

# Cross-border Traders: Emerging, Multiple and Shifting Identities

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## **Abstract**

A significant number of Zimbabweans cross borders daily to engage in informal cross-border trade. Zimbabwean cross-border traders are a 'cosmopolitan, footloose group of cultural and economic entrepreneurs'. They are a highly gendered group, as they comprise mostly women. These women cross-border traders are characterised by emergent, multiple, shifting and negotiated identities. In Zimbabwe, cross-border trade as an occupation had given rise to the image of a strong, independent and mobile class of women involved in long distance transborder business (Cheater 1998; Muzvidziwa 1999, 2000 and 2005; and Zinyama 2000). A new identity marking women cross-border traders from others appeared to be emerging. The paper draws largely from the one year study by the author in 2002 in Chinhoyi, the capital of Mashonaland West Province and Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. This paper seeks to examine how identity is formed and legitimated in the context of women cross border's lived experiences. The paper examines issues related to emerging, shifting and multiple identities in the context of cross border trade. The paper focuses mostly on lived experiences of Zimbabwean cross-border traders. Global domains and issues concerning home and belonging and acquired cross-border identities are also examined in the paper. Discussions in this paper lead to the conclusion that anthropological perspectives are useful and do contribute to a better understanding of issues of belonging and identity among cross border traders in Zimbabwe today.

**Keywords:** cross border, traders, gendered, multiple identities, negotiate

## **Introduction**

Since the official adoption of the economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) (referred to then in Zimbabwe in street lingo as the extreme suffering of the African people) in 1991 by the Zimbabwean Government cross-border trade has become a very important aspect of the national psyche and economy. Many Zimbabweans cross borders daily between the country and its neighbours, that is, Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries and the rest of Africa and go as far as the United Kingdom, China and the USA. With the near collapse of the Zimbabwean economy during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, informal cross-border trade mostly by Zimbabwean women became the single most profitable strategy adopted by a number of women in order to earn an income and in some instances invest the accrued surplus. A number of Zimbabwean women traders not only managed to extricate their households out of poverty but also used the surplus to invest and climb out of poverty. Informal cross-border trade mainly by women is one example of an effective response to poverty and economic hardships. However, it is important to stress that despite the seeming successes of cross-border women traders, highly successful outcomes remained a preserve of the few. The majority of women in the urban populace continued to live in poverty (Musoni 2010; Muzvidziwa 2005).

This paper draws its data from an ethnographic study of a selected group of cross-border women traders who lived at the time of study in two cities in Zimbabwe, namely Harare, the country's capital and Chinhoyi, a provincial capital of Mashonaland West Province some 115 Km to the north west of Harare. The study was funded by the Organisation of for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA). The study mostly employed qualitative research methodology. Fieldwork spanned for a period of a year starting in December 2001 to the end of November 2002. Multiple research methods were adopted in terms of data gathering. Data was collected mainly using in-depth and length intensive interviews with 20 selected fulltime cross-border women traders as well as more than 30 officials. Only those amongst the women who lived in Harare or Chinhoyi at the time of the study were included in the in-depth interviews. The 20 women, 10 from Harare and another 10 from Chinhoyi were selected using snowball sample techniques. Interviews took place in the women's homes

while officials were interviewed at their work stations. In addition during fieldwork, informal interviews and direct observations at border posts and people's homes were utilised. This resulted in the gathering of a lot of data some of which has not been presented in depth in publications resulting from this study. While the study resulted in a book publication, two journal articles and several conference papers, issues focusing on emerging and multiple identities have not been explored in depth. This paper seeks to explore issues related to emerging, multiple and shifting identities amongst Zimbabwean cross border women traders. This is intended to take the debate expounded in Muzvidziwa's (2010) article focusing on double-rootedness and networking amongst cross-border traders further.

Social identity is the defining feature of any person or group including cross-border traders. It is the rallying point and strategic resource wielded by women cross-border traders as they go about their daily operations. Identity issues mark and circumscribe women cross-border's activities and well-being. This paper seeks to examine how identity processes are played out and legitimated amongst the women traders. The focus is on women traders' lived experience in terms of given identities.

This paper excluding the introduction and conclusion consists of five sections. The first section presents a descriptive account of four cross-border women cases selected from the 20 women who participated in the in-depth interviews. This is intended to present a back drop against which to understand identity issues subsequently examined in the paper. The second section explores issues related to emerging, multiple and shifting identities. The use of multiple identities sometimes functioned as a strategic resource that enable research participants to access resources and cement business ties and networks. The third section examines the link between lived experience and identity. The significance of daily life and practice is discussed in order to understand issues of belonging and identity using the Zimbabwean cross-border case study.

