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# Mothering from across the Limpopo: Experiences of Zimbabwean mothers living in Johannesburg

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A research project submitted to the African Centre for Migration and Society in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Migration and Displacement

# Declaration

I declare that this report is my own unaided work. It is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, for the Master of Arts Degree in Migration and Displacement. It has not been submitted in part or in whole to any other Institution or University as a requirement for a degree or any other qualification.

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Thulisile Zikhali

# Abstract

Migration patterns in Zimbabwe and the Southern African region have historically been male led and dominated. Recently, however, there has been an increase in the participation of women in migration in search of improved work and education opportunities. This feminisation of migration has implications on normative understandings of motherhood, family and gender roles. In particular, it may necessitate renegotiation of family roles: fathers and other relatives may be tasked to take care of and nurture the children, whilst mothers find alternative ways to mother from afar, suggesting changes in mothers' productive and reproductive roles. Against this backdrop, the study explores mothering experiences of Zimbabwean women living in Johannesburg who left their children in Zimbabwe, or who have had children in Johannesburg and then moved them to Zimbabwe. Participants' perceptions about motherhood, the challenges they face and the ways they try to overcome them are examined. Special focus is on single mothers who are employed in the low skills labour market for two reasons: first their mothering role gains particular importance in light of the absence of the father to help with parenting. Second, given the nature of their employment, they tend to face resource constraints which do not permit full-time mothering. The study draws from literature on transnational motherhood and transnational families and in-depth semi structured interviews with eleven Zimbabwean mothers living and working in Johannesburg. Constructivist grounded theory was used to analyse the data. As a mother who travelled alone to study in Johannesburg and who has a child in Zimbabwe, I am reflective of my position throughout the research process. Findings indicate that while mothers displayed agency in their conceptualisations of motherhood in the context of migration, they nonetheless viewed the ideology of intensive motherhood, which portrays mothers as selfless and fully dedicating their time to taking care of children at home, as an ideal form of mothering. This created challenges for them as they viewed themselves as not adequately exercising their mothering role and subsequently falling short of being 'good mothers' despite the important role they play as significant contributors to the household income in Zimbabwe.



**Key words:** Grounded theory, intensive mothering, migration, transnational motherhood, transnational families

# Dedication

*To my late father Douglas Zikhali*

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First and foremost I would like to thank God Almighty for giving me the perseverance that enabled me to complete this report.

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# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ACP | African Caribbean and Pacific Group of States |
| ACMS | African Centre for Migration and Society |
| CoRMSA | Consortium for Refugees and Migrants South Africa |
| COFACE | Confederation of Family Organisation in the European Union Report |
| ESAP | Economic Structural Adjustment Programme |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| UNDESA | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs |
| ZDP | Zimbabwe Dispensation Project |

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# Chapter One

## 1 Background and Introduction

Intra-regional migration has characterised Southern Africa since the colonial era. The development of industries, especially in mining, created an intra-regional labour market which fostered inter-dependence between countries that supplied labour (mainly Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) and those that received labour (mainly South Africa, Namibia and Botswana) (Crush and Tevera 2010: Crush, Williams and Peberdy, 2005: Crush and MacDonald: 2001). Ethnic and kinship ties across borders continue to facilitate cross-border movements of people. The end of apartheid in 1994 and South Africa becoming a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) after years of isolation encouraged cordial relations in the region, created economic opportunities within South Africa, and led to increased migration flows to South Africa as it opened its borders.

Despite the long history of intra-regional migration, migration in the region has been in favour of male labour, partly due to colonial regulations facilitating male migration and supporting gender biased labour contracts (Crush, et al, 2005). This pattern is also reflected in Zimbabwe's history of migration patterns which demonstrate that migration was primarily gendered as it was male led and dominated (McGregor, 2007: Bloch, 2005: Tevera and Zinyama, 2002). Recently, however, women, who traditionally had remained at home, whilst their spouse/male partner migrated, now migrate on their own in search of work and education opportunities. This is due partly to the increasing levels of poverty, shifting gender roles, economic hardships and unemployment leading to women migrating as a form of survival strategy (Crush et al, 2005). Today, independent female migration is no longer restricted to internal movements but women now migrate internationally as well (Adepoju, 2006), for example, cross border traders, in search of work or education. This has seen professional women such as teachers, nurses and doctors being recruited from countries such as Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe to work in Western countries (Adepoju, 2006). In 2013, for instance, 48% of the stock of migrants in the world were women and in Africa, 45.9% of migrants were women (United National Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2013). Specific to Zimbabwe, the worsening of the country's economic situation since 2000 accelerated the rise in the number of Zimbabweans moving to neighbouring countries in

search of better economic opportunities and fleeing from socio-political challenges. According to the 2011 Census, amongst the international migrants from the SADC region in South Africa, 45.5% were Zimbabwean (Statistics South Africa, 2015).

The increasing participation of women in migration can also be attributed to changing societal attitudes and perspectives about female migration (Cornelissen, 2009). In the past, independent female migration has been disapproved of as a result of cultural norms in different societies. The migration of women has resulted in a changing role of women in the household, from a traditional reproductive role of nurturing and taking care of children to a productive role as important contributors to family income including, at times, being the sole breadwinner. As such the migration of women challenges normative understandings of family and motherhood (Millman, 2013: Parrenas, 2010), particularly when women are obliged to (or chose to) migrate and leave their children behind, in their places of origin. This brings to the fore the question of how the notion and understanding of motherhood changes in the context of migration and how women who mother from a distance manage to maintain relationships with their children back home. As Hochschild (2002) points out, this movement of women signifies a potential change in family care structures, as women who historically migrated for the purposes of family reunification are now moving to look for work independently in other countries or places. This movement of women challenges conceptualisations of motherhood that call for the physical presence of the mother in taking care of and nurturing her children (Illanes, 2010: Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997). It is against this background that this study seeks to contribute to existing literature that explores the implications of the feminisation of migration on the conceptualisation and understandings of motherhood, from the perspective of migrant mothers.

The research report is structured as follows: the first chapter specifies the research question, objectives and significance of the study. Chapter Two conducts a review of existing literature, with the aim of situating this study in the broader literature on transnational motherhood. Within the chapter, I discuss the concepts of motherhood, transnational motherhood and transnational families. In Chapter Three I explain my philosophical position and how I adopted the principles of grounded theory in data collection and analysis for a thematic description. In this chapter I also outline the research population and data collection techniques as well as ethical considerations and reflexivity. In Chapter four I present and discuss the findings of

this study and finally the last Chapter concludes the study and provides suggestions for future research.

## 1.1 Research Question and Objectives

The main research question for the study is: *What are the mothering experiences of Zimbabwean women living in Johannesburg who have left their children in Zimbabwe, or who gave birth in Johannesburg and moved their children to Zimbabwe?*

In answering the above question I interrogate three related issues; the nature of mothering from a distance, challenges faced in the process and the nuances that fall between the mothers, their families and children back home. Therefore the specific objectives of the study are:

I. To explore ways in which Zimbabwean mothers in Johannesburg engage with the ideology of 'intensive' motherhood.
II. To describe the challenges Zimbabwean mothers in Johannesburg face in trying to maintain relationships with their children and the people taking care of them in Zimbabwe.
III. To explain how mothers try to incorporate and make sense of the spatio-temporal separations from their children in their conceptualisations of motherhood and mothering, using the example of Zimbabwean mothers in Johannesburg whose children are in Zimbabwe.

## 1.2 Significance of the study

This study is premised on transnational motherhood literature. There is a dearth of literature on transnational motherhood in the African context. Studies on transnational mothering have largely focused on migrants who move to countries in the North. Thus a number of studies have been undertaken in countries in the North, for example, the United Kingdom, Italy, France and the United States (Chib, Malik, Aricat and Nadir, 2014: Zontini and Madziva, 2012: Zontini, 2010, Falicov, 2007: Schmalzbauer 2004: Moon, 2003: Parreinas, 2001: Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 1997). Furthermore, many studies on transnational families have focused on the wellbeing of children left behind by parents in their countries of origin, there is less written on the experiences of mothers themselves and the effect that such separation from their

children has on them (Bohr and Whitfield, 2011). The African Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) Observatory on Migration Report (2012) similarly observes that there is little existing research on transnational families in the South, with most literature on transnational families focusing on South-North movements. In a review of literature on motherhood in North America, Arendell (2000) concludes that what is needed is for scholarship to pay more attention to the lives of particular mothers and the voices of different groups of mothers. As a result, this study will contribute towards existing literature on transnational mothers by focusing on the lived experiences of Zimbabwean mothers living in Johannesburg. The study seeks to add to the literature by looking at transnational mothering in a South to South context, using the example of Zimbabwean mothers in Johannesburg whose children are in Zimbabwe.

In the next chapter I discuss the Johannesburg and Zimbabwean contexts, in order to highlight the different spatial locations that women in this study have to contend with, in terms of motivation for migrating and their circumstances in South Africa. This is followed by a discussion on motherhood, transnational motherhood and transnational families. I discuss motherhood in general so as to highlight the influence of migration in conceptualisations of motherhood as outlined in the concept of transnational motherhood.

# Chapter Two

# 2 Literature review

## 2.1 Introduction

Conceptualisations of motherhood and mothering tend to evoke ideas of women's reproductive roles, for instance, nurturing, caring, and socialisation of dependent children (Arendell, 2000: Glenn, Chang and Forcey, 1994: Ruddick, 1989). The mother is often assumed to interact with her children in close proximity, that is, in the same geographical space (Phoenix and Bruna, 2013: Moyo and Kawewe, 2002). Yet, not all mothers have the resources to be full time mothers at home due to, for example, economic hardships and the need to contribute to the household income or education opportunities. Existing literature suggests that these mothers find alternative ways of mothering that are dependent on their circumstances, in ways that question normative ideas of child care that call for mother and child to share the same geographical space (Contreras and Griffith, 2012: Illanes, 2010). However, this is not without pitfalls as mothers and the society in general constantly evaluate and judge their mothering strategies within the dominant ideologies of motherhood, for example, the ideology of intensive motherhood which emphasises the reproductive roles of mothers as nurturing and taking care of children at home (Parrenas, 2001: Millman, 2013: Hondagneu-Sotelo et al,1997).

This presents mothers with psycho-social challenges emanating from feelings of inadequacy and falling short of being good mothers (Nicholson 2006: Parrenas 2001). In this chapter I discuss the Zimbabwean context that gave rise to mothers migrating independently in search of better livelihoods and ideas of motherhood from a Zimbabwean perspective as depicted in the literature. The discussion then moves on to the Johannesburg context, to highlight some of the issues that make it difficult for mothers to bring their children to South Africa. Lastly I discuss the concepts of motherhood, intensive ideology of motherhood, transnational motherhood and transnational families.

