Contextual background to the rapid increase in migration from Zimbabwe since 1990

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Abstract

This paper provides a contextual background to and causes of recent emigration from Zimbabwe. With an estimated quarter of the population currently living outside Zimbabwe, migration from the country is unprecedented. The country is now ranked as one of the top ten migrant-sending countries in sub-Saharan Africa that include Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Eritrea, Nigeria, Mozambique, South Africa, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Periods of migration are divided into sections, beginning with the war of liberation (1960-1979) to 1990; 1991 to 1997 and 1998 and beyond. Migration was caused by inter-related factors ranging from political and economic instability, poverty, low returns to labour, unemployment, increased informalisation of the economy, fluctuation in prices of basic commodities and their erratic supply. Migrants from Zimbabwe are a diverse combination of people of all ages that include professionals, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, documented and undocumented migrants dispersed in countries in the region, predominantly South Africa and Botswana, and far-flung countries like the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Whereas in the past male migration was dominant, by 2000 women have migrated in almost equal numbers with men.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, migration, causes, period, unemployment, political, economic and social instability

1. Introduction

Based on literature review, this paper chronicles migration periods and gives an overview of the contextual background to emigration from Zimbabwe in the period 1960 to 1998 and beyond. The country is one of ten top emigrating countries in sub-Saharan Africa that include Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Eritrea, Nigeria, Mozambique, South Africa, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (World Bank 2008). Intensive emigration from Zimbabwe in the last decade masks the fact that for over a century the country was both a migrant sending and receiving country (Maphosa 2005). Before independence in 1980, immigrants came to Zimbabwe from Zambia, Malawi, Asia and Europe attracted by economic prospects in agriculture and mining (Tevera & Zinyama 2002). This is because during the early 1980s following the victory of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, Zimbabwe became the fourth most industrialised country in Africa south of the Sahara, with a middle-income status supported by a diversified economy (Nhema 2002: 127; Sachikonye 2002: 130).

Buoyed by a sound economy and under pressure to redress past social inequalities and to fulfil electoral campaign promises, the government adopted redistributive socialist fiscal policies (UNDP 2008). Apart from offering free access to primary education and health, the government also supported several social welfare programmes. Rapid expansion in these sectors created growth in public sector employment. Unfortunately, there was no corresponding increase in government revenue generation to pay for such an increase in government expenditure. Increasingly, such free social services were financed by domestic and international loans (Bond 1998). This caused the budget deficit to grow to unsustainable levels, such that by the mid-1980s the economy was in recession. The poor economic situation was exacerbated by the effects of successive/consecutive droughts during the 1982/83 and 1984/1985

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agricultural seasons, a fall in the demand for the country's exports and foreign investment (UNDP 2008). For these reasons, there was a marked decline in national foreign currency reserves.

2. Zimbabwe's migration periods

As a result of the above-mentioned developments, Zimbabwe has experienced substantial changes in the causes of migration dynamics as well as the composition of people engaged in migration over the last 30 years. Emigration from Zimbabwe has never ceased since independence and can be discussed in three phases spanning the period before and after independence in 1980 as outlined below. The phases are predicated on changes in the political and economic development of the country. The adoption and implementation of politically expedient policies in the decades following independence, especially the fast-track land reform programme severely undermined the economy. The political, social and economic instability that ensued caused an acceleration in migration from the country (Kanyenze 2004).