The fourth section explores issues related to the cosmopolitan nature of cross-border women traders. This section tries to contextualise cross-border trade in relation to the interconnections between the global and local. Ties that bind go beyond one's borders as demonstrated by what constituted a trader's well-being and domain of operations. The last section before the conclusion examines issues of belonging in the context of internal and

international migration. The section examines notions of belonging, double-rootedness and ‘home’ ‘*kumusha*’. A strong sense of belonging engendered by the varying lived experiences of the women is an important part of understanding emerging identities among cross-border traders. The analysis of issues of emerging and multiple identities in the paper focuses mostly on an examination of lived experiences of Zimbabwean cross-border traders. It can thus be concluded based on the issues raised in the paper that cross-border traders are a cosmopolitan footloose group of cultural and economic entrepreneurs. Cross-border traders are a highly gendered group, as they comprise mostly women. It is demonstrated in the paper that cross-border traders are characterised by emergent, multiple and negotiated identities.

## Cross-border Women Traders’ Cases

### *Case 1: Amai<sup>1</sup> Sekai*

Amai Sekai was a 49-year-old married woman and mother of four, three sons aged 30, 24 and 12 and a daughter aged 28. Two of her eldest children were married and worked in the United Kingdom (UK). Her 24-year-old son was single and also worked in the UK. The only dependent child was the 12-year-old son in grade seven. Amai Sekai’s parents and parents-in-laws had died, hence her only dependents were her youngest son and retired husband in his late sixties. She stopped secretarial work with Zimbabwe Cares Trust (ZIMCARE) an organisation for mentally challenged people in 1978. Amai Sekai started cross-border trade in 1979 a year before Zimbabwe’s independence. In those days they acted as a club and hired Express buses to travel to Durban and Johannesburg in South Africa. Average trips took them two weeks away from home. Her husband has always supported her cross-border business. Her husband’s uncle’s wife initiated her into cross-border trade.

In 1981 she switched her operations to Botswana. During those days she used to source goods for resale in Zimbabwe, goods like umbrellas, radios, and other electronic items, jeans, etc. She was able to build a house then, using the surplus from her cross-border trade activities. In 1984 she

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<sup>1</sup> *Amai* means mother but it can also be used as a mark of respect, calling a mature woman *amai* irrespective of whether one has a child or not is a mark of respect.

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stopped going to Botswana and worked on the Voters' Roll fulltime. She left after nine months to resume her cross-border trade operations, which were more profitable, compared to this fulltime job. On resumption of cross-border trade activities in 1985 she travelled to Durban. At that time she managed to bring in two cars and a machine for knitting jerseys. In 1987 she worked briefly as a fulltime employee of the Norwegian DANIDA organisation. From 1988 to 1991 she specialised in selling doilies in South Africa. The train was the main mode of transport then. She would go either through Mafeking Botswana to South Africa or direct to Johannesburg. During this period she was able to buy a car, sewing machines, and chemicals for dyeing and many other goods for resale in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. She even managed to pay fees for her daughter, now married, then studying at the University of Cape Town.

In 1992 she briefly operated in Namibia. They had to travel to Gaborone, then Lobatse in Botswana, and then hitch hiked from there to Windhoek, Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. Business was brisk but too demanding. She resumed trade in South Africa this time going to the Orange Free State in South Africa in 1993. Her speciality was now doilies. From 1994 to 1998 she conducted business in Cape Town and Johannesburg. She was able to build a fleet of Taxis from two to six during this time. Some of her taxis operate from the Harare International airport. She stopped cross-border trade briefly in 1999/2000. She resumed operations in 2001. This time she flew to Mauritius. They stayed up to three weeks on the island. She specialised in doilies, chair bags, and souvenirs items, sewn, knitted and crocheted items. On her first trip she paid an amount of 20 000 Rupees as duty for the seven boxes she had because she did not have a COMESA certificate of origin. For the same number of boxes once her papers were in order she paid only 2000 Rupees. Between June and October 2002 the return air ticket from Zimbabwe to Mauritius went up from Z\$79 000 to Z\$500 000. This closed the door to Mauritius. She resumed operations to South Africa at the end of October. She sees cross-border trade as a career. Amai Sekai had initiated many people into cross-border trade. While she believed a professional course is important, she was convinced cross-border trade was more exciting and profitable.