## 2.2 The Zimbabwean Context

Zimbabwe has faced progressive economic and political challenges stretching back from the late 1990s with the government's adoption of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) into the 2000s when the government embarked on a populist and quite controversial land reform programme (Zimbabwe Country Analysis Report,2014: Makina,2005: McGregor, 2005). While ESAP saw a number of civil servants getting retrenched from work as the government sought to reduce public expenditure, the land reform also had dire consequences for the economy. Cost of living became high as families struggled to meet basic economic needs. The controversial fast track land reform programme led to disintegration of the civil service, and alarming levels of inflation (Hammar, McGregor and Landau, 2010). Raftopolous (2009:220) notes that, at the peak of this crisis, inflation rose to a level of 230 million and 85%% of the population in 2006 was living below the poverty datum line. This deterioration of economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe has led to the exodus of many people from the country to other countries in the region and internationally to look for better economic opportunities (McGregor, 2005: Zinyama et al, 2002). This has seen qualified doctors, nurses, teachers and unskilled labour leaving the country so as to diversify their sources of income. The influx of Zimbabwean migrants into South Africa ultimately led to South Africa's department of home affairs to attempt to regularise Zimbabwean migrants under the Zimbabwe Dispensation Project (ZDP), in which it sought to document Zimbabweans outside the asylum system (CoRMSA, 2011). However this process was marred by bureaucratic challenges such that only a limited number of people benefited from the project (CoRMSA, 2011: African Centre for Migration and Society Report (ACMS), 2011). This has meant that a number of Zimbabweans in South Africa remain undocumented.

Zimbabwe has several ethnic groups. The largest group are the Shona speaking people who make up close to 80% of the population. This is followed by the Ndebele speaking people at 15% (Muwati, Gambahaya and Gwekerere 2011: Ndlovu, 2010). Hence the focus on the Shona and Ndebele speaking Zimbabwean women living in Johannesburg. As Muwati et al (2011) point out, these two groups share almost similar cultural practices, for example, the payment of the bride price before marriage, this is referred to in the Ndebele and Shona cultures as *ilobola* and *roora* respectively (Mangena and Ndlovu, 2013). Likewise, notions of mothering

and motherhood can be understood in almost similar ways in both Shona and Ndebele societies.

Mazuru and Nyambi (2012) note that the Shona/Africana mothers are responsible for the preservation of cultural norms and values. While the woman is expected to be instrumental in her reproductive role in terms of bearing children, her other responsibility is to socialize the children into mainstream culture. In this way, Zimbabwean women, like other African women are seen to be the gatekeepers of cultural values and hence occupy a strategic position in the family (Mangena, 2009). By so doing the woman earns herself family and societal respect (Mazuru et al, 2012). This is demonstrated in the Shona proverb that says '*musha mukadzi',* literally translated to mean that 'A home is what it is because of a woman' (Mawati et al: 2011). This emphasizes the importance of a mother in giving guidance and keeping the family together. It is believed that in the absence of the mother no one can replace her hospitality and generosity associated with motherhood and wifehood in the African society (Mguni, Furusa and Magosvongwe, 2006). In this regard, this can be seen as the traditional reproductive role of women.

Even though some members of the family can take care of children and perhaps the sick, in the Shona and Ndebele speaking societies it is seen as primarily a mother's role. Mothers are seen as having the skills to nurture, nourish and take care of their children. In Shona/Africana cultural understandings mothers are viewed as supreme care givers committed to the security of their families such that in times of discomfort, children both young and old, seek comfort in the arms of their mothers (Mazuru et al, 2012). One Ndebele proverb that illustrates the centrality of mothers as care givers is '*Intandane enhle ngumakhothwa ngunina*' translated literally to mean that the orphan who is better off in society is the one whose mother is still alive (Mawati et al, 2011). This proverb implies that mothers play a crucial role in the lives of their children especially with regards to their welfare. Drawing on the philosophy of *ubuntu* and *hunhu* in both Ndebele and Shona societies, Mangena (2009) notes that this philosophy has so much respect for the extended family. In this type of family the woman is expected to play an extended reproductive role as she is also expected to take care of the husband's relatives as well.

African literature tends to portray mothering in the traditional sense, in which mothers are the primary care givers with unconditional love for the children and the family (Mangena,

2009: Oyewumi, 2003). As Moyo et al (2002) point out, traditionally and in many cultures, mothers stay with their children even in the case where husbands are away from home because of work. These ideas on motherhood do resonate well with the ideology of intensive motherhood. Oyewumi (2003) points out that regardless of whether a particular African society is patrilineal or matrilineal, mothers occupy a strategic position in nurturing relationships and identities in society as they represent unconditional love and loyalty. This suggests that according to traditional beliefs, a good mother is a woman who puts her children first and is loyal to the family.

## 2.3 The Johannesburg context

The City of Johannesburg has been attracting internal and international migrants for many decades; during apartheid the mining industry drew labour migrants from neighbouring countries (Peberdy, 2009), for example, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland. Post-apartheid, the City of Johannesburg has affirmed itself as the country's commercial and economic hub: according to the City of Johannesburg's 2013/16 Integrated Development Plan, the City's economy is the biggest in the country, accounting for around 17% of the national economy and 47% of that of the province of Gauteng (City of Johannesburg Integrated Development Plan (2013/16). This has attracted a growing number of migrants from other African countries in search of better economic opportunities. 'Inner City Johannesburg is made up of the Central Business District, the areas around it of mixed functional uses and the contiguous higher density residential areas' (Olufemi, 1998:228).

International migrants in the city often find themselves having to contend with challenges, for example, discrimination, xenophobia, lack of decent accommodation, crime and working in the informal economy where conditions are less desirable (Harris, 2001: Landau, 2006). Xenophobic attacks often targeted black African migrants, who are said to be stealing economic opportunities from South Africans (Harris, 2001: Crush and Tawodzera, 2011). Under such conditions, international migrants are subjected to feelings of perpetual fear and lack of a sense of belonging to the city. For example, the xenophobic attacks in 2008 claimed 62 lives and the displacement of between 80 000 and 200 000 people (Landau and Wa Kabwe-Seggati, 2009).

Even though migrants may have professional qualifications, migrants find themselves being underpaid and working in precarious conditions due to problems associated with documentation (Landau, 2005). This means that even if migrants have the skills needed in the formal sector, they may not be employed in this sector due to their qualifications not being recognised and lack of documentation to legally sign work contracts. This makes it difficult for migrant workers to claim their rights and work benefits and consequently they become vulnerable to exploitation (CoRMSA, 2011).

Lack of documentation also affects other aspects of migrants' lives such as access to accommodation and fear of reporting crime to the police. Due to discrimination and xenophobia, migrants (foreign and local) often experience challenges in accessing accommodation both in the private and public sector and often find themselves living in squalid and overcrowded areas (Greenburg and Polzer, 2008). Like any other city, Johannesburg is faced with a number of criminal activities, with some scholars pointing out that the city of Johannesburg can be said to be the country's crime capital (Landau, 2006). Leggett (2002) notes that residential hotels in Hillbrow are infested with criminal activities, especially prostitution and drug trading.

## 2.4 Defining motherhood

Scholars have pointed out that conceptualizations of motherhood and mothering tend to share common attributes, that is, they revolve around ideas about caring and nurturing dependent children (Arendell, 2000: Leonard, 1996: Glenn et al, 1994: Phoenix et al 1991: Ruddick, 1989). Thus in these conceptualizations, mothers are expected to care for their children by attending to their needs, for example, material or emotional needs. This interaction is often assumed to take place when both mother and children are physically close to each other. Phoenix (2010) points out that psychology as a discipline has had a major impact on the validation of normative ways of mothering; psychoanalytic work points out the importance of relationships that mothers form with their children as influential to children's development.

Attachment theory in psychology posits that the relationships that mothers form with their children is crucial for children's developmental health, especially mental health and formation of identities (Burman, 2008: Barret, 2006). Thus for children to develop into healthy

individuals, with high achievements at school and in society, it is important that mothers cultivate relationships with them as they grow. In this view, mothers have a responsibility to ensure that their children become good citizens. In a similar vein, Bowlby (1951) points out that it has always been a concern for attachment theorists that the interruption of the bond that children have with their primary care giver, in most cases the primary care giver being the mother, can be detrimental to the child's development. This implies that it is crucial for the mother and her children to be in close proximity to ensure that they develop positive relationships to ensure children develop to their full potential. Thus motherhood conceived of in this manner places obligations on mothers as they tend to believe that the way a child turns out to be in life, would be a reflection of their mothering role (Moorehouse and Cunningham, 2012: Gillies, 2007).

Motherhood is often taken to be natural and conflated with womanhood, with the assumption that all women can and should mother. Some scholars have been critical of the idea of linking female sexuality with motherhood, arguing that a patriarchal ideology ties woman to the sphere of reproduction and therefore limiting their role in the public sphere (Smart, 1996: Glenn, 1994). In this regard, women's participation in the labour market is often overlooked, with emphasis placed on motherhood in the private realm. This may lead to mothers who cannot mother in close proximity to be filled with feelings of guilt (Smart, 1996), for instance single, migrant mothers or married mothers who have to (or choose to) work in order to provide for their families. As Glenn (1994) points out, an ideology that places mothers in the private arena creates difficulties for mothers who have to move away from home. In this regard, feminists' scholarship has long challenged such conceptions of motherhood that position women to the domestic arena (Phoenix, 2010: Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 1997: Glenn, 1994: Collier and Yanagisako, 1987: Bernard, 1975). Prevailing (normative) conceptions of motherhood are often not aligned to practical experiences of mothers in different contexts.

As Glenn et al (1994) point out, the work of mothering is contingent on the social contexts that are different in terms of constraints and resources and also depend on the actions of women and men within a historical context. Hence the strategies that a mother employs in taking care of her children depend on the availability of resources and the attitudes of the society in general. As Hondagneu-Sotelo et al (1997) point out, women who do not have adequate resources that allow for full-time mothering rely on different arrangements for child

care. Thus, women who have better economic resources can even resign from employment as they focus their lives on child rearing and being there for their children, while those that are economically disadvantaged cannot afford to give their children care in close proximity as they also have to sustain their families. This also applies to women who do have the resources but choose to work. In some instances, as in the case of migrant mothers, immigration laws might make it difficult for mothers to bring their children to the host country.

Silva (1996) points out that even though the concepts of motherhood and mothering have been portrayed as natural, there is need for them to be reconstructed in order for them to be relevant to mothers and the children they take care of. Therefore, the concepts of motherhood and mothering can be understood to be dynamic and fluid: they can be redefined and expanded to accommodate mothers who have to mother in different circumstances. This leads to notions of mothering and motherhood differing within and between specific circumstances (Moore, 1996). In a review of the concept of motherhood, focusing on the United States, Arendell (2000) notes that today's scholarship has a broader orientation to the study of motherhood, encompassing mothers' understandings and experiences. This points to the idea that motherhood understood in the normative sense is narrow and fails to adequately capture the actual lived experiences of mothers. Through mothers' lived experiences, conceptualizations that are not far removed from the realities of mothers can be uncovered.

Ribbens (1994) notes that women's mothering strategies are influenced by aspects such as beliefs about family, the nature of their child and also their childhood. Thus motherhood is dependent on someone's values and priorities at a given time. In this case, since mothers do not share the same childhoods, neither are their children the same; the ideas of motherhood and mothering defy the logic of an essentialist interpretation. Hondagneu-Sotelo et al (1997) point out that motherhood cannot be attributed to biology in any way as it is socially and historically constructed; motherhood can be learned as one associates with mothers, and also adopted in accordance with one's cultural orientation. This leads to conceptualizations of motherhood that are more complex than normative understandings.

## 2.5 Defining intensive mothering ideology

Hays (1996:46) outlines the ideology of intensive mothering as 'child centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive parenting'. Thus in this form of motherhood, the mother is assumed to exclusively be there for her children in all aspects of life. She is conceived as the sole primary person taking care of her children. The mother is to selflessly dedicate her time and emotions to the well-being of her children (Bell, 2004). An intensive mother perceives herself as responsible for how her children turn out to be as adults and also responsible for feeding and providing shelter for them (Hays, 1996). This way, the mother is presented as unselfish and devoted to taking care of others (Arendell, 2000) and therefore, by so doing, intensive mothering reinforces traditional gender and reproductive roles (Fireman, 1995). In essence, mothers in this ideology are assumed to put the needs of their children first.