2.1 Migration during the period 1960 to 1990

Migration in the first phase encompasses the period spanning the war of independence (1960-1979) to the first decade after independence. Escalation of the war of liberation in 1972 caused an estimated 210 000 political exiles to leave the country. They went to various countries in southern and eastern Africa, notably Zambia, Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique. At various periods during that time 75 000 unskilled labour migrants went to South Africa to work in the gold mines and on farms (Makanya 1994). In the aftermath of independence, there was an outflow of a small number of black professionals and 142 000 white Zimbabweans to South Africa, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. They migrated because they were disconcerted by the loss of power and privilege. They were also generally pessimistic about the country's future under a socialist government. Furthermore, they also had general security concerns or feared retribution (Tevera & Crush 2003:34; Bloch 2005). To make up for the skills loss associated with the migration of white skilled workers and professionals, the government recruited expatriate workers on 2-5 year contracts. These expatriates filled positions where skills were in short supply, for example in medicine, engineering, architecture and maths and science in higher education (Tevera & Zinyama 2002). Apart from expatriate workers, other immigrants included Zimbabweans who had been living in exile and white Zimbabweans who had left the country after independence. Government also supported temporary migration to the United Kingdom, South Africa and former eastern bloc countries (East Germany and USSR) for the purposes of higher education (Chung and Ngara 1985).

Further migration during this period is attributed to political insurrection during 1982-1987 in Matabeleland and some parts of the Midlands Provinces. According to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) (1997), in early 1982, Zimbabwe had serious security threats in several parts of the country, especially in the western part of the country. Groups of dissidents were killing civilians and destroying property. To contain the problem the government responded by launching a brutal army operation conducted by the 5th Brigade which was a North Korea-trained military outfit. The CCJP (1997) estimated that a total of 20 000 civilians were massacred in Matabeleland and the Midlands Provinces. Those targeted were accused of harbouring dissidents. Peace was only restored after the signing of the Unity Accord between ZANU PF and ZAPU in November 1987. This protracted violence caused the emigration of 5 000 people to South Africa, Botswana and Britain (Jackson 1994). Those who migrated were predominantly young male adults. They were especially harassed by soldiers of the 5th Brigade who accused them of being dissidents, supporting or sympathising with dissidents (Muzondidya & Gatsheni-Ndhlovu 2007).

2.2 Migration during the period 1991 to 1997

In the first decade after independence, the country was also bedevilled by economic problems that resulted in the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in October 1991. The ESAP was meant to facilitate trade liberalisation, reduce the budget deficit and deregulate prices and wages (UNICEF 2011). Another objective of the ESAP was to reduce social spending by the government. This was to be achieved through the removal of price controls, food subsidies, cost recovery in education and health and reduction of the number of workers in the public service. However, the ESAP did not achieve the desired results. By 1995 the budget deficit was over eight percent of the country's GDP compared to the ESAP target of five percent of GDP. Furthermore, deregulation of wages caused income levels to fall below those of the pre-independence period (UNDP 2008; Chagonda 2010). For example, wages for civil servants declined by 65%, 56% for construction workers, 48% for farm workers and 62% for domestic workers (Bond & Manyanya 2003: 35). Concurrently, removal of food subsidies caused severe hardships. Once famed as the breadbasket of southern Africa, the country moved from having a vibrant economy at independence to a highly-fractured economy unable to provide basic public services. Government also deregulated the job market and, in particular, wage determination. Deregulation of the labour market allowed free collective bargaining between workers and their employers. These measures caused severe socio-economic problems and general discontent expressed in the form of food riots and strikes.

Continued poor performance of the economy caused many companies to relocate to South Africa. Others downsized operations citing viability problems. Export competitiveness was negatively affected by high production costs and negative climatic conditions. In the years following independence, domestic companies had not recapitalised or invested in new and efficient production technologies that would have enabled them to compete against imports following trade liberalisation under the ESAP (Bond & Manyanya 2003:30). Specifically, there was a contraction in key manufacturing sectors such as textiles by six percent in 1990 to 1995 and twenty percent in 1996 to 2000 (Ismi 2004). This resulted in considerable job losses, such that by 1997 unemployment was fifty percent (50%). The public sector and the private sector retrenched 18 000 and 50 000 workers respectively. Throughout the ESAP years the country was heavily reliant on international donor aid. The proportion of the population living in poverty rose to seventy percent (Moore 2003). Liberalisation of the economy had not yielded the desired objectives of reducing poverty and diversifying the economy. By 1997 the economic situation in the country was so severe that the ESAP was abandoned (UNICEF 2011).

