familiar with and which they recognise to be cost effective for their often stretched budgets.One informant, Vivian pointed to this in a group discussion:

> *There are plenty of us from the same area here [in Harare], this one here [referring to a friend who was also present], is also from my neighbourhood, from Highfields... Ahh there so many of us, if it's a matter of going home we would require two busloads, they are definitely loads of us...up to that end (pointing to other end of Harare), it's just Highfields [people] [Group Discussion, 18 October 2008].*

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[15]   It is however not always deemed safe to do so as I learnt during my fieldwork through anecdotes about incidents of foreigners being thrown off the train along the Cape Town- Khayelitsha train line.

[16]   Areas that they have been identified in previous work and by the City of Cape Town to be the main recipients of migrant populations (Brown, 2006) [Available Online, 6 June 2010 from]
        http://www.capegateway.gov.za/eng/pubs/news/2006/jun/136751

[17] Zimbabwean led congregations of these popular prophet-healing groups have mushroomed in many of South Africa's informal settlements and townships where Zimbabwean have relocated (http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/zionist+church; Muzondidya, 2008).

[18] Similarly, a significant number of the young men I worked with during my previous research came from the same area, Chitungwiza,a dormitory urban settlement adjacent to the Zimbabwean Capital Harare (Matshaka, 2007).

Like Muzondidya (2008), I found that after they have crossed the border in to South Africa, Zimbabwean migrants try, to some extent, to "integrate among locals by learning local languages, cultures and subcultures" (Muzondidya, 2008:9). Most of the Zimbabweans I encountered who had stayed in the predominantly Xhosa speaking townships of Cape Town for more than a few months are able to communicate comfortably in Xhosa. In spite of these efforts and varying relations (from day-to-day cooperation to veiled or occasional overt antagonism) with the other occupants of the township spaces they occupy, connection with other Zimbabweans remains central to the young women's migration experience. Proximity, with migrants staying in the same rooms or streets as their compatriots, as well as the connections based on areas of origin back home build the links central to 'community'. For example, although following the eruption of the xenophobic violence in May 2008, Loreen another informant had relocated from Khayelitsha and stayed for a period in one of the more affluent suburbs of Cape Town, she still referred to the township space as 'my neighbourhood, *kumaraini'.* She also indicated that she found it lonely and boring in the suburbs as "you are just on your own" and even when she identified compatriots (having heard them speak in Shona), they often did not want to be identified as Zimbabwean (Loreen, Individual Interview, 16 September 2008). It is however not only proximity which contributes to the sense of 'community' articulated by some of my informants. In the predominantly coloured, Afrikaans speaking townships where few of the women who were part of this research were located, Zimbabwean and other African foreign nationals are sparsely distributed. Tendekai for example, explained that in addition to there being few Zimbabwean and other African foreign nationals in the area of Eersterivier where she stayed, they often do not interact unless they share living quarters.

 For the migrants located in these areas outside Xhosa speaking townships, where there is a less visible 'community' of Zimbabweans, key to production of 'community' is the activation of connections based on common areas of origin or common acquaintances as well as connections they make based on nationality and ethnicity in work places and social settings. For example, although Loreen had moved to the suburbs where she "knew no one", she continued to make connection through already existing networks with other Zimbabweans, particularly those from her hometown. She described the making of connections as the following: "for example my cousin will come across someone we know from home and she will say to them, 'do you know Loreen is also here [in Cape Town]?', then she gives the person your number, that is how we connect". On another occasion in a Zimbabwean-run hairdressing container where I frequented, I observed how two women, who had not been acquainted before, on discovering that they came from the same neighbourhood in Zimbabwe, were soon identifying common acquaintances and updating each other on people from their neighbourhood who were also in Cape Town. As a result of the practice of building extensive links, which develop based on common areas of origin, identification of shared acquaintances, and which also expand as they move from place to place, the women who were part of this research often had networks spread across the wider Cape Town space, an aspect attributed to the long history migration of this national group to South Africa (Sinclair, 1998).

In addition to the proximity and common identity based on common areas of origin, the multiple social networks that exist among migrants are key in reproduction of 'community' for this current

wave of Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town. For young women both kinship based and non-kin networks of support have been key in helping them access accommodation, as well as in providing or contributing to meeting their material costs such as food, rent and transport in this migration context.[19] In addition to providing this material support, both existing and newly established support networks also provide social support such as shared childcare as well as in circumstances such as childbirth, and at times of bereavement[20]. For example I witnessed how when Vivian lost her father back in Zimbabwe, it was Josy, a neighbour from Zimbabwe, and Mutsa, a friend she had made in Cape Town who rallied to support her, comforting and spending the day with her while they waited for Vivian's husband to return from work[21]. When Vongai's older sister passed away in a Cape Town hospital, it was only through the monetary contributions of fellow Zimbabwean migrants and the support of her fellow traders in garnering these contributions that she was able to bury her sister[22].

For the young Zimbabwean women, the social networks that exist among migrants are also a site for sending money and parcels home as well as transference of skills such as hairdressing, for instance. For example, one woman, Mai Tanya, spends most of her days at friend's hairdressing container where she learnt the trade and assisted in doing hair. The networks are also key sources of advice or information with regard to opportunities such as jobs or ventures that are deemed to offer better livelihood as well as resources such as the grocery vouchers that were available to refugees in late 2008. These exchanges are often based on closeness and trust as many of the women often pointed out, with many lamenting how Zimbabweans often keep any information of benefit to themselves.

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[19] The social networks that are central in these Zimbabwean women's migration experiences are not limited to nationality or ethnic based networks but also involve cooperation with Xhosa speaking neighbours and landlords with whom they share childcare responsibilities for example.

[20] In times of illness, responses appear to be varied depending on the extent of illness and the closeness of the relationships. Migrants who are ill for a long period or 'diagnosed' to be terminal are often encouraged to travel back to Zimbabwe 'before it is too late'.

[21] However, later in the day Vivian and Mutsa complained about Josy having spread the news of her bereavement to other Zimbabweans in their neighbourhood 'without Vivian's approval'. This points to how this kind of support (like the other different types) is only expected and desired from particular people who are trusted to be in possession of information about personal situations. When I questioned her on why she did not want other people to know, it emerged that for Vivian her fear was that even during this time of grief not all the conveyed sympathies would be genuine. Instead her compatriots, particularly people from her neighborhood under the pretext of passing their condolences will spitefully be checking to see how she will handle the crisis. In her words, "they will be asking, how will she manage to go [for the funeral], when she is not working. We want to see how she will go" (Casual Conversation, 18 October 2008).

[22] Muzondidya's (2008) points to how burial societies have become an established feature in some parts of Johannesburg and Pretoria which have become home to many Zimbabweans. In the Cape Town context however, I did not find any of my informants to be members of similar groups. The few stokvels that the women reported to have heard of were described as unsuccessful due to the uncertainty of the length of people's stay with people returning to Zimbabwe at any time and at times absconding with group funds. The women I spoke to indicated that they preferred not to be members of such groups due the perceived complications, which include some degree of undesirable monitoring of one's financial situation and behaviour, preferring in most cases to limit their associational life to church membership or casual interactions. As one woman put it; "this congregating [for anything] with other Zimbabwean poses problems. It leads to a lot of talk", (Mutsa, Individual Interview, 14 November 2008).