To assume that all mothers subscribe to this ideology of mothering will, of course, be too simplistic. In this regard, scholars have found the relevance of intensive mothering to women who mother in different contexts problematic (Bell, 2004: Nicholson, 1986). Hence, this ideology of motherhood does not resonate well with mothers who have to work outside the home, for instance migrant mothers with children living in another country and wealthy mothers who choose to continue to work. As Johnston and Swanson (2003:22) aptly put it 'the construction of motherhood, particularly in the form of dominant ideologies, may have little correspondence to the lived social realities of mothers'. Women who mother do perceive the concept of mothering differently according to their contexts, for example, single mothers, immigrant mothers, lesbian mothers, teenage mothers and working mothers. Nonetheless, some studies have pointed out that the ideology of intensive mothering is very instrumental in creating women's perceptions about mothering (Johnston and Swanson, 2007: Stone, 2007: Hays, 1996) and this ideology of motherhood is often used as a yardstick to evaluate various mothering strategies that mothers partake in their different circumstances.

## 2.6 Defining transnational mothering

Transnational motherhood is a discursive form of mothering that deviates from the intensive ideology of mothering where a mother is assumed to take care of her children in close

proximity, within the same geographical space. It refers to mothers who leave their home countries, mainly due to economic hardships to go and work in other countries, leaving their children behind. In this way, mothers ~~re~~construct notions of motherhood that are not in line with normative, that is, intensive motherhood (Contreras et al, 2012: Millman, 2013). Transnational motherhood challenges the idea that mothers should be the ones who nurture their children and teach them norms and values of their society (Chib et al, 2014). Due to migration and not living with their children, mothers who migrate devise new ways of looking at the concept of mothering to encompass their own perceptions and contexts.

Migrant mothers have to contend with living simultaneously in two countries. While they might have settled in the host country, they are at the same time trying to manage the lives of their children and also maintain relationships with children's care givers across borders. In this regard, Falicov (2007:158) has defined transnational mothering as '*the ambiguities of living with two hearts*'. In Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila's study focusing on Latina immigrant women in Los Angeles, one of the participants aptly put this idea of living in two geographical spaces simultaneously, when she said that, '*I'm here, but I'm there*' Hondagneu-Sotelo et al (1997:558). This necessitates more subjective interpretations of what it means to mother in the context of migration.

One way of understanding the concept of transnational mothering is by employing the moral economic framework which considers how migrant mothers contribute to the well-being of their children by making sure that their basic needs are met and that they attain a good education (Contreras et al, 2012 and Millman, 2013). Contreras et al (2012:53-54) argue that the moral economic framework is more relevant 'in cases where primarily women engage in migration explicitly for the well-being, happiness, dignity and education of their children, hoping that their work yields high quality human beings'. Such framing suggests that when mothers migrate across borders in search of economic opportunities, a full account of the children's needs will be considered prior to migration.

Craig and O'Dell (2011:2) note that ''Othered' mothers are constructed in relation to the centre, the assumed and idealised norm of mothering'. This facilitates the marginalisation of women who mother in circumstances considered to be outside the norm. In a review of literature on motherhood in North America, Arendell (2000:1195), situates the idea of transnational mothering in what she calls 'deviancy discourses' which emanate from the

normative ideology of mothering. Mothers who are subject to these discourses, include, immigrant mothers, single mothers and lesbian mothers (Fireman, 1995: Sidel, 1996). In this regard, transnational motherhood is a form of mothering that seeks to accommodate the spatial separations of the mother and her child (ren) which are usually necessitated by the need to provide for the child (ren).

Scholars have pointed out that transnational mothering is fraught with a number of paradoxes and ambiguities (Chib et al, 2014: Contreras et al, 2012: Hondangeu-Sotelo et al, 1997). Contreras et al (2012) note three paradoxes that arise from this form of mothering, that is, mothers try to build quality family life while away from their families, seemingly challenge traditional gender roles yet reinforcing them because often female relatives are tasked to care of the children. They try to create a better life for themselves and the children yet this has repercussions for their own quality of life as they experience negative psychological effects such as anxiety and self-blame. While transnational motherhood challenges gender norms this endeavour comes with great emotional distress for mothers and their children.

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo et al (1997:549) this is a 'brave odyssey, but one with deep costs'. In a similar vein, Millman (2013) notes that even though mothers provide for their families and attain economic independence, emotional costs are high for the mothers involved. Often mothers experience feelings of helplessness, loss, guilt, loneliness and anxiety, mostly arising in trying to live up to the expectation of being a 'good' mother (Millman, 2013: Nicholson, 2006: Parrenas, 2005: Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 1997: Walzer, 1997). Part of what adds to the emotional distress that migrant mothers experience is the fact that mothers alone are often held accountable for their children's behaviour and how they turn out to be later in their lives (Burman, 2008: Riley, 1983).

Through migration, women can break away from abusive relationships and gain financial independence, as they assume roles of being a breadwinner (Contreras et al, 2012). Paradoxically, when biological mothers are not physically present in the household, the work of mothering is often delegated to other females in their home countries, this serves to cement traditional gender roles. Grandmothers, aunties, sisters and sisters-in-law are often tasked with taking care of the children, even when the father is living with the children (Contreras et al, 2012: Schmalzbauer 2004).

Transnational mothers have to contend with the notion of having strained relationships with their children due to their desire to secure their children's future. Some scholars have indicated that long separations from their children are a source of frustration for transnational mothers as they negatively affect relationships with their children (Contreras et al, 2012: Bohr and Whitefield, 2011). Falicov (2007) points out that even if mothers try to keep relationships with their children in a variety of ways, for example, through communication technologies, when they finally get the opportunity to meet, the meeting can be said to be a meeting of strangers than family reunion. In this regard, Moorehouse et al (2012) note that this is because the children left behind do not remain the same, they continue to grow and adapt to their circumstances without the advantage of having a mother in close proximity, and this may lead to children not responding to their mother's authority.

More often when mother and children are separated through migration for a long time, the bond between them is assumed to be damaged (Surmmond, 2010). Bohr and Whitefield (2011) note that migration has a negative impact not only on the relationship but also on the child's behaviour and self-esteem. Therefore, transnational motherhood can be said to be in direct conflict with what attachment theorists (Barret, 2006: Bowlby, 1951) have described as crucial; that mothers, as often assumed to be the primary care givers to their children, cultivate good relationships with their children as they grow.

## 2.7 Practices of transnational motherhood

One aspect of transnational mothering is the reliance on what Schmalzerbauer (2008) and Moon (2003) have termed 'shared mothering', where mothers rely on other female relatives to assume the mothering role in their absence. Due to the fact that mothers cannot be there physically for their children, arrangements are made so that the physical care of children is done by 'other mothers', for instance, sisters or grandmothers (Millman, 2013). Writing on motherhood in the African American communities Collins (1991) also notes that sisters and grandmothers often act as other mothers in the absence of biological mothers. In this case, mothers often feel obliged to cultivate amicable relationships with the people taking care of the children, for instance, providing for them in economic terms (Carling, 2008).

Communication technologies such as Facebook, Skype and WhatsApp help mothers to keep in touch with their children across borders (Chib et al, 2014). In this regard they expand their

own understandings of motherhood to accommodate the distance between themselves and their children. In their study of Filipina and Indonesian migrants in Singapore, Chib et al (2014) found out that transnational mothers made extensive use of communication technologies to address the contradictions that arise from the dialectical process of transnational mothering. Through frequent telephone calls, mothers attend to their mothering role in managing their children's lives as well as managing the relationships they establish with the people taking care of their children (Contreras et al, 2012).

Remittances are a common feature of transnational mothering, as motivation for migrating to other countries for work. Through remittances sent home, transnational mothers redefine their mothering role by adding their productive roles of economically providing for their families. Gifts, food and basic needs are also sent to the children and the people taking care of them as an expression of affection (Horton, 2009: Millman, 2013). As Hondagneu-Sotelo et al (1997:562) point out, 'milk, shoes and schooling-these are the currency of transnational motherhood'. This is evidence that motherhood is a relational concept, dynamic and adaptable to suit mothers in different circumstances.

## 2.8 Defining transnational families

International migration has become common as people move to different countries for better employment opportunities to sustain themselves and their families. The Confederation of Family Organisation in the European Union Report (COFACE), (2012) note that the formation of the notion of transnational families has emerged as a way to acknowledge that migration does not end with settlement, and that migrants maintain regular contacts across borders. This has become particularly so as immigration laws increasingly restrict entry into receiving countries, forcing family members to live in different countries (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 1997). States may facilitate certain forms of immigration such as labour, but may not facilitate immigration for purposes of family reunification. In this regard it has become difficult for immigrants to bring their children and spouses to live with them in the host country.

This necessitates a reconsideration of what constitutes a family and traditional gender roles (Zontini, 2007) as members of the same family locate in different countries and women take on jobs away from their home countries. Transnational families can thus be understood as families in which members 'live some or most of their time separated from each other, yet

hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'family hood' even across national borders' (Bryceson and Vuerola 2002:2). Thus contrary to notions where a family is assumed to be a sedentary unit, bounded to a single geographical space, are problematic in the context of migration. Therefore migration instigates new ways of looking at definitions of the family as families become transnational structures (Parrenas, 2010: Zontini, 2007). However, similar to other families, transnational families must negotiate issues such as decision making, unequal access to resources and child care (Bryceson et al, 2002: Levitt, 2001). Improvements in communication technology have made it possible for people to stay in touch no matter the physical distance between them. Likewise, the practicality of transnational families is necessitated by the contemporary ease of communication. Mobile phones and internet based communication platforms offer ways of communication that transnational families can utilise in keeping in touch with members in another country (Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union, (COFACE), 2014: Schmalzerbauer, 2004).

## 2.9 Conclusion

Conceptualisations of motherhood that prioritise that mothers share the same geographical space with their children become problematic in the context of migration and create challenges for mothers who do not stay with their children. Essentialist interpretations of motherhood are in direct conflict with women who mother in circumstances that are deemed non-normative. Dominant ideologies of motherhood conceal the positions of mothers in different circumstances. More pragmatic conceptualisations of motherhood take into consideration the locations of different mothers and subjective interpretations of motherhood. In the next chapter I explain my philosophical position, introduce the participants, and discuss reflexivity and ethical considerations.

# Chapter Three

# 3 Research Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and the philosophical position pursued in this study. Firstly I describe and justify the qualitative approach and my philosophical position. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology and sampling procedures. A description of ethical considerations that influenced my conduct during the study follows. I then move onto reflections on my position in the research process under the section on reflexivity.

## 3.2 Qualitative research

The research question and objectives lend themselves to the qualitative approach to doing research, and so the study is qualitative and inductive in nature. Hesse-Baber and Leavy (2011:35) contend that '...most qualitative views on the nature of social reality can agree on the importance of subjective meanings individuals bring to the research process and acknowledge the importance of social construction of reality'. In this regard, this study captures subjective interpretations of the concept of motherhood in the context of migration. It is the assumption of this study that there is no universal definition or conceptualisation of what constitutes the notion of motherhood. Therefore a qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study as it is naturalistic with an emphasis on the study of people in the real world in their complexity (Punch, 2014: Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). Qualitative research does not seek to simplify findings and generalise to a larger population but seeks to understand phenomena as they occur in their natural settings. Qualitative researchers 'recognise that the issue they are studying has many dimensions and layers, and so they try to portray the issue in its multifaceted form' (Leedy et al, 2010:135). There is no single truth to be discovered in research but different individuals attach different meanings to social phenomenon. Within the broader qualitative approach I adopt a constructivist grounded theory methodology.