As a direct consequence of the austerity measures associated with the ESAP, migration was adopted as a survival strategy (Gaidzanwa 1999; Chetsanga & Muchenje 2003; Bloch 2005; UNDP 2008). Apart from unskilled and semi-skilled workers, approximately 200 000 skilled professionals emigrated, frustrated by the introduction of wage restraints, deteriorating working and living conditions, as well as instability in food prices due to the removal of subsidies. However, the number of Zimbabweans escaping economic hardships associated with the adoption of the ESAP never reached the alarming proportions that were witnessed during the third phase of migration.

2.3 Migration during the period 1998-2015

In terms of volume, international migration from Zimbabwe peaked after 2000. For a country not at war, the volumes of migration were unprecedented. Because of the large numbers of people migrating from the country in the last decade, Crush and Tevera (2010) referred to such emigration as an 'exodus'. It was estimated that there was at least one emigrant per household (Tevera & Crush 2003). By July 2008, the Zimbabwean migration stock was estimated at four million (Orozco & Lindley 2008). Migration from the country continued even after the stabilisation of the economy through dollarisation in 2009. This is because the economy failed to create new jobs. Industries are undercapitalised, operate below capacity or remain closed. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG 2007: 2) since the year 2000, over 900 companies have closed or scaled down production causing industrial output to drop by thirty percent. The economy also suffered from liquidity problems, depressed investor confidence and a government policy environment pervaded by anti-market sentiments (Kanyenze 2006). For example, the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act (No. 14 of 2007) mandates mining, manufacturing and financial businesses to sell fifty-one percent of their shares to indigenous Zimbabweans. Such policies create market uncertainties and unpredictability on issues regarding property rights and pricing. Due to this and several other factors de-industrialisation has remained a major problem. Thus, inability to get jobs caused an upsurge in permanent and circular migration to regional countries (Crush, Chikanda & Tawodzera 2012).

Recent migration from Zimbabwe is notable on account of the scale of the migration, the composition of migrants, causes of migration and its impact, particularly on neighbouring countries. A potent mix of political, social and economic instability was the major driver of international migration during this phase (Tevera & Crush 2003). Migration from the country in particular from 2000 onwards is symptomatic of structural political and economic problems (Zinyama 2002; Bloch 2005). This migration is exceptional because of the large presence of non-refugee migrants (Betts & Kaytaz 2009; McGregor, Marazzi & Mpofu 2011). From 2005 to 2009, the Johannesburg reception centre registered an average of 3 000 Zimbabweans a day (Betts & Kaytaz 2009).

3. Causes of recent migration from Zimbabwe

3.1 The political context of migration from Zimbabwe after 2000

The fundamental cause of large-scale migration from Zimbabwe is political instability, which spawned social and economic instability creating a combination of factors that destroyed people's livelihoods. Political violence is now endemic in Zimbabwe's political landscape. Desire for monopolistic political power by the ruling party (ZANU PF) is a dominant determinant in the political violence that affected most parts of the country, resulting in internal displacement and migration. Political repression takes many forms, ranging from murder of opponents to rape, mutilation, violence, repression and intimidation. All these tactics aim to suppress opposing views (Maroleng 2008:23). The breakdown in the rule of law means that there is no recourse to justice even when perpetrators are known (Hammar 2008).