The women also rely on social networks for information about the political space of Cape Town and South Africa, often substituting or seeking to verify or supplement the media information with information from each other (although this information is not always accurate and is often speckled with rumour). Popular topics of discussion, which reflect concerns central to the women, were the ever-changing procedures for the issuing of asylum or refugee documentation, rumours about planned xenophobic attacks, checks by Home Affairs officials, and updates on the situation back in Zimbabwe. It is not only information about the socio-political environment that is exchanged however, but also information about other members of the migrant community.

The various combinations of networks of everyday life Zimbabwean migrants are involved in mitigate their ability to adjust within the context in which they immigrate (Beyene, 2004). As Curran and Saguy (2001) posit, 'community' and social networks "are not only powerful conduits for instrumental information", but allow for the transmission of values and cultural perceptions (Curran and Saguy, 2001:59). As sites for the renegotiation of former order of things (Achieng, 2003) as well as perpetuation of particular social gendered norms and stereotypes, these networks contribute to the construction of the gendered migrant identities which young women have to negotiate. Furthermore, I argue that in addition to housing and employment assistance, as well as financial and at times emotional support, "these networks also provide a cultural outlet" for these migrant women specifically from countries with similar cultural characteristics (Beyene,2004). Composed mainly of similarly aged women, friends or kin who draw from similar cultural backgrounds and are situated in township spaces, migration networks become the frames of reference against which appropriate and successful gendered migrant identity is measured.

However, the term 'community' assumes a sense of cohesion and often romanticizes ideas of collective collaboration, harmony, and consensus building (Josephs, 2004). Neighbourhoods, the locality, residential areas (or whatever we choose to call them), may be a source of security and the basis of supportive network for many people whose lives are relatively restricted in an everyday sense to a small area, although they may be an equal source of irritation, danger and even despair depending ones location or social characteristics (McDowell, 1997:19). This critical take is important here too. The Cape Town Zimbabwean 'community' is not free from social divisions, with relations often complicated and not necessarily harmonious. Like Curran and Sugay (2001), I contend that the physical and social proximity with other Zimbabwean migrants, manifested in the dense interconnected networks that sustain living in Cape Town, affords surveillance and close monitoring of individual behaviour (Curran and Sugay, 2001). Migrants thus often prefer to avoid connections based on areas of origin to avoid things like gossip among fellow migrants or their activities and situations being reported back home. Issues of trust and mistrust, which manifest in different ways are key, informing how people live in the communities they are located. Rather than operating explicitly within this community, they rely on activating particular networks only in times of need. Proximity and its associated monitoring, accompanying lack of privacy, and the prevalence of gossip contribute to the reproduction of gendered scripts of behaviour that are not always desirable particularly for those young women attempting to escape the stifling bounds of 'community' and seeking to reinvent themselves in this new space by leaving previous experiences or labels in the

home country such as being labelled the 'neighbourhood whore'[23] or the social stigma being an unmarried mother.

Mobile Zimbabwean women

Over history, there have been varied responses to mobile Zimbabwean women. During certain periods of history, in colonial Rhodesia there was great concern over those women who were breaking with accepted practice by travelling "beyond the bounds of their immediate residential neighbourhood" to the newly emerging urban centres for varying reasons (Cheater and Gaidzanwa, 1992: 191; also see Barnes, 1999). These mobile women, particularly when unaccompanied by patrikin or spouse, were viewed as problematic not only by the colonial authorities who were concerned with influx control but also by the indigenous patriarchs who saw them as a threat to what was seen as African social reproduction (Schlyter, 2003:15; Barnes, 1999). Even when they operated within the patriarchal family as accompanied wives or daughters, women were deemed susceptible to the corrupting urban environment. To some extent, this mirrors and explains the obsession in society about the moral behaviour of urban women which continues today (Schlyter, 2003). Although with increasing numbers of mobile Zimbabwean women moving between rural and urban areas and beyond, there have been some shifts over time in the perceptions of as well as the responses to these women. Nonetheless, some elements continue to surface in the dominant portrayals of these itinerant women, particularly those who migrate and move beyond the borders of Zimbabwe.

Sound Bites on perceptions about Zimbabwean Women Migrants

… most of the Zimbabwean girls that are here [in South Africa], aggh, I am repulsed by them…I just don't like the way they go about their things... they show that they are at the end of their tether when they come to a place like South Africa…they end up doing anything so that they can make money...[24]

"You can pay good lobola for her, 10 cows; she will make a good wife. She will cook, clean and she comes with a guarantee unlike your South African women"[25]

The ways in which Zimbabwean women who travel and locate (for varying periods) in South Africa are constructed and perceived can be seen to fall at two extremes of a continuum, as we see from the above quotations. On one end of the binary pole is the image of the deviant woman who operates outside the boundaries of accepted Zimbabwean 'respectable' feminine behaviour and 'morality' in response to difficult circumstances which render them desperate or due to general

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[23] One young woman recounted how after she got pregnant as a teenager, the young men in her neighbourhood would write derogatory things about her on security walls

[24] D.M. Individual Interview, 27 August 2007.

[25] Informant speaking to a local Xhosa speaking man in reference to me the researcher, Participant Observation, 10 August 2007.

disregard for accepted gendered scripts of behaviour. On the other end, there is the figure of the 'respectable' Zimbabwean woman who in spite of the corrupting experience of migrating to South Africa continues to be the glowing example of female respectability conforming to traditional gender roles, placed often in contrast with the lack of 'respectability' of local South African women. I start by discussing the image of the deviant or transgressive woman and my informants' experiences of this.

Looking at the history, we can see how during the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe there was a "functional redefinition of socially acceptable behaviours" during which time "mobile women were no longer referred to, as in pre-colonial and early colonial times, as 'prostitutes". Instead they were now encouraged to move independent of their families to join or assist the cause of liberation (Hungwe 2006:40; also see Gaidzanwa, 1995 and Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000). However, following the advent of independence there was a reverting back to many of the definitions of female' respectability' of old. Hungwe (2006) points to how "women who had been mobile or active as fighters during the war were now expected to" either "return home and take up traditional domestic chores" or take up demarcated 'respectable' often low-income jobs such as nursing and teaching (Hungwe,2006:41). In post independent Zimbabwe, vilification and public denunciations in the Zimbabwean state media of female migrants (Cheater, 1998; Cheater and Gaidzanwa 1996; Muzvidziwa, 2001) who chose to travel independently participating in informal cross-border trade saw the rebranding of women's mobility as 'unrespectable'. Women who chose to engage in cross-border trade as an income generating option were seen to be defying the boundaries of mobility (which during the later days of the colonial period had extended to accept the mobility of women from rural to urban areas). In addition to female cross-border traders being constructed as unpatriotic economic saboteurs undermining mainstream (male-dominated) trade, they were also represented as lazy and sexually deviant (Muzvidziwa,2001:68). The Shona word *pfambi*, which literally means "one who walks", was used in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods to describe female prostitutes (Cheater and Gaidzanwa, 1996), came to be used as a derogatory term for female cross border traders as part of what Muzvidziwa (2001) describes as a smear campaign against these entrepreneurial women. Over time cross border traders came, to some extent, to be admired and emulated for their success in not only surviving but sometimes prospering in the face of the increasingly harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe (Muzvidziwa, 2001). However, , the negative projection of Zimbabwean female cross-border traders, particularly around their sexual conduct,[26] is appears to persistent. This is illustrated by the following comment by one young man during an informal group discussion:

> ...I'll never marry a cross-border [trader] no-matter what... a friend of mine told me how he managed to propose [love] to a married cross border woman he met on the bus. Yet, he had observed her being sent off by her husband but she still accepted his proposal... those people are disgraceful[27].