## 3.3 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is a research method that was pioneered by sociologists Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Punch, 2014: Bitsch, 2005). These two sociologists aimed at reconciling two forms of doing research, that is, positivism and interactionism, combining a naturalistic approach with a positivist emphasis on a systematic methodology (Babbie, 2011). It was devised essentially as a reaction to the overemphasis on hypothesis testing (deductive) research in American Sociology of the 1950s and 1940s (Punch, 2014). Unlike other approaches to qualitative research, grounded theory has a prescribed set of procedures to follow when analysing and developing a theory from data (Punch, 2014: Leedy and Ormond 2010: Babbie, 2011). The distinctive methodological procedures of a grounded theory based-study are the following strategies: concurrent data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling, constant comparison method, open coding, selective coding, axial coding, and memoing. However, it is important to realise that these strategies are not done as separate stages in the research process but the researcher uses these strategies in an iterative and simultaneous manner.

## 3.4 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) point out that researchers may adopt a grounded theory approach and use it in relation to their philosophical positions. Thus in this study I adopt a constructivist grounded theorist's position, however the study aimed at producing a thematic description of the topic under study not at theory generation. Charmaz (2000) - a student of both Glaser and Strauss - has emerged as the lead pioneer of the constructivist grounded theory who has openly described her work as constructivist grounded theory (Mills et al, 2006). According to Charmaz (2000), researchers need to move beyond interpreting the meaning of the data on the surface and elicit meanings about beliefs and ideologies of those involved in the research. Mills, et al (2006) posit that constructivist grounded theory repositions the interaction between the researcher and the participants, and brings in the researcher as the author of the reconstruction of knowledge. As Arendell aptly puts it, constructivism is an ideal paradigm in the study of motherhood and mothering as it 'affords a means of looking at and taking seriously, interaction, interpretive processes (including those of the researchers and writers), and social context and importantly relationships' (Arendell, 2000:34). Constructivism postulates that people do not discover knowledge; instead, people

construct knowledge - through inventing concepts - as people try to make sense of their lived experiences (Ponterrotto, 2005: Schwandt, 2000: Schwandt, 1998). Thus in this study I sought to write the lived experiences of the participants from their own points of view. However, my interpretation of the accounts of respondents is - to a certain extent - influenced by several factors: my position in the research process, my experience with regard to the topic, and, being a student. In this way both the participants and I are involved in the co-construction of knowledge (Charmaz, 2008: Mills et al, 2006: Pidgeon and Henwood, 1997: Hayes and Oppenheim, 1997: Appleton, 1997: Charmaz, 1994)

## 3.5 Sampling and the interviews

I began by using purposive sampling. Through my own social networks including friendships and relatives l approached the first individual who I invited to participate; I chose her as l felt she was in a position to give information that was relevant to the study. Babbie (2011: 179) defines purposive sampling as, ' a type of non-probability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgement about which ones will be most useful or representative'. So initially I relied on my own personal judgement for participant selection. I then applied snowball sampling and theoretical sampling for subsequent interviews. The principle of theoretical sampling is the idea that subsequent data collection should be guided by theoretical developments that emerge in the analysis of the previous data (Punch, 2014: Babbie, 2011).

Semi structured, open ended interviews were conducted with eleven Zimbabwean mothers living in three areas in Inner City Johannesburg, that is, in Berea, Hillbrow and Yeoville. The interviews were conducted in Shona and Ndebele and then transcribed verbatim into English. Interviews lasted for about 15 minutes to an hour. Of the eleven mothers interviewed, seven mothers were interviewed twice. A total of eighteen interviews were done. Questions asked centred on the following themes: motherhood, transnational motherhood, mothers' experiences, mothering practices they employ across borders, relationships with their children and the challenges they encounter. Interviews were conducted in three sessions between August and November 2015. The first session of the interviews was done between the 22$^{nd}$ and the 24$^{th}$ of August 2015. The second session was carried out between the 5$^{th}$ and

the 11th of November 2015 and the last session was done between the 17th and 19th of November 2015. A summary of participants' backgrounds is presented in the table below:

**Table 1:** Participants' backgrounds

| **Pseudonym (Participant name)** | **Age and Marital Status** | **Migration Status** | **Occupation** | **Number of years in Johannesburg and residential location** | **Number of children living in Zimbabwe, sex and their ages** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Busi | 30 Single (never married) | Undocumented (Passport without permit) | Waitress | Hillbrow (17 years) | 2 boys, twins (16 years) |
| Mercy | 33 Single (never married) | Documented (Passport with study permit) | Hair Dresser | Berea (9 years) | 1 girls (13 years) |
| Nomsa | 43 Divorced | Undocumented (Passport with no Permit) | Domestic Worker | Hillbrow (9 years) | 4 (3 boys: 18,15,13 and 1 girl, 9) |
| Netsai | 36 Widowed | Documented (Passport with Zimbabwe Dispensation Permit (ZDP)) | Hair Dresser | Hillbrow (4 years) | 2 (boy, 17; girl, 14) |
| Sibonokuhle | 34 years Widowed | Undocumented (Passport with no permit) | Sales Agent | Berea (7 years) | 3 (2 boys; 16,14 and 1 girl, 11) |
| Sphiwe | 32 Single (never married) | Undocumented (Passport with no permit) | Sales Agent | Berea (8 years) | 1 boy, 14 |
| Babra | 30 Single (never married) | Undocumented (No passport) | Waitress | Yeoville ( 1 year) | 1 boy, 10 |
| Ayanda | 42 Single (divorced) | Undocumented (No passport) | Self-Employed (owns a small food outlet in Hillbrow) | Yeoville (18 years) | 4 girls (16, 14,11, and 5 years) |
| Mary | 33 Single (never married) | Undocumented (Passport with no permit) | Domestic Worker | Yeoville (9 years) | 2 (boy, 13; girl, 11) |
| Grace | 30 Single (never married) | Documented (Passport with ZDP permit) | Hygiene Controller (Cleaner) | Hillbrow (9 years) | 1 boy, 10 years |
| Martha | 34 Single (never married) | Documented (Passport with ZDP permit) | Receptionist | Hillbrow (9 years) | 1 boy, 13 years |

## 3.6 Summary of the research process

In line with grounded theory procedures, the study began with collection of data (Punch, 2014: Babbie, 2011). In the first session of interviews I worked with six women. Busi, Nomsa, Mercy, Sibonokuhle, Netsai, and Simphiwe. Guided by the research question and objectives, I constructed a semi-structured set of questions relevant to the study. Through my own social networks I identified Busi as the first participant. During our conversation with Busi, I realized that there was a problem with the way I had posed my questions. The observation was that there were closed questions, which limited our conversation and were less effective in addressing the research objectives. Nonetheless, I did not discard the data that I got from Busi's interview but together with the field notes that I wrote during the interview, I analyzed it to get concepts that relate to the research question and objectives. Consistent with a grounded theory study is the concurrent data collection and analysis; these processes take place throughout the research process (Babbie, 2011). Analysis in grounded theory proceeds in three stages that are conceptually discrete but are in practice overlapping processes (Punch, 2014: Calman, 2006: Bitsch, 2005). These are open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Likewise, I engaged with these processes in an iterative way - not in a linear fashion - throughout the research process.

First of all, I conducted line by line open coding to get a sense of the data. Chamarz (2006:50) notes that, 'line-by-line coding works particularly well with detailed data about fundamental empirical problems or processes...' This helped me to get an overview of what was of concern to the participant. Through open coding, the researcher opens up the text to reveal some thoughts and ideas that can be concealed in the data, resulting in the development of concepts (Punch, 2014: Babbie, 2011: Strauss and Corbin, 1998). However, in this study I analysed the data through open coding and axial coding because this study's aim is to identify themes from the data and not to build up a theory. Throughout this process of initial coding I stayed close to the data (Chamarz, 2006) so as not to distort the information given to me by the participant. Therefore the codes that I developed were more to get to know the raw data rather than creating abstract concepts. To get concepts from initial coding I collapsed the codes that I developed and placed them under concepts. Some of the themes that emerged from studying the concepts were: economic hardships as a motive to leave Zimbabwe, single motherhood, expansion concept of motherhood, desire that children have a better future,

communication, and Johannesburg as an environment that is not good for children. Through comparing incident with incident within the same interview and through analysing the transcript and listening to the audio recording of the same interview, I checked to see if the concepts that I came up with truly captured what was of concern to the participant. Babbie (2011: 394) points out that the grounded theory method employs the 'constant comparative method'. In this process, similarities and contradictions arising from the data can be identified. This way, researchers endeavour to think comparatively by obtaining multiple view points of the same phenomenon, by occasionally stepping back and reflecting on the data, and by maintaining an attitude of scepticism in relation to initial concepts that emerge from the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

After I had identified these concepts, I sought to seek how they are related through axial coding. In axial coding the researcher rearranges the data and searches for relationships between the concepts (Babbie, 2011). Axial coding helped me to understand the data and to see how the concepts relate to each other and consequently to the research question and objectives. After the first interview I felt like I had not asked important questions with regards to the study. With the help of literature review I did in the proposal writing stage, notes that I wrote during data collection as well as analysis from the first interview, I constructed a revised interview guide. Questions that I developed revolved around notions of motherhood, motives for migrating, societal expectations, decision making, and the impact of transnational mothering on mothers' emotional well-being. Unlike the previous interview guide, these questions were open ended with appropriate probes.

In line with sampling techniques in grounded theory, I proceeded through theoretical sampling. Babbie (2011:300) notes that theoretical sampling 'is whereby groups or institutions are selected on the basis of their theoretical relevance'. Thus, theoretical sampling happens after the researcher has collected and analysed the first set of data. In line with this, I decided to focus on single mothers who have the sole responsibility to parent as a result of fathers being absent. These mothers are employed in the lower income labor market, for example, hairdressers and waitresses. I felt their mothering role can be illuminated by their circumstances, in the sense that their productive role in terms of being breadwinners is emphasized. As pointed out by Hondagenu-Sotelo et al (1997) women who are less privileged in terms of resources cannot afford full time mothering at home. Given that they do not have

the privilege of women who are employed in better paying jobs who have the financial resources to travel more often to visit their children and even pay for child care. With Busi's help, she referred me to Nomsa and through snowball sampling I went on to interview four more women, (Mercy, Sibonokuhle, Simphiwe and Netsai).

Analysis for these interviews proceeded in the same way that I analyzed the first interview. Through open coding and axial coding I analyzed the next five interviews and came up with themes that were prominent across the interviews. To make sense of the data and see how the themes are related to motherhood, I compared incidents or events that I found within the same interview and also across the five interviews to make sure I was capturing the correct themes. I identified the following themes from the data: emotional stress, strained relationships with the children, falling short of being a good mother, traditional gender roles remaining the same, and Johannesburg considered to be a bad environment for the children. Under these themes I identified subthemes that helped to buttress the main themes. These sub-themes included the following themes: self-blame, perceived expectations, strangers with their own children, physical presence a requirement and socialization of children better done by mothers. With the themes and subthemes that I identified in this first session of the interviews, I felt I had to interview the participants for the second time to check for consistence in their responses.