She specialised in doilies, which she sold then to predominantly whites. Her customers generally paid in cash. She had no problem of

following up on debts. She wanted to activate her network of white customers in the Orange Free State. Otherwise she had not been able to maintain a strong cluster of friends as she was always changing destinations. She confessed though that friendships were an important resource in cross-border business. She only brought back cash to Zimbabwe and no items for resale due to the collapse of the Zim\$ vis-à-vis other currencies. She was then contemplating taking her wares to London in 2003. She observed that a number of Zimbabwean women were plying the London, Dubai Middle East, Malaysia and China routes. Amai Sekai was a strong, determined, hardworking informal cross-border trader who knew what to look for in the market. This was an example of a successful pioneer who had defied negative attitudes of society to become a successful informal cross-border trader. She was in the climbing<sup>2</sup> out of poverty category. She owned a house in one of the low-density suburbs of Harare and was planning to invest more into properties. Due to her exposure Amai Sekai had become a language expert, something critical to cross-border success. She knew nearly a dozen languages that include Sotho, Venda, Zulu, Xhosa, Shona, Nyanza, Tswana, Shangaan, English, and Afrikaans etc. Language proficiency was found to be handy in cross-border trade operations as it enabled the trader an opportunity to blend well with her customers' communities.

### *Case 2: Amai Kudzi*

Amai Kudzi a 32-year-old divorcee had two sons aged 15 and 12. She was in the poverty coping category. Her marriage had ended in 1995 and since then had supported herself and her sons. She was just glad to be out of the unhappy marriage and had not bothered to sue her ex-husband for maintenance. She rented a two-bedroom cottage in one of the city's low-density suburbs. She left school before completing her O levels due to pregnancy.

Amai Kudzi started cross-border operations in 1996. She used two sewing machines to generate income for food and rent. She raised her start-up capital for cross-border operations from savings. Amai Kudzi was initiated into cross-border trade by a female cousin who took her to Durban. Up to the year 2000, she used to go Durban at least once every two months.

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<sup>2</sup> Used as per Muzvidziwa 1998. Climbing out of poverty referred to those who had relatively healthy domestic budget, savings and investments.

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From 2000 onwards she made monthly cross-border journeys to her destination. She was proficient in English, Nyanja, Shona, Sotho and Zulu. She carried crafts, souvenirs and curios, textile products, embroidery, knit ware and doilies. At the time of research, Amai Kudzi had stopped sourcing goods for resale back home in Harare. She only brought back grocery items for the consumption of her household. On average she was able to raise at least SAR3000 monthly. Amai Kudzi had other sources of income in addition to her cross-border operations. She had a flea market and a thriving dressmaking business enterprise in which she employed three women. The three women worked in the city where they shared rented space in a room in a high rise eight-storey building.

Amai Kudzi did not have dependents other than her children. Amai Kudzi had managed to buy a vacant stand in a low-density suburb. She had been buying the materials slowly and was ready to start construction at least before the end of 2002. For her, the house was the major investment of her life. She wanted to move into her house sometime during 2003. Amai Kudzi was a member of the Apostolic Faith church. Whenever she is not away on cross-border activities she attends church services. Amai Kudzi is also a member of a four-person rotating savings club. Members take turns to receive a lump sum of money as agreed amongst the members. Generally every member agrees in advance who the beneficiary for the month is.

#### *Case 3: Amai Dzimba*

Amai Dzimba a 28-year-old widow was a mother of two; a son aged 10 and a daughter aged 7. She was solely responsible for her children's general welfare. Her husband had died in 1999 and his relatives shared amongst themselves most of whatever he had. She had continued to live in Chinhoyi after the death of her husband. In addition to supporting her two children Amai Dzimba remitted money to her in-laws on a regular basis. From time to time she also remitted money to her own parents. She rented three rooms and stayed at the premises together with her children. Amai Dzimba was in the poverty<sup>3</sup> coping category.

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<sup>3</sup> Used as per classification by Muzvidziwa 1998. Coping referred to those who could balance the household budget.

Amai Dzimba had started cross-border trading operations in 1997, when her daughter was two years old. She travelled to Cape Town in South Africa on a monthly basis and spent at least a fortnight away from home. She had a domestic worker who was very reliable, loved the children and remained behind looking after the children during Amai Dzimba's numerous cross-border trips. Amai Dzimba had completed O levels but did not do any professional course thereafter.