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[26] Muzvidziwa (2001) points to how in the Zimbabwean state media, "stories about cross-border traders prostituting themselves with haulage truck drivers, and spending long periods in South Africa selling nothing but their bodies were rife" and how these traders "were charged with resorting to illegal abortions during their trips as 'shoppers'" (Muzvidziwa, 2001:69).

[27] L, Informal Group Discussion, August 2007.

The dominant negative stereotypes of mobile women are however not confined to this particular group (oscillating cross border traders) of Zimbabwean migrant women, but are shaping how the current wave of Zimbabwean women migrating and relocating to areas such as Cape Town, are being constructed. Some of the common assumptions found to prevail with regard to Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa, particularly when they are unaccompanied, include the stereotyping of these women as desperate, parasitic purveyors of disease, images which I elaborate and reflect on below.

The general opinion expressed particularly by attached often older women as well as Zimbabwean men in the Cape Town context is that the majority of ever-increasing numbers of young women that are travelling independently to the city are unmarried mothers who are seeking to find ways to take care of the children they have left at home. These unattached women are a group who are traditionally constructed as 'unrespectable' and viewed as moral failures by virtue of being unable to clinch or hold-on to a husband and if never married, for "raising 'totemless[28]' illegitimate children" (Chitauro-Mawema, 2003). Although she indicated that young "untainted" girls were also beginning to travel independently to Cape Town, one informant emphasised that the current wave of migrant women are "predominantly women who have children...those [women] who have been impregnated [out of wedlock] and jilted back in Zimbabwe" (Memory, Individual Interview, 27 November 2008). In migrating to South Africa, these women are not seen only to be responding to the combined economic and political adversity in Zimbabwe over the last decade, but their difficult situation is viewed as a product of the absence of spousal economic support, therefore constructing them as desperate. Because of their desperation, these young women, particularly when they do not have established networks in the migration destination, are described as resorting to any measures to either find shelter or to cover their living costs. Memory described what she perceives to be a common situation for young unaccompanied women:

> *At times, a young woman leaves home not knowing where she is headed. She gets to Joburg and finds that Joburg is teeming with police. Hearing that things are better in Cape Town, she then gets on train to come here. But once in Cape Town she is stuck for a place to go as she knows no-one...they just hear that there is a place called Harare where many Zimbabweans stay and if you go there you will not fail to find a place to stay ...often she finds other Zimbabweans willing to take her in after she explains her situation, but she is expected to contribute to buying mealie meal and relish ...[even if she does not have money] she will have to find ways around that,...that is why you find many young women end up whoring. If a man propositions her she knows that if she becomes involved with this man he will give her money, then she can be able to buy mealie meal [Individual Interview, 27 November 2008].*

Joanna confirmed this view:

> *The problem is that if a woman fails to get a place to stay here ...you find that some females when they find that they are in a tight situation, sometimes she won't have an option, that is*

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[28] A totem is natural object (animal, vegetation) serving as the emblem of a family or clan, passed from one generation to the next (Moser et al, 1996).

> *why you find that here [non-marital] live-ins are very common... It is rare for a [single] woman like me to stay alone [Individual Interview, 28 October 2008].*

As a result of the difficult situations back in the home country that prompted them to migrate and the often desperate situations they find themselves in the migration context in the absence of kin or other support and because of the difficulty of finding work, young women are also viewed to be susceptible to being taken advantage of by men (often their fellow countrymen), who dupe them. As one young man observed:

> *...some Zimbabwean [men], if they see a young woman from Zimbabwe who is facing difficulties, they take advantage... they go and spoil this person who just came to look for money in South Africa instead of showing them the avenue for making money... they don't advise that but instead take her for his woman. In the long run you will find that girl pregnant or ill[29].*

It is because of the perceived susceptibility as well as the vulnerability of unaccompanied young women in the South African context that Joanna's family were reluctant for her to stay in Johannesburg with her female friends, instead they encouraged her to travel to Cape Town where she could have the support and 'protection' of her brother and male cousins. This perception of the vulnerability of female migrants is one that is not only expressed by others but by the young women themselves. Joanna articulated this feeling of vulnerability by pointing out how as a woman alone "you may be able to brave being alone but there some elements that will just bring you down especially considering that this is a foreign country" (Individual Interview, 23 October 2008). She added that:

> *…some of the men here have the wrong idea about us women who are here... they can do anything with every Zimbabwean female they come across. They think that you are desperate and they know that there is no one to protect you here, unlike when you are in Zimbabwe where you have your relatives and friends. Here someone can easily get away with it...*

Young unaccompanied women are however not only perceived to be desperate and vulnerable but are also constructed as lazy and parasitic. They do not embody the expected work ethic[30] of 'respectable' women but instead are often perceived to be taking the 'easy' way using relationships with men (who are frequently married with spouses back in Zimbabwe). When they become a man's live-in girlfriend, the historically socially deplorable and controversial (Barnes and Win, 1992) *mapoto wife*[31] they rely on the man for rent or other material costs. The *mapoto wives* are thus

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[29] Agali, Individual Interview, 27 August 2007.

[30] Which over time has come to be associated with the older generation of cross border trader women who suffer deplorable conditions such as sleeping in the open air at border posts or market places, working hard to support and improve the situation of families at home.

31 Mapoto literally translates to cooking pots. A *mapoto* relationship is often a temporary set-up which does not involve the payment of lobola [bride price] from the man to the woman's family. According to Barnes (1999) this type of relationship became common in the urban centres of Rhodesia due to the colonial system which precluded women from getting housing by asserting that only men could to register for housing (Barnes, 1999; also see Barnes and Win, 1992). This meant that for accommodation, single women had to rely on relationships with men living in town without their 'married' wives.

understood to survive through this relationship that also allows them to achieve successful migrant status which is defined as the accumulation of capital and goods as well as regular remitting. Unabashedly speaking about her neighbour's new live-in girlfriend (even though the woman was a few feet away), Mutsa an accompanied wife expressed this common stereotype stating:

> When they get here, single women are budgeting (saving on costs) by moving in with men so they do not have to worry about rent...she will be glad to find someone to cover rental costs so that her income goes to covering her transport costs to work and sending money to the child she left at home [Casual Conversation, 14 November 2008].