Data from the second session of interviews showed consistence with what participants were saying earlier on. Participants elucidated how they used religion in times of distress and that motherhood is a historical and learnt concept as they learnt from their own mothers how to mother. Themes that I identified in this session of interviews were as follows: Views on motherhood, Emotional Strain, Relationships with their children, Conflicting parenting skills, Economic hardships, Religion and Johannesburg not being a good environment for the children. Sub-themes that fall under these themes include: socialization, anxiety, aspirations for the children and demands from home. From this round of interviews I developed a better understanding of the concept of motherhood as participants talked more about more their views on motherhood. What seemed apparent to me is that they emphasized the idea that a mother should be with her children. They also felt that a mother is the one who should impart values and norms of a society to the children. The other factor that became salient in this

round of interviews was that of religion. Mothers highlighted that they drew strength from God whenever they felt they could not cope.

In the final session of the field work I sought to fill up the themes that I had identified and to gain a deeper understanding of the themes that emerged in the first and second session of interviews. As I realized that participants were giving me more or less the same answers, I decided that instead of sampling that is premised on new directions in the data I should sample to have a deeper understanding of the themes that I have identified. This time I did not construct a new interview guide I used the previous interview guides. Seeing that the responses that I got in this session of field work did not yield new insights into the study I decided to stop the interviews. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) point out that in grounded theory the alternation between data collection and data analysis continues until theoretical saturation, a point when the researcher begins to get the same responses.

## 3.7 Ethical considerations

Permission to carry out the study was granted by the University of Witwatersrand, Non-Medical Research Ethics Committee on the 14th of August 2015 under Protocol number H15/07/54. Formal consent was sought for participants to be interviewed and separate consent obtained to audio record the interviews. In both instances written consent was sought and participants signed the forms. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Purposes of the study were explained and made clear to the participants. Since the study had the potential to evoke moments of emotional stress I explained to the participants that they had the right to refuse to answer questions that they felt uncomfortable with. In line with promises made to participants with regards to anonymity and confidentiality, l use pseudonyms throughout the study and as such there is no identifying information that can link what is written here with the participants. The pseudonyms that I assigned to the women were as follows: Busi, Sphiwe, Sbonokuhle, Mary, Babra, Mercy, Nomsa, Netsai, Martha, Grace and Ayanda. Considering that I am also a Zimbabwean mother who has a child back in Zimbabwe while I pursue further studies in South Africa, it was important that I continually reflect on my position in the study to guard against bias and imposing my own values.

## 3.8 Reflexivity

As Guba and Lincoln (2005:210) contend reflexivity 'is a conscious experience of the self as both the inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself'. I was open to learning new ideas which at times contradicted my own values on motherhood. Throughout the study and my interaction with participants during interviews, I was compelled to acknowledge the multiple identities that manifested in the research setting (Alcoff and Potter, 1993) as I reflected on my position as a Zimbabwean migrant, a mother with a child in Zimbabwe, and as a research student. In as far as being a Zimbabwean migrant and a mother is concerned I identified myself - to a certain extent - as one of the participants. However, I was careful not to let my own ideas and beliefs about motherhood and mothering interfere with the way that I interpreted and engaged with participants' perceptions.

Reflexivity is perceived as an important part in qualitative research, where a researcher constantly reflects on how their actions influence the research process (Gernish and Lacey, 2006). Likewise, during the research process I regularly stepped back and reflected on how my own values, own experience as a Zimbabwean migrant mother, and the way I asked some of the questions might interfere with the research process. I was open to new ideas that in many instances contradicted my own personal views on motherhood. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that researcher's influence is not always negative. Morrow (2006) contends that reflexivity can be a strategy that researchers use to better understand phenomenon under study and accurately portray the meanings made by participants. In this regard, I drew from my childhood, my experience as mother and as a Zimbabwean migrant to interpret the data and better understand participants' perceptions.

## 3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained and justified the methodology used and my philosophical position. I also explained my position in the research process in the section on reflexivity, in terms of being aware my own personal values and opinions on the topic under study so as not to distort perceptions from the participants. I also presented and described the women who

participated in the study. Lastly, I presented the summary of the research process in terms of data collection and analysis.

# Chapter Four

# 4 Findings and Discussion

> *…for me it was a difficult decision,...I had a wish to groom my children myself, see for myself...it was going to be easier, not like this now, I only get to hear over the phone, discipline and correct over the phone especially this one who is a girl, I really wished I could stay with her so that I can give her guidance up until she is a mother herself, I wished she would always stay close to me…*
>
> *(*Nomsa, 8 November 2015)

Based on the data obtained my argument is consistent with scholars such as Millman (2013) and Glenn (1994) who point out that the idea of motherhood is relational, subjective and adaptable to contexts that mothers find themselves in. In line with existing studies, my research shows that, motherhood and mothering are dynamic concepts which are not only dependent on socio-cultural issues, but also on the perceptions of those who consider themselves as mothers. In this chapter I present experiences of the participants as transnational mothers in terms of redefining motherhood in the context of migration, the challenges they experience, and reasons for not staying with their children in Johannesburg. First I present the participants and my engagement with them and then I move onto a discussion on themes and their sub-themes. Five broad themes were identified in the data namely: (1) broadening the concept of motherhood, (2) falling short of being 'good mothers', (3) compromised relationships, (4) emotional strain and (5) reunification challenges. These themes are discussed after the presentation of how I engaged the participants.

**The participants**

*Busi*

Busi is 30 years old. She works at a local restaurant as a waitress. She migrated to South Africa in 1998 after the company she worked for in Zimbabwe closed down. She is a mother to twins (boys) who are aged 16. We are more or less the same age group so she talks to me like a

sister. From my first interview with Busi, what seemed salient in the interview was that she was adamant that Johannesburg was not the right environment in which to raise children. Somehow I felt there was something that she was not telling me. I felt I will have to do the interview again, but efforts to get Busi to talk to me again were fruitless as she repeatedly postponed our meetings.

*Nomsa*

Nomsa is a divorced 43 year old mother of four children. Three boys aged 18, 15, 13 and a girl aged 9. She works as a domestic worker in Johannesburg. She migrated from Zimbabwe in 2006 to find work in South Africa because her business in commodity trading in Zimbabwe was no longer making any profits. In both interviews I found Nomsa to be paternalistic, perhaps because of the age difference. She was quite in control of the conversations I had with her. However, she was very open and seemed delighted to talk about the topic under study. I felt the influence of me as a researcher did not really affect how we related to each other during the interview and I gained new insights about motherhood and mothering from her based on her experience. She talked with authority, and she seemed determined to provide for her children as a single mother. Implicit in the interview was that Nomsa blamed herself for not being there for her children. She narrated how her children tend to 'lose direction' because of growing up without her guidance. I am reminded of my daughter who is also being taken care of by my mother in Zimbabwe. Even though I cannot fully apprehend her pain of leaving her children, I think somehow I understand the emotional strain that she goes through.

*Netsai*

Netsai is a 36 year old, widowed mother of two children (a boy aged 17 and a girl aged 14). She came to South Africa in 2011 to look for work after her husband passed away. She works as a hairdresser at a salon in Hillbrow. The two interviews I had with Netsai were tense and uncomfortable from the beginning to the end. She could not relax and talk more freely, I thought she would relax in the second interview but she did not. Somehow I felt I did not establish good rapport because she seemed edgy and responded with one word answers. I became conscious of myself as a student. Initially I thought she would relate to me well due

to the fact that I was Zimbabwean and I also had a child in Zimbabwe but this was not the case.

*Sibonokuhle*

Sibonokuhle is a 34 year old widowed mother of 3 children (2 boys and 1 girl). The boys are aged 16 and 14, and the girl is 11 years. She arrived in South Africa in 2008 to look for work. She works as a sales agent. Interviews with Sibonokuhle were very difficult for me emotionally, even though she narrated her experiences with confidence and determination. '*She says it is very painful to be separated from her children. She is worried that she cannot bring her children to be efficient in doing house work and that there is this loss of the maternal bond between the daughter and mother*' (Field notes, 24 August 2015). I learned a lot from this interview, even though I found her narratives very sad. However, the conversations flow naturally and I don't feel my position as a researcher in the interviews.

*Siphiwe*

Siphiwe is a 32 year old single mother. She has only one child who is a boy and is aged 14. She came to South Africa in 2007. She works as a sales agent. Interviews with Siphiwe were also emotionally draining for me. She narrates how painful it was for her to leave her son in Zimbabwe. The following quote from my field notes explain this, '*Siphiwe seems to be very emotional I find myself being emotional as well. She is worried that she does not have an intimate relationship with her child. They find it difficult to talk. Her son is closer to his grandmother than her*' (Field notes-24 August 2015) However, she is adamant that her decision to come and look for work in South Africa was the best she could have made under her circumstances.

*Mercy*

She is a 33 years old single mother of one child, a daughter who is 13 years old. She works at a saloon in Hillbrow as a hairdresser. She migrated to South Africa in 2006. Interviews with Mercy were a bit uncomfortable in the beginning as she was quite anxious. This made me feel conscious of my position as a researcher in the conversations. From our conversations I picked out that, her main worry about being a mother who has to take care of a child in another

country is that she cannot be 'hands on'. This is borne out from this quotation from my field notes, '*Mercy feels she has to try by all means possible to provide for her children. She wishes she could be 'hands on' with her child, like 'being there*'' Field notes, 23 August 2015. This is quite evident to me because she narrates this with an attitude of resignation and powerlessness.

*Martha*

Martha is 34 years old. She has one child in Zimbabwe, a boy aged 13. She works as a receptionist at a company in Johannesburg. She came to South Africa in 2006.Martha seems to be a very open and candid person in both interviews. She shared her experiences with me in a relaxed manner. I learnt a lot from her.

*Grace*

Grace is 30 years old. She is single and she has one child back in Zimbabwe, who is 10 years old. She works as a hygiene controller at a company in Johannesburg. Both interviews with Grace were relaxed. She acknowledges that having her child in Zimbabwe is very difficult for her.

*Ayanda*

Ayanda is a 42 year old mother of 4 girls, aged (16, 14, 11 and 5). She is self-employed and she arrived in South Africa in 1996. She runs her own food outlet in Hillbrow. It is a very busy outlet. After postponing our appointments a couple of times she finally invited me to come and interview her at work while she was busy preparing food for her customers. The interview with Ayanda proceeded well. Her narrative flows like a normal conversation even though I find her account quite moving. What is salient from our conversation is that she believes a good mother stays with her children. I can tell that her children mean a lot to her.

*Barbra*

Barbra is 30 years old. She has been in South Africa for almost a year. The interview with Barbra was quite short. She seemed to me to be indifferent about motherhood in general.

*Mary*

Mary is a 33 year old mother of two children (a boy and a girl). The boy is 13 and the girl is 7. She arrived in South Africa in 2006. Her account is moving, I found this interview difficult especially towards the end. I wondered if I made the right decision to leave my child in Zimbabwe, for a while I felt as if it is as good as abandoning her. Below is a presentation of themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data.