For her outward journeys to South Africa she specialises in tourist focused objects, pieces of artefacts, both wooden and stone crafts products. In addition to artefacts, she also carries with her doilies. She does the crocheting of doilies herself. One required at least SAR1000 rands per trip. She reckoned she was making a profit margin of SAR5000 or so rands per month. With parallel markets rates appearing favourable to all those with access to foreign currency it was likely that that she would finish building her house in a short time. She had bought a stand.

Like most female cross-border traders she relied on public transport i.e. taxis and buses to get to and from her destination. She used to bring back goods for resale from South Africa, but had stopped purchasing goods for resale to the Zimbabwean market. The free fall of the Zim\$ made the currency so unstable and this had contributed to the skyrocketing of prices of commodities in Zim\$. Cape Town being a tourist market place had a huge market for Amai Dzimba's products. Amai Dzimba was proficient in English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Shona, Nyanja, Xhosa and Ndebele.

Amai Dzimba was a member of a three-person credit and savings club. The three women had an arrangement where they contributed Z\$20 000, which they advanced to each other on a monthly basis. They took turns to receive the money. Amai Dzimba had also found help and refuge in the church. She had minimal interaction with other women in the neighbourhood.

#### *Case 4: Amai Sarudzai*

Amai Sarudzai was a never-married, 35-year-old and had a son aged 16 years who was doing form four at a boarding school. She had an elder brother who worked in Harare and stayed there with his family. She lived with her mother in Chinhoyi. Her father died in 1996. She had completed O levels but did no

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further professional formal training. The house where she stayed belonged to her mother. She however, contributed money for extensions of two additional rooms to the original four rooms.

Amai Sarudzai is in the poverty coping category. She managed her finances well and was planning to invest in housing. She worked in a saloon and retail shop up to 1999 when she abandoned this line of work and started cross-border trading activities. Since 1999 she had been going down to Johannesburg in South Africa. She travelled to South Africa on a monthly basis. She had financed her first trip from both her own savings and was also given a grant by her brother. A cousin initiated her into cross-border trade. They still travelled together on most trips. They sold their wares to individuals in their homes. She also visited people at work places marketing her goods. She spoke English, Shona, Sotho, Venda and Zulu very well, something that is good in cross-border trade. Many of her old customers act as referees for prospective new customers. They also help her find customers for her goods. She sold goods on a two to three month credit basis and had no debt collection problem. She sometimes found customers who purchased goods on a cash basis. She also sold goods to formal shops especially goods destined for the tourist market.

She used to bring back goods for resale in Zimbabwe. She had stopped this practice because of reduced profitability. She only brought back grocery for consumption by her household and money for exchange in the parallel foreign currency market. On average, she got between SAR1000 and SAR2000 monthly from trips to South Africa. She took to South Africa clothing items, Zambian cloth, trendy shoes, knitted clothes, and crocheted items, occasional wood, metal and stone crafted products for the tourist market. Formal shops paid her cash for her products unlike most of her individual customers who operate on a credit basis. She partly self-produced some of the items for her trade. She also commissioned people for a fee to produce some of the items. In addition she sourced from formal shops and individual producers some of the goods she took down with her to South Africa.

During her visits to South Africa to minimise costs she shared a room with three or four other Zimbabwean cross-border traders and paid for the duration of her stay SAR50. She spent three to five days each month in Johannesburg, her area of operations. The owner of the house where she

rented a room had become a friend and they related as if they were kin. Sometimes Amai Sarudzai brought her landlord friend gifts. She used to bring her some selected food items from Zimbabwe. The landlord had stayed with some of the people who lodge rooms at her place during short visits to Zimbabwe.

She believed something needed to be done to lessen the burden women faced trying to get visas particularly those outside Harare. Customs officials of both countries needed to improve on customer care handling procedures. Zimbabwe customs officials were reported as being to desperate to raise money from cross-border traders that at times their zealousness borders on harassment. Amai Sarudzai felt something should be done to improve interactional relations between customs and cross-border traders. She had commended the work ethic of immigration officials.