Because of the general stereotype of young Zimbabwean women's 'loose' or 'whorish' behaviour when in South Africa, Melody explained that her brothers who were already in Cape Town were for a long time reluctant for her to come to the city in order to find work.

As a result of the above gendered stereotypes and expectations around independent or 'own-account' migrant women's strategies for survival, a woman alone in this migration context who is not seen to strictly tread the line of respectability is treated with suspicion. Young women's dress and public comportment or behaviour in particular is often used to judge them as respectable or not, determining how they are treated[32]. For example, Enniah described how one young man who had offered to provide her and her friend Rumbie with a room to stay, later turned around to say he could not organise the room citing that his landlady (a Zimbabwean woman) had declared that because "the girls wear mini (skirts)" they could not be accommodated on her plot "as they would tempt her husband" with their short skirts (Enniah, Individual Interview, 11 March 2009). Young unaccompanied women who are not visibly involved in any income generating activities (or actively looking for openings) are also treated with suspicion as they are thought to be out to ensnare men. Illustrating this suspicion, in reference to one newly arrived young woman who had taken to spending her days with her male relative who sold wares at the Khayelitsha station where she also operated, Vongai commented, "she wakes up, baths and does herself up so that she can spend the day talking to man. Some people come here to find man", (Vongai, Casual Conversation, 3 March 2009). Women who travel independently, leaving a spouse back in Zimbabwe for extended periods are viewed with suspicion in the same way as unmarried female migrants. It is assumed that both single and married unaccompanied female migrants *"vanoshanda nemusana"* which translates to 'lying on their backs' implying that these women use sex to get by or supplement their incomes. Unaccompanied married women were charged with giving the spouses back home the impression that they 'worked hard' in 'regular' work to accumulate the goods and capital they send or return with, a view expressed for example by a Zimbabwean male trader at Khayelitsha station during a casual discussion. For examples, by choosing to remain in Cape Town after her husband decided not to return from a trip home, Precious's standing in the eyes of others swiftly shifted from that of 'respectable virtuous wife' to that of a 'suspicious woman alone'. When she went on a trip to Johannesburg to explore market options for her informal business venture, one Zimbabwean male neighbour speculated that she had found herself another man whom she had gone to meet.

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[32]Also see Mupotsa, 2005 for a similar discussion

Unaccompanied women in this migration context are also frequently stigmatised as purveyors of disease. Particularly when they are identified as having crossed the border into South Africa through irregular channels, young women are treated with suspicion, especially by young men who assume that they were likely subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse at the hands of migration officials or *maguma-maguma* -Shona urban lingua for conmen and operators often involved in facilitating illegal crossing of goods and people through the border. Pointing to this assumption, young Zimbabwean men, repeatedly emphasisedthat getting into an intimate relationship with a woman who is a 'border jumper' was dangerous and not encouraged. Whether they are acting out of desperation, are duped or seeking the 'easy' way by engaging in parasitic 'whorish' behaviour, unaccompanied women are viewed as more susceptible to sexually transmitted infections which they transmit to unsuspecting new partners (or their partners back home). It is not only intimate partners, (particularly when they are men the young women have met in this migration context) who treat these young migrant women with some degree of suspicion, (an aspect which is discussed further in the final section of the paper when I consider how these migrant women negotiate heterosexual partnerships). For instance Enniah recounted how during a disagreement with her live-in boyfriend's housemate, he had said to Enniah's friend, "*voetsek,* go to hell. You are whores! You want to give my boy AIDS". Such negative assumptions and perceptions have implications for how a woman alone is treated in this context and how they negotiate their migration experience. Often they are accorded little respect and treated as insignificant or expendable. For example, I witnessed how when another male friend came looking for Enniah's partner Tinei, he did not even bother to greet her or acknowledge her presence instead speaking to the young men present to inquire about her boyfriend's whereabouts. Unaccompanied women are also treated with suspicion by Xhosa speaking landlords who Joanna described as sometimes unwilling to have single female tenants "because they know that if woman stays on her own she will bring all sorts of men", adding that her own landlord had warned her against this practice*.*

Negotiating stereotypes and gendered social norms

The young women however do not always subscribe to these gendered stereotypes and assumptions surrounding their behaviour and experiences. Instead, they often find varying, sometimes subtle ways of subverting or resisting being typecast into these images and to counter the social stigma of 'unrespectable' femininity. For example, in Enniah's case although she did not have any other place to stay following the fall out with her ex-husband, she resisted the unwanted sexual advances by her new hosts[33]. She indicated that the young men thought "because you are stranded with nowhere else to go, you will eventually give in and say alright let's do it" (Enniah, Individual Interview, 11 March 2009). In resisting these advances Enniah refused to subscribe to the image of parasitic desperado who is assumed to be sexually 'easy'. She recalls saying to her friend Rumbie, "It's better, for us to even stay on the street than for these men to take advantage of us. We are not that cheap" (Enniah, Individual Interview, 11 March 2009). When shortly after they moved to another place, even though Enniah was involved in an intimate relationship (which she

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[33] Enniah shared a one-room informal structure with a male friend who stayed with an older brother and male cousin in

describes as having developed following "love at first sight") with their host who gladly 'provided for them', the two young women decided to use the little money they had to buy some groceries[34]. Enniah explained that they did this so they would not be seen as freeloaders "eating and residing for free". In doing so, they positioned themselves as not entirely dependent on their host. Another key way of challenging the negative stereotypes of Zimbabwean women is through the reinforcing and reconstruction of images of respectable Zimbabwean femininity suitable to this migration context. The construction of these contrasting images highlights what are deemed positive aspects or traits of 'traditional' Zimbabwean female identity.

Constructing respectable Zimbabwean migrant women: Reinforcing gendered cultural ideals?

Hungwe (2006) points to how with the increased presence of women in the colonial towns of the former Southern Rhodesia and the parallel increase in the branding of urban women as prostitutes, married women living in towns with their husbands "wished to create a new kind of respectability by differentiating themselves from 'unrespectable' women – "the prostitutes" (Hungwe 2006:35;also see Barnes and Win, 1992 and Barnes, 1999). Similarly, in this current migration context of Cape Town, there is a desire, not only by accompanied women but also by other different groups of women and men who make the 'community' of Zimbabwean migrants, to construct 'respectable' Zimbabwean women. This 'respectable' Zimbabwean migrant woman is one who is perceived to display and epitomise normative respectable femininity which draws on 'traditional' notions of Zimbabwean femininity, bringing honour and esteem to her national group in this foreign context. This 'respectable' woman exists in direct opposition to the dominant negative image of the 'unrespectable' desperate and parasitic Zimbabwean woman, for whom the code phrase is *"hure*, prostitute[35]"* who attracts social opprobrium (Hungwe, 2006). In this migration context, one of the ways in which the 'respectable' migrant Zimbabwean woman is constructed and the indices of good standing are reinforced is through women socialising each other into acceptable female behaviour. Among the Shona, historically the role of providing guidance and socialisation of young women into the role of acceptable adult womanhood was the responsibility of the paternal aunt and grandmothers (Gelfand, 1973; 1979)[36]. As has happened elsewhere on the continent (see Tamale,2005; Schlyter,2009), with growing urbanization which saw the absence of the traditionally appointed older female relatives to play this role[37] there was a re-structuring of this tutelage or

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[34] Although the young women were later accused of stealing a cell phone which had disappeared from the rented room then using the money from the sale of the phone to buy the groceries.