**Table 2:** Major themes and sub-themes

| **Major themes** | **Sub- themes** |
|---|---|
| Broadening the definition of motherhood | • Mother as provider<br>• Working towards a better future for their children |
| Falling short of being a 'good mother' | • Importance of being physically present<br>• Child socialisation most effective when done by mothers |
| Compromised relationships with their children | • Strangers with their own children<br>• Material relationships |
| Emotional strain | • Pain of living separated from their children<br>• Self-blame<br>• Anxiety |
| Reunification Challenges | • Crime and Accommodation problems in Johannesburg |

## 4.1 Redefining motherhood in the context of migration

As indicated in my literature review earlier on, findings in my study show that motherhood is a fluid concept which defies a single universal definition. Explaining motherhood in terms of dominant ideologies conceals subjective perceptions of the mothers themselves and obscures their agency. Feminist scholars like Glenn (1994) and Hondagneu-Sotelo et al (1997) have argued against universal interpretations of motherhood. In my study, participants redefined motherhood in terms of their locations as transnational mothers to encompass breadwinning and making sure that they prepare for their children's future. To make sense of the spatial and temporal separations from their children, the mothers defined motherhood with an emphasis on their productive roles not their reproductive roles.

### 4.1.1 Broadening the concept of motherhood

In line with previous studies that have been undertaken elsewhere, for example Mexican women in the United States (Contreras et al, 2012) and Latina women in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 1997), participants in this study also viewed their positions as transnational mothers as necessitated by the need to economically provide for their children

and families. Participants pointed out the hardships posed by the unstable economic situation in Zimbabwe as a major reason for migrating to South Africa in search of employment. Due to economic hardships experienced by Zimbabwe since the late 1990s, a number of Zimbabweans have sought better economic opportunities outside the country. Some people engage in cross border trading while some further their education. A number of scholars have documented the deterioration of economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe, for example, Raftopolous (2009) and McGregor (2005). Likewise participants in my study pointed to economic hardships in Zimbabwe as playing a major role in their decision to leave the country. This is outlined by the following quotes from the interviews,

> *…I used to sell cooking oil and washing soap but when it was time to collect money people would not give you all of it such that the money that you used to buy stock is not returned…*
>
> Nomsa, 23 August 2015

> *I came here to look for a job…if I remained seated at home I will not get enough money to take care of them (children) lazing around brings nothing,…Money is scarce in Zimbabwe and it is hard to get hold of it*
>
> Netsai, 24 August 2015

This is evidence that mothers chose to migrate to South Africa as a way of providing for their families. Migration was undertaken primarily for the good of the children in terms of their well-being and material needs.

#### 4.1.1.1 Mother as provider

Participants explained that they understood motherhood does not only entail their reproductive roles, like for instance, giving birth to their children but also includes productive roles like being able to provide for them in terms of their material needs. As discussed in the literature review, this can be better understood by drawing on the moral economic framework which posits that the mothers partake in this migration project solely for the good of their children. Participants viewed their decisions to migrate as primarily premised on the desire to see their children provided for in terms of food, clothes and shelter. They

understood their roles as mothers to include making sure that their children do not lack anything. The following quotations from the interviews illustrate this:

> *…a good mother is a mother who works for her children…a mother who…understands that her children have to go to school and they should eat and ensures that they have food to eat and clothes to wear…*
>
> Nomsa, 23 August 2015

> *…I had to convince myself that I was making the right decision, because if I am to take care of him and provide for him, then I have to go to South Africa, because he would want to go to school, he would want clothes to wear and also he would want food to eat,*
>
> Martha, 5 November 2015

This provision of material things to their children went beyond buying clothes and food to paying children's school fees on time and making sure that they attend school with all the requirements of schooling provided. This they believed could not be achieved had they stayed and worked in Zimbabwe. Hence participants pointed out their sole wish was to make sure that their children have good careers and opportunities for better jobs in the future.

#### 4.1.1.2 Working towards a better future for their children

Participants believed that as mothers, their responsibility is to work hard now and ensure that their children have a better tomorrow. Even though the support they gave to their children in terms of sending remittances back home extended to other family members especially those taking care of them, their priority was to make sure that they invest in the future of their children. This they did by making sure that their children attend the best schools they can afford and they do not lack anything in terms of what is required at school. This they believed, could position their children for better employment in the future. Participants alluded to the fact that they did not like their children to grow up and be like them especially in the areas of career and work. This is how *Nomsa* and *Ayanda* described this:

*…I wish they can have good jobs and never lack anything you know, I want them to have permanent jobs for example be teachers and know that in life I am qualified to work in certain areas, you see like being a nurse…they must not be like me…*

Ayanda, 19 November 2015

*I just wish my child will get a good education…I wish she could just take care of herself and continue with her education, because there is no greater inheritance than getting educated…this is the thing that I always pray about that God please grant me that wish, that my child gets educated*

Nomsa, 24 August 2015

This means that even if mothers were aware of the consequences of separation from their children, they overlooked them in the hope that their children will have what they referred to as a better future. However, even if mothers displayed agency in the ways they presented themselves as transnational mothers, they faced challenges in trying to reconcile motherhood as conceived in their circumstances and motherhood as they believed it ought to be in an ideal situation. Through reflecting on what they thought motherhood should entail and the ways in which they mothered from afar, participants believed that they cannot be referred to as 'good mothers'. They displayed an internalized belief that they were somehow failing in their roles as mothers.

## 4.2 Perils and pitfalls of transnational motherhood

### 4.2.1 Falling short of being 'a good mother'

Throughout the interviews I could discern that participants self-evaluated and assessed themselves in terms of whether they were good mothers or not by referring to the ideology of intensive motherhood. Contrary to studies that have indicated that transnational mothers are often subjects of criticism from the society in general for seemingly abandoning their children, in this study much of the criticism that mothers had to contend with was self-imposed. Tyldum (2014) notes that female migration from the Ukraine to Italy receives a lot of criticism in the popular discourse and media in Ukraine, as mothers are seen to be neglecting their children for a good life abroad. Parennas (2001) notes that the traditional Filipino family views the work of nurturing and providing emotional care to children as resting

on mothers even in families when fathers are providing such care. This creates challenges for Filipina migrant women who work in the United States with children back home in the Philippines. Indeed, Phoenix (2010) notes that transnational mothers and not fathers are often subject to public criticism for seemingly not considering their children's needs when they migrate.

As discussed earlier on the section on defining motherhood, (Arendell, 2000) contends that transnational motherhood is an example of motherhood that is located in the 'deviancy discourses' that emanate from the ideology of intensive motherhood. This highlights transnational mothers as those who mother outside the normative ways of mothering. Interestingly, in this study - even though mothers hinted in subtle ways that they received criticism from certain individuals - much of the criticism came from themselves. During the interviews I could discern that they constantly evaluated themselves using the ideology of intensive motherhood as they alluded to the fact that their own mothers stayed with them no matter how difficult things were when they were growing up. This is how *Martha a*nd *Grace* explained this,

> *…sometimes I feel as if I am failing as a mother but then I tell myself that there is really nothing that I can do because I have to support him…I cannot go back to Zimbabwe because I would not be able to find a job and that means I would not be able to take care of him*
>
> Martha 17 November 2015

> *…as for me in my heart I feel like I am not a good mother because even though what I am doing for him is a lot, there is great need for a mother to spend quality time with her children, as for me it is very difficult because I see him after a very long time*
>
> Grace 6 November 2015

Even though mothers explained that motherhood cannot be restricted to reproductive roles only, like giving birth, they felt that the way they mothered fell far below what they considered as ideal ways of mothering. Participants explained that a physical presence is necessary for them to effectively exercise their roles as mothers.

#### 4.2.1.1 Importance of being physically present

Communication technologies have facilitated the resilience of transnational families by making it possible for emotional care to be enacted across borders. Chib et al (2014)'s study, for example, on the usage of communication technology by transnational mothers reveals how they make use of mobile phones and the internet to stay in touch with their children and their care givers. Filipina and Indonesian foreign domestic workers in Singapore who had left their children in their home countries relied on the mobile phone to exercise their mothering role. In order to keep track of their children's lives they also used Facebook to monitor the kind of friends their children had. To maintain communication with their children on a daily basis they relied on texting using their mobile phones. However, in this study, communication technologies did not contribute much on participants' mothering roles. They indicated that even though communication technologies like WhatsApp messaging and calling help to maintain virtual or distant connection with their children, this does not fully substitute the direct physical presence needed to fulfill their mothering roles. They highlighted that such communication technologies underscored the inadequacy of their role as mothers with children in another country. They emphasised that keeping in touch with their children via communication technologies does not replace a physical presence. The quotations below indicate how *Netsai* and *Nomsa* explained this:

> *…to some extent I think I am a good mother but on the other side I don't think I am a good mother because am not always there for the kids…you see it is so painful that…because I buy this and that… everything that they need…but it's good that when you wake up in the morning you see your children…ya I can even buy them food and all that but the fact that am not seeing them…it affects me…*
>
> Netsai, 24 August 2015

> *…the thing that I do not like is this issue of the distance between me and my children but I do not have a choice. This thing of not being home I do not like it. I wish to see that my child has indeed gone to school, has done their homework, you see, things like that…and it would be nice for your child to come home with the expectation of telling you stories but now you are not there…*
>
> Nomsa, 23 August 2015

This idea of the importance of having a mother being physically present staying with their children is illuminated by both Ndebele and Shona proverbs that emphasise mothers' nurturing role. They also tend to relegate the mothers place to be the home. This is outlined in the chapter on literature review. Thus the importance of a mother sharing the same geographical space with her children is emphasised in both languages. Participants pointed out that it was important for them to be close to their children so that they can impart values that were important to their children.

#### 4.2.1.2 Child socialization is most effective when done by mothers

Key to motherhood as perceived by the participants in my study was the idea of socialization of their children. Participants believed that the mother is the one who is responsible for instilling values in the lives of the children so that they grow up to be responsible and respectable adults. They believed that advice given to a child by someone else other than the mother is bound to be misinterpreted as abuse by the children. As one participant aptly puts it,

> *…automatically discipline is met with resistance because it's not coming from the mother, if it's coming from the mother a child takes it well no matter how harsh it can be and accept it that my mum is harsh*
>
> Mercy, 23 August 2015

The idea of a mother's role as a key actor in the socialisation of her children is cemented by the fact that participants believed that as they grew up living in the same space with their own mothers, they felt that nothing can replace a mother's guidance when children are growing up. Mazuru et al (2012) argue that Shona mothers are responsible for teaching children the values of their culture. Likewise, participants in my study indicated that they felt mothers are better positioned to socialise their children. This creates feelings of inadequacy for mothers who have to work outside the home. In their mothering strategies these mothers had to contend with compromised relationships with their children as they found it difficult to relate to them.

### 4.2.2 Compromised relationships with their children

Phoenix (2010) points out that, psychology as a discipline has had a major impact on the validation of normative ways of mothering, with psychoanalytic work pointing out the importance of relationships that mothers form with their children as influential to children's development. This creates problems to mothers who have to mother far away from their children. Like the participants in this study, when children displayed problematic behaviours participants were quick to blame it on their absence. Mothers indicated that they felt their relationships with their children were compromised by the fact that they do not stay with their children and that children had better relationships with the people taking care of them than themselves. Some participants indicated that their children did not recognise their parental authority as the children refused to call them 'mama'. This is illustrated below.