Political repression and intimidation is due to the ruling party's (ZANU PF) refusal to accept political pluralism. After decades of being the only political party in the country, the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999 was seen as a major challenge to the status quo (Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2010). The tipping point was in 2000 when the MDC-led anti-constitution campaign caused the defeat of the ruling party in a national referendum on a new Constitution. It was the first such political upset for the ruling party in twenty years. Inevitably, the party leadership was incensed by the opposition party. So, in order to thwart the opposition party from national ascendancy evidenced by the MDC's strong showing in the June 2000 parliamentary elections, ZANU PF resorted to intimidation and violence against political opponents and their supporters (Bond & Manyanya 2003). Since then with each subsequent election (in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008) political violence has become entrenched in the ruling party's psyche. When the urban electorate overwhelmingly rejected the draft constitution and subsequently voted out ZANU PF in urban local government elections in June 2002, the seeds of conflict between the ruling party and the opposition party were sown. Until 2002 the ruling party had commanded a majority in national and local government elections. The political elite refused to accept democratic political pluralism. The people were no longer perceived as a political asset but as an electoral risk (Kamete 2002). Consequently, government unleashed ZANU PF-trained militia against them. It was predominantly the unstable political situation in Zimbabwe since 2000 that caused people to migrate (Bloch 2006:69).

Further displacement and migration is linked to the launch of the fast-track land reform programme in 2000. Under the operation, ZANU PF supported 'new farmers' who invaded mostly white-owned commercial farms. A total of 3 000 farms were earmarked for acquisition (UNDP 2008). The violent seizure of large-scale commercial farms spearheaded by a violent youth militia throughout the country's provinces caused the large scale migration of white commercial farmers. The white farmers were targeted for their perceived support for the opposition party that led to the rejection of the Constitution. In total over 2.5 million farm workers lost their jobs when commercial farmers lost their farms (Sachikonye 2003). Using the provisions of the Citizenship Act (2003) the government revoked citizenship rights to people born in Zimbabwe to parents of foreign origin. This rendered many commercial farmers and farm workers stateless (Muzondidya 2007). As a result, many of these workers migrated and sought work in the Limpopo province of South Africa (Rutherford 2008).

Agriculture had always played a critical role in Zimbabwe's economy, contributing 11-14% of the Gross National Product, 45% of the country's exports and 60% of all raw materials used by Zimbabwean industry (Weiner, Moyo, Munslow & O'Keefe 1985). Agriculture was also the largest formal sector employer in the country. However, the chaotic implementation of the fast-track land reform programme ruined the livelihoods of many people (House of Commons International Development Committee 2010). Because of the knock-on effect that the fast-track land reform programme had on the national economy there was a decline in exports and inputs to agro-processing, textiles and other manufacturing industries. As a result, by 2007 capacity utilisation in industries fell to 18.9% (Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries 2008). Loss of income derived from exports caused the budget deficit to grow. There was also a severe foreign currency shortage. Since then farm seizures have been ongoing, albeit on a less intense scale than in the years immediately after 2000.

Further migration was also associated with the launch of Operation Murambatsvina (Restore Order or Clear the Filth) in 2005. Following commercial farm seizures, the economy contracted and unemployment rose to 70%. In order to make ends meet, people in urban areas joined the informal sector (Bond & Manyanya 2003). However, in May 2005 the Government launched Operation Murambatsvina with the aim of limiting uncontrolled growth of the informal sector. There was a nationwide operation that destroyed informal settlements and illegal trading structures. It was evident that the ruling party had embarked on the clean-up operation out of revenge to punish an urban electorate that was perceived to have caused its electoral defeat by supporting the opposition party in the 2000 and 2005 elections. The operation displaced 70 000 people and ruined their livelihoods. During the operation goods and wares of informal traders were confiscated by the police and the army (Tibaijuka 2005). Many displaced people migrated in order to rebuild their lives and find livelihood opportunities elsewhere.

The largest number of migrants to date fled the country following the harmonised presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in 2008. The election results were disputed. Although the president and his party lost the elections, he did not cede power, claiming that the opposition party had less than 51% of votes as required by the Constitution. Consequently, a presidential run-off was undertaken as per requirements of the Constitution. ZANU PF ran a violent election campaign backed by the army, war veterans and youth militia that targeted opposition supporters, many of whom were arbitrarily arrested, forced into hiding, maimed or killed. Due to this, the opposition party was forced to pull out of the presidential runoff in June 2008, citing country-wide violence and intimidation of their supporters. The political polarisation and repression that followed caused many people to migrate to flee the violence.