35 Zimbabwean feminist writers (Gaidzanwa, 1995; Hungwe, 2006; Mupotsa 2005) have pointed to how in contemporary Zimbabwe, the term "prostitute" is used not only to refer to women who sell sexual services, but is used as an umbrella term to insult and censure any woman who displays an array of behaviours that is disapproved of or considered defiant of the hegemonic patriarchal order.

[36] A key role of the paternal aunt was (and continues to some extent) to provide guidance and to be a confidante for her brothers children before and after marriage.

[37] Gelfand (1979) points to how for a period some urban based Shona continued to send their children to stay with grandparents in the rural areas during school holidays or for a few school terms during which time they were socialised into appropriate behaviour.

socialisation to suit the changed conditions. This role increasingly fell on mothers as well as other older women located in the urban space. However, unlike in the urban areas of Zimbabwe where there is a mix (age wise), in the context of cross border migration and settlement, in the absence of the older generation,[38] it is increasingly women in the same age ranges who become the resources for maintaining gendered aspects of their culture by passing on to each other discourses of decency and respectability in relation to expected and accepted gender roles and sexuality. For example, on one occasion as I sat outdoors with Mutsa, she teasingly admonished her neighbour Mai Bennie who had just come out after taking a bath, telling her to go and wear a petticoat as we could see the outline of her body through her skirt. Whenever they come together in pairs or groups, women's talk often usually turns to feminine behaviour and comportment, during which time they advise, give counsel *(kuraira)* or admonish *(kutsuura)* each other with regard to acceptable female practice and wifely duties. On the same occasion Mutsa added:

> *"There are some instances where you find your husband reproaching you then you say eish ladies, why did you not let me know, you cry foul but when we tell you […] you complain" (Mutsa, Participant Observation, 14 November 2008).*

Mutsa's statement underscores how the women feel it is their duty to play this role for each other. In the discussions the women engaged in while I was present I often overheard the women admonish and advise each other on how to take care of their partners (which translates to cooking and cleaning with emphasis on doing household chores on time so partners do not complain). The traditional gendered expectations around domesticity, which can be defined as the idea that the 'natural' place for women is the private space, the household, where they are solely responsible for reproductive labour (Budlender, 2003) are not the only aspects of 'respectable' adult women that is imparted or reinforced. The women also discussed how to keep their men from going astray and 'bedroom' etiquette. Also emphasised in this peer socialisation is sexual uprightness reflecting the belief that the woman "is the one who should keep her morality" (Chitauro-Mawema, 2003:141), as well as an attempt to counter the dominant negative sexual discourse and image of the 'loose' unaccompanied migrant woman. Sexual morality in this context is defined as being faithful to partners (both (absent and present), and for the unattached women as not to be seen to have several concurrent or successive partners. These discourses serve to control women by the policing of their sexuality, using a different scale for sexual conduct or morality from that used for men.

The advising or admonishment often takes the form of light or playful banter**.** However, the reproaching also frequently takes a serious tone. For instance, on one occasion I arrived at the container salon I frequented to find the Mai Deon, one of the women who occasionally worked there, being chastised over her involvement in some alleged gossip. The other women were strongly cautioning her not to be associated with any rumours as it would ruin her relations with her in-laws (who were implicated in the gossip) and more so with her husband. Whether done playfully or otherwise, in their day-to-day interactions with other women in the home or 'community' space, these migrant women receive, reinforce and re-transmit the messages they grew up with, messages

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[38] The older women in this space are often engaged in cross border trade activities and only come for short periods often returning home to attend to school going children and other gendered domestic roles.

received from their family, school and church regarding what constitutes standards of proper behaviour for women, messages which also operate powerfully in the migration context (McLaren, 2007). This practice contributes to shaping the rules of behaviour in everyday life and attempts to ensure that regardless of the 'uprooting' from their country of birth, this current wave of Zimbabwean migrant women become or continue to be 'respectable' women, wives and mothers**.**

As part of the project of constructing the image of the 'respectable' Zimbabwean migrant woman, both women and men reinforce positive (and often reinterpreted) customary or cultural aspects of Zimbabwean femininity.[39] In constructing this image of female respectability Zimbabwean women are often pitted against local South African women, particularly the Xhosa and Afrikaans speaking women who are their neighbours in the township spaces they occupy. In her work on the ways that the body has been theorized, Orzeck (2007) understands the production of the body as a process that produces particularly marked bodies and difference. Drawing from this conceptualisation, I posit that with the production of the image of the 'respectable' woman, there is a concurrent construction of the 'unrespectable Other' through a process of hierachisation and differentiation. Although the ideal Zimbabwean body gendered female is the one still located back in Zimbabwe uncorrupted by the South African context, even the Zimbabwean migrant woman in Cape Town is positioned on a different scale of morality or decency from the local South African woman. Case in point is with regards to sexual conduct, consumption of alcoholic beverages and dress, with the local women presented as lacking in virtue and rectitude, 'loose', immodest and heavy drinkers among other things. The stereotypes with regard to the Zimbabwean women's deportment, are illustrated by the popular observation (made by both women and men) that one can always identify a Zimbabwean woman from their dress style, defined as modest, and their demeanour; demure and self-effacing. These characteristics thus contrast them to local women often along lines of ethnicity and gendered norms. Even when they are acknowledged to deviating from what are considered to normative notions of respectable femininity, Zimbabwean migrant women are presented as more restrained in their transgressions.

There also appears to be some degree of re-appropriation of stereotypes regarding deviant femininities to local women. Mai Pana who for example, had earlier admonished Zimbabwean single women who come to Cape Town and instead of 'working hard' to sustain themselves and their children "stupidly get hitched to other people's husbands" (Follow-up Interview, 22 March 2009). She later applied the same stereotype of the parasitic deviant to local women, expressing the opinion that because "local women are aware that that foreign men are hardworking…they only get involved in [love] relationships with them so that they can benefit from the money he is working for. Not that they are sincerely in love with them". In doing so she contrasts local women to Zimbabwean women whom she represents as looking for genuine long-term relationships (with the added benefit of financial support or access to shelter), though unfortunately they often are duped. Similar to unaccompanied Zimbabwean women, local Xhosa women are also frequently represented as purveyors of disease. Migrant Zimbabwean women commonly worry about Zimbabwean men's 'fascination' with local women, as one young woman observed, "when young men from Zimbabwe get here they don't give us a second glance as they become ensnared with the local women"

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[39] This resonates with the practice of young male Zimbabwean migrant craftsmen in Cape Town, whom I also found to construct and reinforce positive stereotypes about themselves to counter the negative stereotypes about migrants common in the South African context (Matshaka, 2007; 2009).