#### 4.2.2.1 Strangers with their own children

Attachment theory in psychology postulates that when mothers are separated from their children the mother-child bond is immediately compromised (Phoenix, 2010). Consistent with this, participants in this study highlighted that the relationships they have with their children have been compromised due to separation from them. Mothers indicated that at times they felt awkward when they were with their children; they did not know how to behave or even start a conversation. Attachment theory posits that the relationships that mothers form with their children is crucial for children's developmental health especially mental health and formation of identities (Barret, 2006: Burman, 2008). This is borne out in this study as some of the participants indicated that without a mother close by to guide the child, his or her character can be problematic. As *Nomsa* explains,

> *…but a child is a child…a child needs guidance from a parent…but a child who lacks guidance from a parent loses direction…*
>
> Nomsa, 23 August 2016

The ages of the children of the mothers in the study show that their children are below 18 years and hence mothers feel children need guidance as they were still growing up. Since they did not stay with their children mothers indicated that they felt like strangers with their own children. The following quotations from Sibonokuhle and Simphiwe outline this:

*…we are not that close,…they just know that there is a mother and I know that there are children back home, when I have sent them items and I have called them and hear that they are ok…end of story…but I wish we could communicate more you know if they can tell me that…you know mum at school today it was like this but you know I don't get to communicate with them like that…*

Sibonokuhle, 5 November 2015

*We are not so very close to each other…so when we talk he would just answer with yes yes…short replies I try to maintain that relationship with him so that he does not forget that I am his mother even if I tell him I love him he does not say I love you too…he does not call me 'mama'…*

Simphiwe, 24 August 2015

Below is what Mercy had to say,

*…fine we are mother and daughter but somewhere somehow I feel like we are familiar strangers because she can confide in my mother and my sister-in-law more than in me even when I am around,*

Mercy, 23 August 2015

This is consistent with perspectives from other scholars, for example, Falicov (2007) and Moorehouse et al (2012), that when these mothers finally unite with their families, it is more of a union of strangers because are not used to each other. Participants in my study explained that their children were closer to the people taking care of them than themselves.

#### 4.2.2.2 Material relationships

Implicit in the interviews was that mothers felt the need to respond to the material needs of their children in order to be able to be relevant and visible in the lives of their children. This provision went beyond buying basic needs to buying luxury goods. This is how *Mercy* and *Ayanda* explained this,

*…I feel that makes our relationship more of a material relationship…because you realise that for you to have your child's attention you have to buy her something and when you call her you always ask so what do you want me to bring you from Joburg?*

*This creates a material relationship between a mother and a child because it's as if I am buying my child so that there is at least some conversation between us...*

*Mercy, 11 November 2015*

*…I just feel that there is something missing in my life I feel like I am in between…I just try by all means to make sure that they are always happy…that's the only way I try to be visible to my children because if you are so far away from them and you fail to make them happy then you become a failure…so I struggle to be a good mother to them by making sure that whatever they need they get on time…*

Ayanda, 19 November 2015

Mothers in this study believed that in order for them to be considered as fulfilling their mothering role by their children and the society at large, given that they do not stay with their children, the least they could do was to make sure that children are provided with every material thing that they may need. Mothers said that they sent groceries, money and gifts to their children and the people taking care of them. Parennas (2001) refers to this as the commodification of love where mothers tend to buy material things for their children as a way of dealing with the emotional strain of mothering from afar. This created feelings of anxiety and emotional stress because mothers felt obliged to send goods or money home no matter their circumstances in Johannesburg. This is discussed in detail below.

### 4.2.3 Emotional strain

Parrenas (2001:361) argues that 'without doubt, mothering from a distance has emotional ramifications both for the mothers who leave and children who are sent back or left behind'. Explicit throughout the conversations that I had with the participants in this study was emotional strain. Even though some participants managed to give accounts of their stories in a determined and confident manner, they explained how difficult it was for them to live separate from their children. Interestingly, this study was undertaken in a 'South to South' context but the similarities in terms of findings with studies undertaken with mothers who have migrated to the North (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al, 1997) are striking. Similar psycho-social challenges or effects of being a transnational mother were borne out by participants. In line with what was discussed under literature review, mothers in this study had to contend with

difficult psychosocial emotions such as pain, self-blame and anxiety. Participants in this study narrated how much pain they felt because of not staying with their children, the perpetual anxiety and self-blame. This is explained and illustrated in the sub-section below.

#### 4.2.3.1 Pain of living separated from their children

Participants indicated that separating with their children was not easy. They indicated that they suffered a lot of emotional pain just by thinking about the distance between themselves and their children. This is evident in the following extracts from the interviews:

> *..it was so painful…sometimes I would even cry…just thinking about him I would cry I will be thinking how is he managing without me close by, I will be thinking if he is well taken care of by the person who stays with him…do they get along together…you know such things,*
>
> Martha 17 November 2015

> *…it is very painful, because I may be giving them everything they need but the fact that am not there is just so painful. You see when child is sick you have to monitor him and see how he is feeling, the temperature, what they want to eat, you understand…*
>
> Netsai, 24 August 2015

These mothers experience a lot of emotional pain as a result of imagining how things could be back home, with regards to their children. They imagined whether their children had enough to eat or if they were being well taken care of. This shows that even though transnational mothers may be seen as having taken a bold decision, one that defies normative ways of looking at motherhood, such an endeavour comes with 'high emotional costs' (Millman, 2013).

#### 4.2.3.2 Self-blame

Implicit in the conversations that I had with the mothers was self-blame. Participants found themselves at fault when children misbehaved and when they turned out to be difficult children. This is shown in the following extracts:

> *… you see when a mother is not close there is somewhere where its lacking because when I look at the role I played when I was at home it was very easy for me to identify*

*mischief and deal with it swiftly but now I have noticed that they are so spoilt…in that way you realise that you are failing somewhere as a mother...*

Ayanda 19 November 2015

*…sometimes you look at other mothers with their children here and you realise that they spend quality time with their children they do a lot of things together like going to the park and you start thinking you have never given your child such quality time,*

Grace 6 November 2015

These mothers blamed themselves for the decision they made to move to South Africa without their children, yet at the same time they were aware of the benefits of being in South Africa in terms of being able to work and provide for their children in economic terms.

#### 4.2.3.3 Anxiety

Part of the anxiety expressed by participants in this study emanated from worrying about how things are back home. Mothers also had to contend with parenting styles that were at times different from their own. They indicated that they worried a lot trying to imagine how things are across the border. This is evident in the following extracts from the interviews:

*…you will be thinking that since I have left my child are things going to be the way they were with my child when I was there or they will change… ya…that happens such that your mind becomes so messed up ya it's never just easy...*

Mercy, 11 November 2015

*…it is very difficult to stay without your children near you…you never find rest you only have rest when you cross the border and visit them…you feel happy inside…but when you are here you will always be thinking of your children as for me I always worry if my children had enough to eat, if they went to school*

Mary, 19 November 2015

Even though mothers felt it was emotionally draining to live without their children in Johannesburg they dismissed any future prospects of bringing their children to South Africa citing reasons of crime and accommodation challenges. They explained that it was not a safe

environment to raise children in. This is explained in the section below on reunification challenges.

## 4.3 Reunification challenges

Mothers explained that they could not bring their children to come and live with them in Johannesburg because it was a place with a lot of criminal activities and they did not have decent accommodation to share with their children. As discussed earlier on in the chapter on literature review, international migrants are often subjected to discrimination and xenophobic attacks. In addition to anti-foreigner discriminatory sentiments Johannesburg is marred with crime, for example, prostitution, drug dealing and robberies. In my study participants believed that such crimes would negatively affect the development of their children so they were better off staying in Zimbabwe. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

> *…I can see that Joburg is not good for children…here in Joburg people get killed children get kidnapped…there are a lot of drugs and a lot of alcohol and they just sell to anyone…like they do not assess if this person is above 18years…but back home it is very difficult for a child to get access to such things,*
>
> Grace, 18 November 2015

Another reason that was cited for not having the desire to move their children to Johannesburg was the fact that they did not have decent accommodation where their children could live. This can partly be explained by the fact that international migrants often encounter difficulties in accessing decent accommodation which is expensive given that they do not earn much as for example hair dressers and waitresses. Participants explained that they shared accommodation with friends and relatives so as to cut on accommodation costs. This is how Martha and Mercy explain the conditions under which they live:

> *…initially I came here to sell goods and the place where we were staying was a 1 roomed house and it was shared amongst nine people both men and women shared that room so we had to divide the place with a curtain at night, so when people were bathing in the morning they had to use the other side of the curtain...*
>
> Mercy 23 August 2015

*…sometimes I feel like I have to have him this side but then I think of my situation…I stay in a single room and its very expensive…so that will not be good for him and besides he is a boy and is grown up now…we cannot share a room…*

Martha 17 November 2015

Challenges to accessing decent accommodation may be attributed to lack of documentation in terms of having legal rights to work and live in South Africa by having a valid work permit. Of the eleven mothers I interviewed six of them were undocumented migrants. This can have a bearing on access to formal accommodation as identity documents would be required by landlords. This leads to a situation where informal arrangements are made where a friend or relative with documentation can register a flat under their name and then share it with other people who then pay the person directly.

Another factor that may cause mothers to prefer that their children stay in Zimbabwe is the issue of the nature of the work that they do. As indicated in the table on the summary of Participants' profiles, mothers are employed in the lower income labour market, for example, as waitresses and hair dressers. Due to problems associated with documentation, migrants who are professionals may find that their qualifications are not recognised in South Africa and so they get employed in the informal sector were documentation is less emphasised. For example, this is how Sbonokuhle explained this,

*...as for me I remember I set out to look for a job, and when I got here I did not even find a decent job remember I was a teacher back home but when I arrived here I worked as a maid...imagine of all the things, I cleaned the house and had to take care of another woman's children...*

Sibonokuhle, 24 August 2015

This means that even if migrants may have the skills needed in the formal sector, they may not be legible for employment in that sector due lack of documentation which is needed to formally sign work contracts.

This was also a contributing factor in their decision to leave their children in Zimbabwe because they believed that here in Johannesburg they do not have the kind of support system

they have in Zimbabwe to help with taking care of their children. Given the kind of work that they do, clearly cannot afford to pay for child care in Johannesburg and so participants felt that children were better off in Zimbabwe with other female relatives such as grandmothers and aunties. Interestingly, as highlighted in existing literature for example, (Contreras et al 2012: Parennas 2001) this reinforces traditional gender roles in the sense that even when mothers migrate to other countries, child care is delegated to female carers who take care of the children in the absence of the biological mother. Likewise, participants in this study - as single mothers who work in menial jobs like hairdressing and waitressing and as sole providers for their children - left their children in the care of either their own mothers or other female relatives, a phenomenon which some scholars have termed 'shared mothering' (Schmalzerbauer, 2008: Moon, 2003). Mothers felt this made it possible for them to move to South Africa to look for work.

## 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed the findings from my study, illustrating how the concepts of motherhood and mothering are redefined in the context of migration from Zimbabwe to Johannesburg, and the challenges that participants faced as transnational mothers. Challenges associated with being an international migrant in the context of xenophobia, crime, lack of decent accommodation and precarity of work in Johannesburg prevent any prospects of bringing children to live with their mothers in Johannesburg. Participants asserted themselves as mothers who mothered in different ways as compared to those who can mother their children in close proximity, however, they had to contend with living in perpetual emotional turmoil such as feelings of anxiety, pain and self-blame. In the next chapter I conclude the study by outlining key findings and suggestions for future research.