Amai Sarudzai was an Apostolic Faith member. She attends Church on Sundays at least twice a month and pays her dues to church. She was a member of three credit and savings groups, one group had a membership of three they rotated giving money to each other. Their contributions are Z\$10 000 and the second group had a membership of four just like the first group they contributed Z\$10 000. The third group consists of 23 members. They contributed Z\$500 and members can borrow money and make a repayment of the full amount with 10% interest the following month. Amai Sarudzai bought a 300square metre-stand in 2002. She was planning to start building sometime in 2003. She believes investing in property was the only means to secure the future.

## **Cross-border Traders: An Emerging Identity**

Cross-border trade was clearly moulding a new type of business woman in Zimbabwe. This was more than what Lacaze (2010) in the case of Mongolian traders referred to as ‘businessmen of the transition’ or informal ‘suitcase traders’. In the 1990s and early 2000s cross-border women traders were popularly referred to as *vakadzi vekuSouth* (the women who go down South – this was with reference to South Africa). This term was used irrespective of destination plied by the woman trader. The term was also associated with business shrewdness and success. Women like Amai Sekai, Amai Kudzi and other fellow cross-border traders were beginning to be constructed as male to

denote their breadwinner status and hard determination to succeed. They were seen and referred to as *varume pachavo* (just like men). The women had broken the glass ceiling by proving that women too can be shrewd successful business persons.

While all the women cited in this paper self-identified as Shona in terms of ethnic group, they considered this to be of less importance in cross-border trade but the women stressed that language competence was critical and more often than not a pre-requisite to success. The language ability of these women was amazing. Yet none had gone beyond O level, but all of them were multi-lingual. Mai Sekai a veteran cross-border was proficient in nearly a dozen languages. Mai Sarudzai and Mai Kudzi were competent in five languages and lastly Amai Dzimba was fluent in seven. These women could understand several other languages. Language proficiency is seen as the key defining feature and of necessity to anyone contemplating being a successful cross-border trader. The women were able to gain acceptance and win customers in any ethnic group they happen to come across due to their ability to reach out to their customers through the language of the customer or prospective customer. It is not surprising that even during the highly publicised xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008 there were hardly any reports of attacks of cross-border traders. The importance of one's ability to adopt multiple identities is seen as critical to successful development efforts (Kiang, Yip & Fuligni 2008). This however is not something specific to adolescence and young adults. The women cross-border traders were able to blend in easily in the communities in which they plied their trade by learning the local languages. Through language competencies the women cross-border traders were able to fit in very well in the respective communities. Language was in a way being used to redefine ethnic identity. It was recognised as a key resource that enabled the women to maximise returns on their investments in cross-border trade.

Language versatility was matched by the high levels of physical mobility. Cross-border trade was very demanding and required physical stamina on the part of the women traders. A lot of effort was needed carrying the goods to be traded in distant places. Amai Sekai had travelled across the South African landscape and equally in Botswana and Namibia. It did not matter whether one moved by bus, train, long distance trucks or aeroplanes. Mobility in terms of space was very demanding and needed strong

determined women prepared to venture into new unknown places. As demonstrated through the four cited cases, it is clear that Zimbabwean cross-border traders are highly mobile trans-nationals. Mobility is a pre-requisite to success in cross-border trade (Muzvidziwa 1998, 2005; Peberdy 2000; Peberdy & Crush 1998, 2001, 2007). This gave rise to the impression of women on the move both metaphorically and in actual space. Cross-border trade was the one single livelihood that was creating a space for women to move up the socio-economic ladder. Amai Sekai was a successful investor business woman and the other three women were all in the poverty coping category. Through cross-border trade women were in physical and metaphorical terms on the move.

Cross-border traders are a highly gendered group, as they comprise mostly women. This allows us to see how women cross-border traders such as those in Zimbabwe construct their lives under changing contexts and circumstances. The propensity of new forms of migration that attracted many women entrepreneurs especially in the post 1990s structural adjustment phase which decimated the livelihoods of the poor is noted by many writers (Cheater & Gaidzanwa 1996; Mahler & Pessar 2006; Muzvidziwa 1998, 2005; Ojong 2006; and Porter & Poerwandari 2010). As observed in Muzvidziwa (2010:85),

cross-border trade as an occupation had given rise to the image of a strong and independent class of women involved in long distance trans-border business. A new identity marking cross-border traders from others appeared to be emerging. It was quite clear that cross-border women traders were shrewd business strategists. Cross-border trade was the one single strategy for climbing out of poverty.