3.2 The economic context to migration from Zimbabwe after 2000

The seeds of the severe economic instability that affected the country after the year 2000 were sown in the late 1990s. In November 1997, a politically motivated decision was made to pay each of the 50 000 war veterans a belated and unbudgeted one-off payment of Z$50 000 and a Z$2 000 monthly pension for their participation in the liberation war (Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2010). From there onwards economic indicators dipped. Following such gratuity awards to war veterans, the Zimbabwe dollar shed 72% of its value against the United States dollar while the stock market crashed (Chimhou, Manjengwa & Feresu 2010). In 1998, the country participated in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This further drained the economy of resources causing the government to run a large budget deficit (UNDP 2008). Seizure of white-owned commercial farms eroded investor confidence resulting in a lack of foreign investment. Farm invasions further hurt the economy by destroying a key sector of the economy. It also caused severe food shortages and loss of exports. As a corollary to the fast-track land reform programme agriculture production fell by an average nine percent a year, manufacturing eight percent and mining seven percent (Zanamwe & Devillard 2010). Shortages of basic commodities spawned inflation, a black market and a foreign exchange parallel market.

The GDP fell by a third in the period 1999 to 2006, impacting negatively on the balance of payments situation, incomes and social indices (Sachikonye 2006; World Bank 2009; Adebajo & Paterson 2011). The country earned the infamous tag of having the fastest shrinking economy in the world outside of a war zone. Annual GDP growth rate fell from 3.9% during 1980-1998 to -14.1% in 2008 (McGregor 2006; Makochekanwa & Kwaramba 2010). This decline of the economy occurred at a time when other African countries, notably Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Madagascar, Malawi, Swaziland, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia, were achieving reasonable rates of growth (UNDP 2008). This attracted Zimbabwean migrants.

Unemployment rose to 94% in 2008 (AFP 2009; Van Klaveren, Tijdens, Hughie-Williams & Martin 2010). Formal employment shrank from 3.6 million in 2003 to an estimated 480 000 by 2008. High unemployment caused informalisation of the economy where incomes are unstable (Simpson 2008; McGregor, Marazzi & Mpofu 2011). For all sectors of the economy the minimum wage[3] in 2009 of between US$20 to US$391 per month was below the poverty line (Van Klaveren *et al.* 2010). Although official sources claimed that inflation was 231 million per cent, the IMF (2009) pegged inflation at 500 billion per cent in September 2008 while Hanke (2009) thought inflation of 89.7 sextillion per cent was more realistic for the period. Such hyperinflationary conditions eroded incomes and caused instability in prices of basic goods. Price rises of basic goods of up to three times a day were common.

Difficult economic conditions caused a surge in poverty levels. For example, in 2003 the Total Consumption Poverty Line (TCPL) rose from 61% to 72% (Zanamwe & Devillard 2010). Inability to access money in the banks due to hyperinflation and shortage of bank notes made life particularly difficult for ordinary people. Such hyperinflation reduced economic competitiveness, forcing traders to demand payment for goods and services in foreign currency. Poverty and deprivation caused families to adopt migration as a survival strategy. During the economic crisis remittances became the primary source of income for the majority of households (Tevera & Zinyama 2002; Bracking & Sachikonye 2006; Van Klaveren et al 2010; Adebajo & Paterson 2011). A survey by Bloch (2008) in both the United Kingdom and South Africa found that 80% of respondents sent remittances to their families. Households were receiving an annual median amount of US$109.30 in cash remittances and US$54.90 in goods (IOM 2009). At the same time, remittances benefited the national economy through fees and taxes levied on formal remittances. By 2008 remittances were estimated at US$361 million or 7.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (IFAD 2007; Makina 2010b). So battered was the economy that the local currency ceased circulating in October 2008 (IMF 2009). Accordingly, government was forced to authorize the adoption of a multicurrency regime in February 2009 in order to stabilize the economy.