(Pauline, Informal Group Discussion, 3 March 2009). There is also a perceived heightened risk for sexually transmitted infections when Zimbabwean men get involved with local women. When discussing her ex-husband who had been attempting to foster reconciliation, Enniah expressed this concern: "he now has some Xhosa [women] whom he swaps and I thought no! He is no longer fine. He is no longer in good health" (Individual Interview, 10 March,2009). On a later occasion she made the following comment, "once you find that your partner is involved with local Xhosa women it should be cause for worry. It is better for him to be going around with [other] women from home..." (Enniah, Casual Conversation, 26 July 2009). This process of 'Othering' the local women (and to some extent local men) serves also to define Zimbabwean migrant women's identities within existing dominant gender discourses. The collective negative stereotypes, however, often do not surface in their everyday interactions with Xhosa-speaking women who are their friends', neighbours or landladies with whom they spend time and have a high level of co-operation.

The Policing of Respectability

The construction of the respectable Zimbabwean migrant woman is also achieved through the policing of these migrant women's behaviour along binary lines of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Following the pattern of hetero-patriarchal discourses which police and control women's bodies and sexualities, respectability is maintained by shaming and branding any woman who is seen to be threatening the (patriarchal) *status quo.* These arguments are often cast in negative sexual language (Baines, 2003; Moffet, 2006) with women often labelled 'loose' or 'prostitutes' –'*mahure'*. Carried out by both men and women, such labelling put pressure on women to conform to the normative notions of respectability.

The policing of migrant woman's respectability, which is not only defined in terms of their sexuality but also in terms of their day- to- day conduct with regard to the spaces she occupies, whom she socialises with and what activities she takes part in, is carried out at both the level of home and level of the wider 'community'. In the home, available kin (male and female) as well as fellow housemates or other occupants of the plots they occupy, police young women's behaviour. Memory, for instance, during our discussions repeatedly emphasised how her brothers were "very strict" with her, questioning her when she received phone calls and expecting her to stay indoors. For the partnered women, policing of their behaviour also comes from their husbands or live-in-partners. For example, I witnessed how Enniah's partner Tinei made repeated reference to how he did not tolerate "people with no manners". Although this was said in what appeared to be nonchalant ways, in an interview later, Enniah recounted how when she and her friend had begun staying with him, Tinei had cautioned the young women to 'not to misbehave' particularly in the presence of his maternal cousin (customarily held with the same regard as his biological mother), who stayed with other relatives on the same plot. Enniah explained that because she is a social drinker (a practice which in the Zimbabwean context is not associated with 'respectable' women but instead associated with women of ill repute), Tinei feared that they might behave in ways that might bring him opprobrium from his kin. In conversation, Mai Pana also indicated how her husband often

reproached her regarding her inclination for hanging out with her Xhosa-speaking female neighbours who often are collectively constructed as 'unrespectable' as illustrated above.

Although many of these Zimbabwean migrant young women may "not have to answer to parental figures in their households", but their conduct and behaviour is monitored and policed by other Zimbabweans within the neighbourhoods in which they live (as well as Zimbabweans in other areas of Cape Town who are connected to them through common networks). The policing of femininities outside the usual home or community spaces of Zimbabwe also comes to include close or key non-kin networks which are re-appropriated or explained as being like kin relationships. In Joanna's case, her brother's network of friends who are key to her support network and whom she also considers as her 'brothers', felt it was their place to monitor and comment on her behaviour in this migration context. On hearing that she had left the job as domestic worker (which he had connected her to) one of these 'brothers' was suspicious of how she was now taking care of herself, commenting, "she wants to get into mischief here in South Africa..." (Postman, Casual Conversation, 28 October 2008). This policing of respectability for migrant women at community level is achieved by making judgements about the "kinds of women" they are, then branding them; as well as through what Merry (1997) discerns as judgemental gossip (Merry, 1997:11). For instance, even though they have travelled the long distances from their home country, there appears to be a continued disapproval of mobile women. Powerful notions of a women's place 'in the home' continue to be invoked even in this migration context and women deemed to transgress from this expectation branded negatively. I often heard negative comments being passed (more often by men) about particular women who were perceived to spend large amounts of time moving around the neighbourhood who were labelled 'Johnny Walker' or the 'Mayors of Harare' in disparaging tones. Their movements were perceived as attempts to attract the attention of men or to spread gossip. Particular negative discourses also develop in association with certain geographical spaces within Cape Town and activities such as regularly drinking alcohol or frequenting nightspots such as nightclubs, with women labelled unrespectable if they are seen to partake in these activities or frequent these spaces. During an interview, Loreen for example expressed the view that migrant women "who hang out in Long Street[40] are engaged in 'indecent' or prostitute-like [behaviour]" (Individual Interview, 16 September 2008).

"Among the Shona any slighting remark which detracts from the character of another person, whether true or false is known as gossip *makuhwa*" (Gelfand, 1973; 1979). With Zimbabwean migrants located in the urban periphery spaces of Cape Town, living close to one another under conditions that make privacy difficult, *makuhwa* was named by many of the women as a shortcoming of this proximity and the common networks the migrants share. They found negotiating or escaping this disciplining difficult. Judgemental gossip, censure, and branding can be seen to be tools used particularly by the different 'categories' of Zimbabwean migrant women in Cape Town (accompanied, unaccompanied, attached, unattached etc) to separate themselves from particular practices or activities which fall outside normative notions or definitions of migrant female respectability.

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[40] Long Street, a major street located in the Cape Town city centre, is famous among other things for its nightlife as the street is lined by many restaurants, bars and clubs.

Citing several theorists in cultural studies and anthropology who have challenged the time-honoured assumption[41] that gossip and scandal serve as effective modes of informal social control, Merry (1997) in consensus with these theorists argues "that talk, by itself, is far less important in deterring deviance" than imagined (Merry, 1997:48). However, although gossip about individual or groups of migrant women's behaviour may not completely succeed in controlling it, the content of gossip points to the underlying rules, values and expectations or prescriptions key to defining Zimbabwean female migrant identities and experiences. Even though, as I point out earlier, the young women may not always subscribe to the gendered social norms that emerge through the construction and policing of the 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' Zimbabwean migrant woman, the attitudes and stereotypes reflected in these discourses have ramifications for their positions, choices and actions. In the home and township spaces they occupy, the young migrant women have to negotiate these expectations and assumptions that govern their experiences and how others respond to them. Their individual situations, motivations, and prerogatives are however more complex than the stereotypical binaries portray. The earlier sections of this paper have pointed to the diverse relationships that are key to the young women's experiences. To highlight the complexities of their individual experiences as well as the ways the migrant women negotiate the discourses of respectability and the accompanying monitoring and disciplining in their everyday, in the final sections of the paper I pay particular attention to heterosexual partnerships. Central to the construction of the migrant woman (respectable or otherwise) is her sexuality and how she follows gendered scripts of performance with regard to relationships with men. Heterosexual partnerships provide a useful example of how women negotiate their position within the social and discursive environment described above at the everyday and micro level of body, identity and relationships in this migration context.