Mushaben's (2009) observation that gender tends to give rise to 'complex migration dynamics' that in many ways determine 'who stays, who moves, where, why, how often' tend to be played out in the lives of Amai Dzimba, Amai Kudzi, Amai Sarudzai and Amai Sekai. The choice of residence during the women's stay when on cross border operations, was greatly influenced by security and safety considerations. Amai Sarudzai and Amai Dzimba shared a room with friends. The women cross-border traders were also cultivating more personalised relationships with their landlords.

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The four cross-border women traders cited in this paper were forging ahead economically. All the four women cross border traders used a Zimbabwean passport to cross borders legally. However, in informal discussions women knew of some Zimbabwean cross-border traders who were legitimate holders of passports from South Africa and Malawi. South Africa allows for dual citizenship while Zimbabwe does not. Many Zimbabweans qualified for dual citizenship on the basis of descent. More than a million Zimbabweans are of Malawian origin and many have South African roots in addition to other nationalities. At the time of field work there were many obstacles that made it difficult to access a South Africa visa for Zimbabweans. On the other hand holders of a Malawian passport did not need a visa. It is also more of a symbolic statement to insist on mono citizenship when other states do not. It is quite possible that some of the cross-border traders successfully negotiated their way into South Africa using a legitimate passport from a country other than Zimbabwe. Cheater (1998) and Cheater and Gaidzanwa (1996) made a critical assessment of how the Zimbabwean patriarchal state tried to control women through citizenship constructions but with limited success as women continued to find space for themselves to conduct successful cross-border business ventures under hostile states gaze that include Zimbabwe. In many instances women cross-border traders had managed to overcome obstacles from state functionaries and gate keepers such as customs officials and immigration officials by appearing to be going alone with official policy and also appearing to be weak. This is what is referred to by Scott (1993) as the 'weapons of the weak'. The women's strategic responses to cope with the various demands in the conduct of their business, made them better tactical 'politicians'.

In their lived experiences women cross-border traders did not hold on to one identity only but were doing what was pragmatic and practically feasible under the circumstances. This was meant to maximise returns on their business operations. This gave rise to what Werbner (1996) referred to as 'shifting identities'. As noted from the story of the cited four women cross-border traders they confronted a number of obstacles in their lives as cross-border traders. Cheater (1998) observed that women learn survival tactics out of the everyday lived experiences at borders and during operations away from Zimbabwe in other countries. Ranger (1996) also noted that identity reflected the strategic choices that people make in view of the circumstances they face.

This is important in order to have a clearer picture of the lives of the women cross-border traders discussed in this paper.

## **Identity as a Product of Daily Life**

Cross-border women traders' identities are created in the course of daily struggles for existence and survival that challenge people. Amai Sarudzai just like the other three women traders' lived reality and daily realities influenced the kinds of possibilities and options available them in terms of livelihoods strategies. For these women, the notion of the existence of one identity in any given social context is rejected and substituted by the possibility of the existence of a multiplicity of identities. This mirrors the observation by Mbembe (2002 cited in Ceton 2005:121-122) that

we have to start from the assumption that identity formation is always a historical process. This means that identities are not formed out of a vacuum. The material conditions in which people live have a serious impact on the way they imagine themselves. For most people in Africa, those material conditions of daily life are such that they have to grab at every opportunity to try and make it from one day to the other. In such a situation, it is more rational not to have one single loyalty. ... One has to invest in multiple social relations in order to be able to confront the different facets of everyday imperatives.

This is equally true of the lived experiences of the women cross-border traders cited in this paper.

The practicalities of everyday realities force people to enter into various kinds of relations that in turn mould them into certain types of peoples. Informality and the kinds of survival struggles that people opt to hang on to affect their emerging identities. The women traders resorted to use of social networks in order to survive in their everyday lived experiences. Amai Kudzi, Amai Sekai and Amai Sarudzai were initiated by kin into cross-border trade. Kin also played an important role in terms of raising start-up capital for cross-border business as shown by Amai Sarudzai and Amai Sekai. Not only were the women connected to kin they were

strongly connected to various groups of different individuals. This enabled the women to maximise on returns of cross-border trading activities. Friendship networks played an important role in the lives of the women cross-border traders. In the case of Amai Dzimba and Amai Sarudzai some of their customers not only had become their friends they also acted as referees of potential customers. This had the effect of minimising bad debts. To minimize rental costs during cross-border visits some of the women shared a room with other traders. In due course the women had developed friendship relations with their landlords some of whom visited Zimbabwe and stayed with some of their tenants. Spiritual support gave the women the strength to continue in their trading activities. Amai Kudzi and Amai Sarudzai were Apostolic Faith adherents and Amai Dzimba was a Methodist. The importance of social networks in the lives of the women traders cited in this paper is shown by the high level of participation in rotating credit and savings clubs. The three women in the poverty coping category belonged to at least one rotating credit and savings group. In the case of Amai Sarudzai she was a member of three vibrant clubs. These networks can thus be seen as strategic resources that helped the women to mobilise other resources needed in order to be a successful cross-border trader.