3.3 The social context to migration from Zimbabwe after 2000

Due to limited resources, the government reduced expenditure on health, education, housing and other public services. Thus, after 2000 service delivery systems became completely dysfunctional or collapsed. Hospitals closed due to a lack of drugs, medical and support staff. Apart from individual initiatives, foreign recruitment agencies facilitated the migration of doctors and nurses. By 2003 the health sector had lost over 2 100 doctors and 1 950 nurses (UNDP 2008). Schools suffered the same fate, as an estimated 15 200 teachers migrated to neighbouring countries because salaries were too low, having been severely eroded by inflation. For many people, it was no longer worthwhile to go to work when the purchase price of bread was Z$ 3 330 000. Furthermore, salaries could not be accessed from banks anyway due to the shortage of bank notes. In rural areas teachers perceived as opposition party supporters were evicted from their schools by ZANU PF militia.

3. Minimum wages are government stipulated wages for each economic sector. Workers in the agriculture sector are the lowest paid workers in the country.

The lack of basic services in urban areas caused a serious cholera epidemic which killed 4 000 people out of the 100 000 infected with the disease. Urban local authorities attributed the cholera outbreak to the inability to purchase water treatment chemicals due to a lack of foreign currency. The problem was compounded by power shortages which reduced water pumping capacity (Makina 2010). There were also severe food shortages throughout the country (Simpson 2008). Altogether 7.5 million people were food insecure and depended on donor aid. This made Zimbabwe the only country in the world with over half of the country reliant on food aid. A combination of a worthless currency, lack of foreign currency and food shortages pushed people to migrate.

On account of HIV/AIDS and poor standards of living for the majority of the people, life expectancy fell from 61 years in 1992 to 43 years after 2000 (Sachikonye 2006; Simpson 2008; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2010). The proportion of the population living below the poverty line rose from 57% in 1995 to 69% in 2002 and to 80% in 2005. Thus, rising poverty levels and limited livelihood opportunities pressured many people to migrate (Betts & Kaytaz 2009). High levels of unemployment and low wages left people with limited options for survival, hence the adoption of migration to diversify survival strategies. By 2000 Zimbabweans had become the largest group of people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom (Bloch 2005). The number of asylum applications rose from 230 in 1999 to 7 655 in 2002 (IOM 2005: 11). To tame the numbers the United Kingdom was forced to impose visa restrictions on Zimbabweans in 2002 (McGregor 2006).

4 Conclusion

Although there is no scarcity of research on migration from Zimbabwe, most such research has given a superficial discussion of the underlying causes of migration. This is unfortunate because understanding the causes of migration is critical for meaningful national migration policy formulation. This paper hopes to fill this gap by giving an overview of the contextual and background factors that led to emigration from Zimbabwe. While migration from the country has never ceased since independence, intense mobility from the country is a characteristic of the last decade. A severely ravaged economy, political and social instability are the major drivers of contemporary migration from the country. It is noteworthy that in the last decade the profile of migrants has changed from predominantly male to include an equal proportion of women. In addition, unaccompanied children are also taking part in migration. In light of the main challenges posed by high volumes of migration from the country, the government in recent years has adopted a proactive attitude towards the management of migration. Working with the IOM (Harare) and donor partners, the government drafted a national migration and development strategy which seeks to manage migration and enhance its development impact. Some of the migration management initiatives seek to recruit Zimbabweans in the diaspora to participate in skills-based transfer programmes. It is also making efforts to encourage Zimbabweans in the diaspora to return to the country to fill the skills gap created by migration and to urge them to invest in the national economy. However, the economy remains constrained by lack of money and low investment. Therefore, it has not created many new jobs. As such Zimbabweans in the diaspora are unlikely to consider return migration unless the economy shows significant improvements. Additionally, it will depend on the ability of the government to improve governance indicators in the short term and restore the political rights of Zimbabweans in the diaspora.

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