Limiting stereotypes, and seeking respectability?Relationships with man, negotiating expectations and identities

In the earlier sections I have pointed out that one of the dominant perceptions among the 'community' of Zimbabwean migrants is that for unaccompanied women, relationships with men are useful resources, which allow them to survive and 'achieve' in this migration context. Some of the views expressed by the young women echo this gendered expectation that in heterosexual partnerships the man should provide for the material needs of the woman[42]. However, their experiences and aspirations also point to the complex and varying meanings these women attach to these relationships. As I will illustrate, although on occasion they may enter into relationships of 'convenience' determined by the need to secure access to 'free' accommodation or which allow them to get spending money or have their other material costs covered, for the young women this is

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[41] An assumption put forward in the work of anthropologist such as Radcliffe Brown, 1933; Gluckman, 1963, Pitt- Rivers, 1971 among many others.

42 This expectation is one that is not unique to this context but becomes more pronounced in this migration space where the need for a male partner to 'provide' gains importance in the absence of family or other usual support. The expectation not only positions young women as dependent but allows young man to play the masculine role of 'provider', what among Zimbabwean male migrants is referred to as *"kuhoster vasikana"* (hosting the girls) (Matshaka,2007).

not the only side of relationships with men, with affection and aspirations for marriage coming into play (Ramphele, 1993). In this section I look at the ways in which young migrant women experience heterosexual partnerships (both marital and non-marital), pointing to how the gendered stereotypes and expectations surrounding mobile Zimbabwean women are often reflected and played out in the different ways they construct and negotiate these relationships. Central to this discussion is the bearing the dominant discourses around gendered social norms and expectations as well as the policing of respectability have on the young women's identities.

The experiences of the different young women demonstrate the variation and fluidity in the constructions and expectation as well as the dynamics and complexities of negotiating relationships with the non-kin males they encounter within this migration context. With marriage still central to how an adult woman and respectability are defined, marital status is also key to how these relationships are defined and negotiated. For the married women who were part of this research, maintaining their relationships with their spouses and safeguarding their position as 'respectable' wives is a key concern. On the other hand, many of my unmarried informants are at a juncture in life where they feel they are at the age when they are supposed to find their place in society as wives. They are therefore keen on entering into love relationships that will lead to the married status to which they aspire. However, for both the attached and unattached women, negotiation of these intimate relationships is mediated by different factors which include the polarised stereotypes and gendered expectations around migrant respectability (the 'unrespectable' parasitic desperado on one end and the 'respectable' hardworking virtuous woman on the other) that exist within this social environment. These constructions and concerns shape the course and character of heterosexual partnerships and in particular the young women's sense of self, as well as how they negotiate it.

In discussing heterosexual partnerships in this context most of the young women interviewed indicated that these relationships often present a challenge. For one, those women who had partners back in Zimbabwe expressed insecurities about their relationships with some fearing or reporting transgressions by their partners. They also pointed to the strains put on the relationship by distance and mutual suspicion. Joanna expressed this concern when discussing her relationship with her boyfriend back home: "of course we communicate but I no longer call it a relationship" adding "he is not sure what I am doing here and he is always questioning me about who I spend time with here", (Joanna, Individual Interview, 28 October 2008). Vongai, an unaccompanied wife echoed this experience. Insecurities however do not only exist around relationships with absent partners but also around establishing new or maintaining relationships in this context.

As I pointed out earlier, in this migration context single or unaccompanied female bodies are viewed suspiciously as parasites or constructed as 'easy' or 'loose' sexual objects which are often discussed in relation to casual relationships. In discussing his unpleasant experience with a fellow Zimbabwean woman who had nearly succeeded in duping him into sending money for marriage proceedings to

purported relatives when she was already married to another man back in Zimbabwe, one young man asserted:

> *If I have a relationship [with a Zimbabwean woman here], it will be something casual not something serious…When I want to marry I will go and get someone back in Zimbabwe, not someone who is already here… (Individual Interview, 15 October 2008).*

This view is one shared by many of the Zimbabwean men who are the targets of these young women's marriage aspirations. With unattached or unaccompanied migrant women stereotyped as 'unrespectable' which translates to 'unmarriageable' (Hungwe, 2006), establishing a genuine, sustainable relationship in which they are not seen as temporary expendable casual partners but that will lead to the matrimony which many of these women aspire to, becomes complex. However it is not only young men who approach relationships with the opposite sex with some degree of skepticism and caution. Cognisant of the assumptions and accompanying attitudes towards them, and holding their own stereotypes about their male compatriots together with what they have seen to be the practice of their male kin, Zimbabwean migrant women are also often apprehensive about men's intentions towards them. When discussing a young man she had met in Cape Town, Joanna expressed this dilemma with regards to relationships in this context; " the thing is it's very hard for females to have relationships here [in South Africa]", adding , "you never know who is real. I keep asking myself, 'what does he want from me?' …" (Individual Interview, 28 October 2008).

Informal discussions and interviews with other women revealed that for unmarried young women the issues of trust, fear of deception and desertion were among the key mediating factors that shape their understanding and negotiation of intimate relationships in this migration space. Although she holds aspirations for marriage indicating that this is something she has been praying for[43], 23 year old Fungie shared similar concerns with Joanna regarding the potential of being deceived and "exploited" by the men she meets in the space of Cape Town. Describing what she perceived to be the common experience of single unaccompanied women in the space of Cape Town, Mai Pana had the following to say; "she gets here and gets [romantically] involved with a person she does not know, someone she does not trust. He gets you pregnant then makes off leaving her with problems…" (Mai Pana, Follow-up Interview, 22 March 2009). She added, "most of them will be a married man with a wife back at home. You get involved with him then [later] he tells you 'Oh by the way…'". These risks of deception and desertion also exist in the context of Zimbabwe but are seen to be heightened by the convergence of people from different backgrounds (often unknown to each other) in the absence of the usual family and social networks that monitor the relationships between young people through various mechanisms such as making commendations about a potential partner's character or providing detail about their history. Memory expressed the following views in relation to this issue:

> *In Zimbabwe, the thing is [any] man who courts me is someone from around... I will know them. Here I just meet a boy, a Zimbabwean boy who proposes [love] to me but I don't know*

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[43] In a conversation she indicated that she had recently begun attending *masowe* (prayer sessions*)* with one of the Zionist sects where she received prayer guidance and prophetic revelation (which is one of the common features of this church) about her future and prospects regarding making a good marriage.

about his home, what he is like. Maybe he even left a wife [back home] … If he approaches me I will get excited thinking I have found myself someone, but when we get back to Zimbabwe I find myself to be the third [wife]… it's a challenge, because you cannot trust these people when it comes to these issues (Follow-up Interview, 29 March 2009).