The daily negotiations and interactions taking place at many levels in the lives of African women cross-border traders contributed to the emergency of multiple loyalties. For cross-border traders we cannot speak of a homogenous identity, the pressure for multiple identities is high. The cross-border woman trader is pulled in various directions all at the same time. It is to her advantage to establish effective social networks whether they are kin or non-kin ones. When we asked who are these cross-border women traders we realized that the notion of a homogenous identity is not that correct. Flowing from Mbembe, Ceton observed that the African identity is a splintered identity not a single one. This is so mainly as a result of survival challenges faced by people in their everyday lived experiences. African identity or rather any other form of identity is deeply rooted in the cognitive maps of existence. Taking this discussion to our home base Zimbabwe we can begin to appreciate the importance of grasping the dynamics of inter-group relations. In order to come up with practical examples it is useful to illustrate some of the issues on our real life citizens. Once we begin to see

the influence of lived experiences on people's lives there is a likelihood of an emergency of divergent and competing identities. In the following sections I examine the issue of Zimbabwean cross-border traders as global citizens,

## **Zimbabwe's Global Citizens**

The 2002 study showed that Zimbabwean women cross-border traders are a highly mobile and well-connected group of entrepreneurs that has managed to establish links that cut across ethnic, class, gender and nationality. They plied their business virtually in every continent though the four cases cited in this paper were mostly confined to the SADC region. However traders like Amai Sekai were planning to start trading in places like the UK. Hannerz (1996) stressed the strong connection between one's cosmopolitan outlook and globalisation processes. This is something that brought out clarity in studies focusing on cross-border traders. Women traders in the context of global challenges were developing skills that enabled them to manage and survive under conditions of increasing diversity and often difficult circumstances. Hannerz (1996) observed that cosmopolitans are people constantly on the move. The women discussed in this paper were all highly mobile. Mobility is to a large extent part of the survival and business strategies adopted by cosmopolitans. Amai Dzimba and Amai Sarudzai spend at least a fortnight away from home on cross-border trips. Cosmopolitan behaviour fits quite well with that of the cited four cross-border traders' cases in this paper. Hannerz's observations are particularly useful as women traders are constantly on the move sourcing and selling their wares and at the same time creating business links through the different kinds of relations based on friendship and kin like relations. In order to understand cross-border traders one needs to locate them within a particular global domain.

While all the four women cases in the paper remained rooted in Zimbabwe and could be termed local, their horizon and sights in terms of business operations went much further than Zimbabwe they were global in orientation. The market for their goods extended beyond the country's borders. Traders like Amai Sekai were good at sensing and utilising market opportunities. They were not risk averse. She had been to Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Mauritius and was planning to extend her operations to international markets like the UK. Amai Dzimba was

networked into the tourist market in Cape Town which exposed her to people of many nationalities other than South Africans. These women were to a large extent cosmopolitan in outlook and a highly mobile group of cultural and economic entrepreneurs.

Cross-border trade had resulted in transnational behaviour on the part of the women traders. They all self-identified as Zimbabweans and were deeply connected to their families and homes in Zimbabwe. Yet at the same time their whole being was oriented towards forging strong ties and connections with persons and places in and outside Zimbabwe. Mau, Mewes and Zimmermann (2008) noted that trans-nationalism is 'the extent to which individuals are involved in cross-border interaction and mobility'. For instance Smith and Guarnizo (2009) noted that global migrants do work and live in cities and towns quite different from their place of birth and many of them stay connected to their antenatal homes. This is true of cross-border women traders. While the women transverse the region, they were all firmly connected to their Zimbabwean roots.

Freuke (2008) identified mostly four entrepreneurial strategies amongst Poland's global migrants particularly those operated in Germany. Firstly, there was a high degree of mobility amongst the economical differentiated migrants; secondly they were transnational in outlook; thirdly the home and foreign places where they were located were both considered as market places and lastly migrants were initiating and expanding business opportunities at home and abroad. Transnational social networks and social mobility were considered instrumental to success in the global market. Freuke's (2008) observations are similarly mirrored in the case of Zimbabwean cross-border traders despite differences in location and levels of socio-economic development.