# Chapter Five

# 5 Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Studies

## 5.1 Conclusions

The study set out to explore the lived experiences of transnational mothers in a South to South context, using an example of Zimbabwean mothers in Johannesburg with children living in Zimbabwe. This was necessitated by the lack of literature on this topic in the African context, with a number of studies on this phenomenon being undertaken in Western countries. However, it is interesting to note that findings from countries in the West are quite similar to the findings in this study, with regards to challenges that mothers faced in terms of how they perceived their mothering role, the emotional strain associated with transnational motherhood, and the relationships they have with their children across borders.

This study has demonstrated that motherhood cannot be described in universal ways. It is complex and dependent on context and the perspectives of those who mother. The context in which these mothers found themselves in calls for subjective understandings of mothers' positions in different locations. This serves to validate feminists' perspectives and arguments that motherhood should not be understood in terms of reproduction and the confines of the home. Definitions of motherhood need to encompass both the reproductive and productive aspects of mothering. This facilitates normalising those mothers who are said to be mothering in non-normative ways, for example, immigrant mothers. Conceptualizing motherhood in terms of mothering ideologies tends to obscure the role of mothers in the productive sphere that is in terms of assuming breadwinning roles in their families. Participants in this study were single mothers, some have never married and some were divorced and widowed. This helps to highlight their roles in the productive sphere as the sole breadwinners in their families. In this study participants have demonstrated that motherhood is a subjective experience as they incorporate providing for their families in economic terms in their conceptualisations of motherhood and the practices that ensure from such conceptualisations.

However, in their perceptions as transnational mothers, the ideology of intensive motherhood impedes mothers' innovative ways of making sense of the spatio-temporal separations from their children. This is consistent with perspectives from scholars such as Stone, (2007), Johnston and Swanson (2007), and Hays (1996) that the ideology of intensive mothering is instrumental in shaping women's perceptions about motherhood. This presents challenges to mothers who do not stay with their children, as they try to reconcile their circumstances and what they believe mothers ought to do. Findings indicate that there is a disjuncture between circumstances under which participants mother and their own beliefs of how mothering should be. They pointed out that mothers should stay with their children no matter how difficult things were at home, particularly as they grew up with their own mothers.

Mothers engaged with the ideology of motherhood in ways that created emotional strain to them. They believed that mothers are better at socialising their own children and instilling discipline. As a result, they experienced anxiety, self-blame, and pain because of not staying with their children and seeing them grow. They also believed that their absence from home was detrimental to the relationships they had with their children. They felt they were strangers with their own children. To stay relevant and visible in their children's lives, mothers felt obliged to buy anything that the children wanted. This they believed compensated for not being there physically for their children.

Prospects of reuniting with their children were dismissed as mothers felt that they cannot live in Johannesburg with their children because it is an unsafe environment marred with crime. This was exacerbated by the fact that mothers were employed in menial jobs from which they did not earn much to afford decent accommodation and pay for child care. Xenophobia and precarity of their work reduce the likelihood of bringing their children to Johannesburg.

In terms of policy, the study findings point to the need for the Department of Home Affairs to continue to facilitate documentation of (Zimbabwean) migrants in general and the re-unification of transnational families in particular. This will help migrant mothers to participate fully in both job and housing markets. These national efforts need to be complemented by efforts by local and provincial governments to reduce crime and offer affordable accommodation in Johannesburg. These could make migrant mothers consider bringing their children to Johannesburg.

## 5.2 Suggestions for future studies

- For future researchers embarking on a similar study, it would be interesting to look at the impact of spatio-temporal separations of mothers and their children on the well-being of mothers themselves, in particular mental health and emotional well-being.
- It would also be interesting to use discourse analysis on studies such as these in order to unpack discourses that place transnational mothers as different from other mothers.
- A case study on Johannesburg and transnational mothers from other Southern African countries like for example, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique would be interesting as it would shed light on what shapes transnational mothers' of experiences in the Southern African region.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

**Open ended, semi-structured first interview guide**

**Research topic:** Experiences of Zimbabwean mothers living in Johannesburg

I would like to welcome you to the interview. As we have already discussed in the information sheet, I would like to remind you that participation is voluntary and our conversation is confidential. You can also withdraw from the interview any time without any penalties.

1. When did you arrive in South Africa?
2. How did you come to South Africa?
3. What decisions did you have to make in moving to South Africa?
4. Why did you leave Zimbabwe?
5. How many children do you have?
6. What is your understanding of being a mother?
7. Who takes care of the children in Zimbabwe?
8. What relationship do you have with people taking care of your children?
9. Were you raised by your own biological mother?
10. Do you have a say on what happens to your children in Zimbabwe?
11. How do you stay in touch with your child/children?
12. How do you stay in touch with their carer(s)?
13. How do you pay for their schooling/ food/clothing?

**Revised Interview guide**

| Question | Probe |
|---|---|
| **Introduction** | |
| 1. Tell me about yourself | i.e how long have you been in South Africa and what made you to move to South Africa, what and why did you leave your child/children there. |
| **Mothering** | |
| 2. In your view what is a good mother? | Do you think being a mother is defined by you or by the society? |
| 3. Do you think you are able to live up to that definition? If yes, why? | Do you think it makes you any less of a mother? |
| 4. If you had your child here, or with her or him in Zimbabwe would you have done things differently as a mother? | |
| 5. How do you mother your child/children? | Who influences you?<br><br>Do you believe that mothers are the ones who should guide their children with values and morals?<br><br>How do you ensure that your children are well taken care of?<br><br>How do you utilise communication technologies like whatsapp, cellphones, internet, skipe etc to keep in touch with your child/children and the people taking care of them?<br>How often do you see your child/children?<br><br>How do you pay for their fees, schooling, food?<br><br>Would you say your suggestions or inputs are taken into account in how the child is raised? Day to day activities? |
| 6. Have you at any point felt pressure from your family, friends and society at large regarding your decision to leave your child? | |
| 7. Is there any difference in the way you perceived mothering when you were in Zimbabwe and the way you understand mothering when you have moved to South Africa? | How has Johannesburg influenced the way you mother? |
| **Decision making** | |
| 8. What kind of considerations did you have to take in deciding who will take care of the children? | How did people perceive your migration to South Africa alone, people in terms of family, society, friends, and relatives? |

| Question | Probe |
|---|---|
| | Was there any resistance from family members about you leaving your children behind and migrating alone?<br><br>What relationship do you have with the people taking care with your children? |
| **Emotions** | |
| 9. How do you think separating from your child affects you, your child/children and your relationship? | Stress etc.<br>How do you deal with these emotions? |

**Interview questions for the second round of interviews**

| Question | Probe |
|---|---|
| What would you say is the best thing about being a mother? | In terms of what?<br>Why do you feel that way? |
| Do you feel at times that you are to blame when your children misbehave? | Why? |
| Who was involved in your decision to migrate to South Africa? | Did you consult anyone?<br>How would you describe the process of making the decision to come to Johannesburg?<br>Would you say it was a difficult decision or an easy one?<br>Why do you think so? |
| Other than economic reasons, what motivated you to leave Zimbabwe? | What else would you say you were unhappy about?<br>Bad relationships, marriage, boyfriend, conflict etc |
| How do you deal with emotional stress? | What do you think is the cause of the stress?<br>How do you spend your spare time, when you off work?<br>Do you go to Church?<br>Which church?<br>In what ways does religion help you as a mother? |
| How would you describe your relationship with your children? | How would you describe your children's behaviour?<br>Are you not worried that your children will have behavioural issues later in life?<br>How do you deal with that<br>Do you feel they are well disciplined?<br>Who do you think should instil discipline?<br>Have you ever received complaints about your children's behaviour?<br>If yes, how did that make you feel as a mother?<br>If No, how does that make you feel as a mother? |
| Do you ever experience conflicts with the people taking care of your children? | Would you describe for me incidents when you had a conflict with the people taking care of your children?<br>How did you solve it?<br>What do you think are the expectations of the people taking care of your children? |
| From where do you get your ideas about being a good mother? | Is it from your own mother?<br>Is it from the society?<br>Or is it from your childhood?<br>Where you raised by your own biological mother? |
| How would you describe responsibilities of a mother and a father in a family? | What responsibilities do you feel you have as a mother to your children? |

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| | How about the father?<br>Do you think that changes after migration? |
| What do you think are people's opinions about your decision to migrate and leave your children behind? | How does that make you feel?<br>Do you think their opinions are important? |
| Has your perception about being a mother changed because of migration/ since you came to Joburg? | How would you describe the role of a mother in the family before migration?<br>Do you think that changes or remains the same after migration? |
| What are your aspirations for your child? | How do you think they will achieve these aspirations when you are separated from them?<br>What do you do to help them achieve their ambitions? |
| Do you think a mother is responsible for the behaviour of her children? | Who do you think should impart society's values and norms to the children?<br>Why? |
| How did you make the decision to leave your children with the people in Zimbabwe? | Would you say it was an easy decision<br>If so why?<br>If not why? |

Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**
R14/49 Zikhali

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| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H15/07/54** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | Mothering across the Limpopo: Experiences of Zimbabwean mothers living in Johannesburg |
| **INVESTIGATOR(S)** | Ms T Zikhali |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT** | Social Sciences/ |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 24 July 2015 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved unconditionally |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 13 August 2018 |

**DATE** 14 August 2015 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr J Vearey

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**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
**Signature** **Date**

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

**A. 1 Participation information sheet**

University of the Witwatersrand

1 Jan Smuts Avenue and Jorissen Street

Braamfontein

Johannesburg, 2000

**Title of research project:** Experiences of Zimbabwean mothers living in Johannesburg with children in Zimbabwe

**Researcher:** Thulisile Zikhali

**Email:** thuliezikhali@gmail.com

**Contact number:** 076 943 8722

**Supervisor:** Prof. Jo Vearey

**Email:** jo.vearey@wits.ac.za

**Contact number:** 011 717 4041

**University of the Witwatersrand Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) contact:**

Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za

011 717 1408

Hello! My name is Thulisile Zikhali and I am a Masters student at the University of Witwatersrand. I am conducting a research study that is focusing on Zimbabwean women living in Johannesburg, who are mothers to children in Zimbabwe. I would like to invite you to take part in this study as it will help me to understand how different women manage to take care of their children in Zimbabwe, and the challenges they face in maintaining ties with their children. Your participation in this study would include: face-to-face interviews that will last approximately an hour, during which I will ask you some personal questions about your life and being a mother. If you agree, I will record the interview.

If you experience discomfort anytime during the interview please feel free to stop me.You may experience some discomfort in discussing some of the topics in the interview. You may find it helpful to talk about these issues with someone and I can refer you to The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Braamfontein Centre, Johannesburg. Telephone number: 011 403 5650. They offer counselling services for free.

Please understand that participation in this study is voluntary, and you are not obliged to answer all the questions l ask. Your name will not be used anywhere in the research report and it will not be possible to identify you. You can withdraw from the study any time you feel like with no penalties.

The information that will be collected is purely for research purposes and will be shared as a research report available on the internet. Should you have any questions you can contact me or my supervisor using the above contact details.

Thank you

Thulisile Zikhali

**Consent form**

I agree to participate in Thulisile Zikhali's study on the experiences of Zimbabwean mothers in Johannesburg. This entails taking part in the interview. I understand that I am participating freely and I also understand that I can stop participating at any point should I not want to continue. I understand that my participation will remain confidential. I acknowledge that I have received R50 as transport money.

**…….....**

Signature of participant: Date:……..

Consent for tape-recording

I hereby agree to the tape recording of my participation in the study.

**…….....**

Signature of participant: Date:……..