The apprehension over deception or desertion is linked, to some degree, to anxiety over being assumed 'unrespectable' which translates to `unmarriageable' and therefore prone to the trickery and the 'exploitation'; which single or unattached women associate with relationships with young men in this context. In an attempt to avoid being read as 'unrespectable' or viewed and treated as a woman men "can do anything with" (Joanna, Individual Interview, 28 October 2008), some of the young women for example attempt to vigilantly police their personal moral careers (Salo, 2004). The mechanisms of this policing are often centred on avoidance practices such as monitoring who one talks to or who one is associated with. When I inquired about the wellbeing of a mutual acquaintance who had introduced us, Fungie was quick to say that she had decided to stop speaking to the young woman due to her proclivity for concurrently dating multiple men[44]. Another informant indicated that for what she described as her "safety" she was unwilling to visit her boyfriend overnight. This would help her avoid embarrassing her family by having to elope as a result of an unplanned pregnancy. She added that she wanted time to establish herself and be sure she can "can afford to take care of" herself and her baby in the event of being jilted by the "many playboys of today" (Memory, Individual Interview, 27 November 2008). Married women also attempt to monitor their personal moral careers and reputations through similarly policing their behaviour and interactions or associations or through meeting the expected gendered domestic roles. Avoiding association with particular practices, activities, geographical and social spaces as well as avoiding being associated with other women whom are deemed to not meet morally prescribed sexual and social respectability, is an attempt by young migrant women to safeguard their reputations. For the single women maintaining their good name and 'good gal' (Salo,2004) image can also be seen to promote their chances of finding genuine long term relationships which will allow them to transition from good daughter to respectable wife and mother. For the married women, this negotiation of self to promote a good name is seen to play a part in maintaining their relationships with their spouses and safeguarding their position as 'respectable' wives. However, the young women often find that strictly policing their personal moral careers is not always enough to shield them from being assumed 'unrespectable' and therefore temporary and expendable, nor is not always possible with some reporting experiences of forced sex for instance. Regardless of their actual behaviour, assumptions and suspicion of what is considered deviant behaviour continues to carry social consequences for migrant women. This is particularly so for single mothers and divorcees, making it difficult to achieve the social reinvention and redemption sought after by some of them.

The vigilant adherence to 'traditional' Zimbabwean female respectability to counter the negative assumptions of mobile Zimbabwean women is not only difficult, but it is also often undesirable. For migrant women living with their spouses, some of whom the migration context is the first time they are staying alone as a couple and managing their own household, in the space of Cape Town they are able to challenge some of the expected roles and behaviours in the absence of the usual social

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[44] She went on to say that she had initially wondered what I had in common with the other young woman, implying that she had suspected that this rumoured proclivity (for having multiple partners) was the basis for our association.

controls and monitors (such as in-laws they share households with back in Zimbabwe). This leads to a redefinition of what it means to be a 'respectable' wife, daughter-in-law or mother not only in response to the limited and often precarious circumstances of the migration context, but also as an expression of women's agency.

The single women also find that the practices and behaviour that are required to maintain the 'good gal' image do not always work to achieve their aspirations. For example, even though Memory reiterated that it was not proper for her to go and stay with her boyfriend before he paid lobola, she indicated that if she saw that "he is not thinking or working towards doing the marriage negotiations first," then she would "just have to go" and live with him. With skepticism and uncertainty in relation to relationships with men vying with the desire for genuine 'loving' sustained partnerships and (often leading to ambivalent feelings), the young women negotiate the intricacies of relationships in ways that suit or reflect individual situations, aspirations as well as personalities. Their apprehensions and ambivalences, not only in relation to heterosexual relationships, shape young Zimbabwean migrant women's identities and how they position and negotiate self in this migration space, choosing when to tread the line or not with regard to the expectations surrounding their female respectability within this social and discursive environment.

Concluding remarks: Inherited and reinforced; manipulated and renegotiated

For the young women presented in this paper, the migration experience places them in a situation that requires them to re-examine and re-establish some aspects of their gendered identities. There is an interplay between cultural, and gender discourses in the construction and conceptualisation of the ideal migrant Zimbabwean woman. The young women in conjunction with the other members of the 'community' of Zimbabwean migrants in the urban outskirts of Cape Town where they are located, use the transitional migration space to retrieve or reinforce particular aspects of their female identity – which they present to be the 'authentic', 'traditional' Zimbabwean female identity. Good or 'respectable' women are bearers of indigenous 'traditional'…, beyond the reach of Western 'modernity', or the corrupting influence of locating in a foreign country, a theme that has historically been common within discourses on culture and tradition (Ahmad, 2006). The reinforcement of particular feminine ideals is done through selective appropriation of gendered social norms and discourses of respectability which shaped by and embedded in Christianisation, colonial discourses and a history of nationalism (Mupotsa, 2005), have come to encode female respectability in Zimbabwe over time. Culture and tradition are invoked in idealised ways which homogenises gendered identities and relations in the Zimbabwean context. Some of the ideals that index women's respectability that are reinforced and become salient in this context include a strong work ethic, and domesticity. With sexual identities being central to gendered cultural prescriptions (Tamale, 2003), there is also an emphasis on the exhibition of appropriate female sexuality regulated through codes around dress and behaviour with sexual propriety defined as the expression of women's sexuality only in the confines of marriage

Bolzoni (2009) suggests that participation in dense networks, such as those that exist among Zimbabwean migrants in the townships spaces they occupy, is accompanied by a "push to conformity", some degree of homogeneity and "the observance of cultural and social norms" (Bolzoni, 2009:136). Physical and social proximity shapes the meanings and the practice for acceptable femininities amongst Zimbabwean migrants through continued perpetuation within this social environment of particular definitions of mobile Zimbabwean women. These definitions are also inherited through social conventions and perpetuated through relationships they that carry over from home, for example with male-kin or in-laws. However, these relationships and conventions have to be enacted in different ways in Cape Town, due to circumstances such as limited housing space, which makes observance of some of the conventions and behaviour systems difficult. The women, together with their kin, friends and neighbours who make up the 'community' of Zimbabwean migrants in the spaces they live, make sense and impute particular expectations, acts or spaces with meanings of respectability or lack of respectability, which reflect the new needs of material living conditions in the current context.

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[i] Participant observation activities involved long visits and "hanging out" (Bernard, 1994; Omidian, 1994; Bhavnani, 1994) with the young women. I not only spent several hours at a time observing activities and interactions and having casual conversations in the young women's home spaces, but in the case of the women who were located in Harare and Litha Park, I came to share their neighbourhood as I moved around the area in their company getting to know their networks. I became a regular at the market area at the Khayelitsha Station, where I often stopped by to make conversation with one of my key informants and in time became acquainted with other Zimbabweans (male and female) operating in this space. In the process of engaging in the lives of the research participants, I was able to access the discursive (what people say in public), what they do (the practice), and internal realities (attitudes and beliefs) of these young women.