### **Cross-border Trade and the Politics of Belonging**

A high degree of connectedness to some place and people underpinned cross-border migrants' behaviour in the 2002 study. For Zimbabwean women cross-border traders every person needs a *kumusha* i.e. a home. While the real home is the natal village home has come to include the urban place of residence to which one can claim undisputed ownership. In the study either a person had established her home in the form of an urban residence as was the

case with Amai Sekai or the women were at various stages of constructing one as shown by the purchase of vacant stands and the strong desire to build a housing unit on it by Amai Dzimba, Amai Kudzi and Amai Sarudzai. The women believed that unless you had a home you were nothing. For this group as noted in Muzvidziwa (2010:85) ‘the concept of *kumusha* (home) is very important in understanding urban migrants’ behaviour’. With respect to cross-border women traders when outside the country the notion of *kumusha* refers to Zimbabwe. Even those cross-border traders like Amai Sekai who had children in the diaspora still encouraged their children to invest at home i.e. Zimbabwe. One would see how despite the many challenges Zimbabwe as a country was facing they still kept the flow of goods, services, money and people homeward bound. As observed by Sadouni (2009:243) ‘diaspora is a migratory phenomenon characterised by a strong communal experience’, rooted in the case of Zimbabwe on the *kumusha* ideals of the women’s lived experiences. The *kumusha* mindset can be seen as been instrumental in terms of continued investments at home in the form of property buys despite the free fall of the Zimbabwean economy. Economic decisions in terms of investment were influenced by this *kumusha* ideal reality.

The study demonstrated that cross-border migration is another terrain on which issues of identity and belonging are being played. The cross-border trade migratory process is not a neutral process. It is something that triggers people’s awareness of their identity and sense of belonging and at times entitlements. The women cross-border traders had moved beyond what Worby (1994) described as the colonial practice of mapping ethnicities. This leads to identification of particular places as belonging to a particular ethnic group. In practise in terms of the women’s lived experiences the urban space belongs to all Zimbabweans. In other words in the urban, identities are not tied to ethnically identified geographical boundaries. This does not lead to the dissolving of ethnic boundaries but ethnicity ceases to be an important aspect as far as acquiring an urban home is concerned.

A point muted in the study of cross-border women traders but not fully developed is the issue of how these movements had generated a strong sense of belonging and identity amongst the women. Generally the women are proud of being Zimbabweans despite the collapse of the economy and all the negatives that surrounds the Zimbabwean state. However, the women did not carry a single identity premised on say citizenship or any other thing.

They wore many identities at the same time and this enabled them in many instances to use their identities to maximise returns in their business ventures. The women were mothers, religious persons, breadwinners and heads of households, members of various associations and social networks, Zimbabweans, etc. It is clear drawing on evidence from the study that matters of identity and belonging were fluid and dynamic.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of identity remains central to an understanding of cross-border women trader's well-being, behaviour and predispositions. As observed by Mbembe (1992:5) the 'subjects in the postcolony have also had to have a marked ability to manage not just a single identity for themselves but several, which are flexible enough for them to negotiate as and when required'. Like Narotzky (2009:175) who stresses the need to 'historically contextualize and localize economic models', to get to grips with issues of emerging identities and sense of belonging amongst Zimbabwean cross-border traders there is a need to situate the Zimbabwean socio-economic context against the overwhelming global forces sweeping across nations. It is quite clear from the study that cross-border women traders did not have a single identity but mobilised several in their day to day lived experiences. This is in line with Ranger's (1983:248) observation that, 'most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities'. This was equally true of cross-border women traders in the study. Not only were their identities multiple they were dynamic and changing as well to enable them cope with the changing circumstances impacting on their lives.

To some extent the cross-border women traders' ability to engage in transnational behaviour and their being strongly networked enabled them to maximise returns on cross-border investments. Notions of *kumusha* and sense of belonging in terms of the ideology of *kumusha* enabled the women to stay connected irrespective of high levels of mobility. This in a way might explain the emergency of women cross-border traders as a highly successful entrepreneurial group. As noted in Muzvidziwa (2010:90) 'the crisis in Zimbabwe has seen the emergence of an independent, economically vibrant entrepreneurial group in the form of cross-border traders'.

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